Solidarity in motion

Exploring Unauthorized Movements, Routes and Solidarity Networks across Europe at Large

edited by
Livio Amigoni
Rassa Ghaffari
Dorian Jano

GENOVA UNIVERSITY PRESS

Immagin-azioni sociali

SOLROUTES Series

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Via Balbi 5, 16126 Genova
Tel. 010 20951558
e-mail: gup@unige.it
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Acknowledgements

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About the authors

Amir Pasha Zamani is a postdoctoral researcher in neuroscience at Duke University and an activist. He has conducted extensive research on unauthorised migration and Iranian networks across the Italian-French border together with the OnBorder movement.

Camille Cassarini is a researcher at the IRMC and a former postdoctoral research fellow in the SOLROUTES project. Based on fieldwork in North Africa (Tunisia, Algeria) and West Africa (Côte d'Ivoire), he conducts research at the crossroads of social geography, political anthropology, and migration studies.

Dorian Jano is a postdoctoral research fellow within the SOLROUTES project. He was previously a Marie Curie fellow at the Centre for South-East European Studies at the University of Graz.

Enrico Fravega is an assistant professor (RTD-A) at the University of Genoa. His recent research explored the nexus between migration, housing conditions, and temporalities. His methodological approach mainly relies on ethnographic, participative, and biographical techniques.

Federico Rahola is a professor of sociology of cultural processes at Genoa University and co-PI of the SOLROUTES Project. He has taught courses at the University of Jyväskylä, the University of Nice-Sophia Antipolis, and the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro. He is a member of the editorial board of the Italian Journal *Etnografia e Ricerca Qualitativa* and the scientific board of the International Journal REMHU *Revista Interdisciplinar da Mobilidade Humana*.

Filippo Torre is a postdoctoral researcher in Sociology at the University of Genoa. He holds a Master's degree in African and Asian Studies from the University of Pavia and a PhD in Sociology from the University of Genoa. He is a member of the Laboratory of Visual Sociology at the University of Genoa, with which he produced two ethnographic films entitled *Hogra* and *The Ritual of Passage*. He has conducted field research on the Italian island of Lampedusa, Tunisia, Morocco, and along the French-Italian border.

Gianluca Seimandi is a poet and social worker at *Asl 4 Chiavarese*, *Cooperativa Sociale Un'occasione*, *Fondazione Acceglio*.

Ismail Oubad is a doctoral researcher within the SOLROUTES Project. He is conducting a thesis on the solidarity actors and support networks to the journey of unauthorised migrants within and across the Belgian borders, adopting ethnographic methods. Ismail has conducted fieldwork in Morocco, Italy, and Belgium.

Ivan Bonnin is a critical sociologist currently employed as a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Genoa (MOBS Project). His research interests span from border studies to racial capitalism in Europe and the Mediterranean, social theory to international relations 'from below'.

Livio Amigoni is a postdoctoral researcher in the SOLROUTES Project at the University of Genoa. During his PhD, he developed ethnographic work on Sudanese forced migration, focusing on factors driving high-risk migration pathways and support networks for these journeys.

Luca Daminelli is a doctoral researcher in Social Sciences, Migration and Intercultural Processes, at the University of Genoa. His research focuses on temporal borders and temporalities of migration.

Luca Giliberti is a sociologist and a Professor of Cultural Sociology and Educational Sociology at the University of Parma and the coordinator of the SCERE at SOLROUTES project.

Luca Queirolo Palmas is a professor in Sociology of Migration and Visual Sociology at Genoa University. He is co-director of *Mondi Migranti*, a journal of studies and research on international migration. He has directed several European projects on migration, gangs, and youth cultures. Currently, he is the Principal

Investigator of the ERC AdG SOLROUTES – Solidarities and migrants' routes across Europe at large. He has been a visiting professor in Barcelona, Quito, New York, San Paolo, San José de Costa Rica, Paris, and Tunis.

Lülüfer Körükmez is a doctoral researcher within the SOLROUTES Project. Her research focuses on migration solidarity movements in Turkey, which are situated at the intersection of political history and solidarity experiences in issues other than migration, focusing on state and statecraft.

Massimo Cannarella is a photographer and filmmaker who coordinates the visual activities of the SOLROUTES project. He works as a research technician in the Visual Sociology Research Group of the University of Genoa. In the past, he participated in many research projects on migrations, youth cultures, the social condition of migrants' children, and gender-related issues.

Michela Lovato is a doctoral researcher within the SOLROUTES Project. She has a background in international science, conflict, and peace studies and is a student at the University of Turin. She is working on a research project to observe the dynamics and actors in solidarity toward unauthorised movements in Morocco.

Nadia Chaouch is a doctoral researcher within the SOLROUTES Project. She is conducting a doctoral thesis about gender, deportees, and solidarity networks in Tunisia, adopting ethnographic and ethnographic methods.

Paolo Cuttitta is a migration and border scholar whose work lies at the intersection between geography and sociology. Before joining the SOLROUTES project at Genoa University, he held research positions at Palermo University, VU University Amsterdam and Sorbonne Paris Nord University.

Piero Gorza is an anthropologist and President of Onborders. He has carried out academic activities in Italy and abroad, doing research in the Balkans, Latin America and Africa and is currently carrying out studies on the topic of borders.

Rassa Ghaffari is a sociologist studying migration, gender, and Middle Eastern studies. As a postdoctoral researcher within the SOLROUTES project, she focuses on migratory routes through Turkey and the so-called Balkan route, particularly on Iranian and Afghan fluxes, digital infrastructures, and women on the move.

Roberto Beneduce, an anthropologist and psychiatrist, is a Professor of cultural anthropology at the University of Turin and the founder of the association Frantz Fanon.

Simone Spensieri, a psychiatrist at *ASL 4 Chiavarese* and *Associazione Frantz Fanon*. He is also a psychological counsellor for the SOLROUTES research group.

Stefano Greco, social worker and graphic novelist, is the author and illustrator of *The Jacket*.

Preface: on solidarity, routes, and abolition[1]

Federico Rahola (University of Genoa)
Luca Queirolo Palmas (University of Genoa)
Ivan Bonnin (University of Genoa)
Paolo Cuttitta (University of Genoa)

This book reflects the first year of collective work within the research project SOLROUTES, an ERC advanced program that basically turns around three words: the first two, solidarity and routes, address the current crisis and multiplication of both migrants' movements and borders around and within Europe; the third one, abolition, works as a kind of general predicate, suggesting the research main theoretical orientation and political commitment. Focusing on the illegalised movements and routes of people on the move (either migrants, asylum seekers, refugees, fugitives, displaced and absconded persons) that point towards and cut through Europe from several scattered directions (thus marginalising and provincialising it into a larger picture), we started to work on these three words, trying to redefine them and finding out a possible line or a joint among them. We can play with these words without a necessary order; the one we chose to follow started from solidarity and from the need to redefine it.

[1] This preface reflects a work of collective writing that has also involved Camille Cassarini, Georges Kouagang, Michela Lovato and Ismail Oubad. In particular, Camille, Georges and Ismail contributed to the writing of the initial part on solidarity, which synthesises a collective article, Unsettling Solidarity. Towards a Materialistic approach to border transgressions, to be published on *Soft-power*, while Michela worked on the idea of interruptions, in the chapter on routes and ruptures.

Unsettling Solidarity

In the last decade, a growing body of work by European and Western scholars has used the concept of solidarity to describe various forms and practices, inner intentions and political orientations related to supporting the illegalised movements of 'migrants' (Agustin & Jørgensen, 2019; Bauder, 2020; Della Porta & Steinhilper, 2021). Elsewhere, we suggested conceiving of and reframing the often ephemeral yet persistent coalitions and forms of cooperation between people on the move and groups of activists and civil society actors through the historical lens of the Underground Railroad in the 19th century pre-Civil War US (Queirolo & Rahola, 2022). Other colleagues invited us to reverse the actual and spectral necropolitical dimension of a 'solid sea' and of an enormous graveyard referred to as the Mediterranean which, despite the thousands and thousands of deaths, shipwrecks and missing, is nonetheless challenged every day by hundreds of dinghies and crossed by many disobedient vessels involved in rescue operations into a space of re-articulation and crossing similar to the 'Black Atlantic' explored by Paul Gilroy (1993), thus suggesting the idea of a 'Black Mediterranean' (Smythe, 2018; Proglio *et al.*, 2021). In both cases – as well as in more discrete situations involving direct support to people crossing, inhabiting routes and being hosted and supported on their move – solidarity actions and actors seem to play a central role as a challenge to the European border regime and its prohibitionist and necropolitical order. On these assumptions, solidarity has been brought at the core of the political debate almost as a self-evident and explanatory category: it has mainly been represented as an act of moral and political disobedience, and for this reason, over-exposed, often criminalised and persecuted, with activists being charged with aiding and abetting illegal migration and smuggling. Yet, the very existence of an alleged 'solidarity crime' (Fekete, 2018) reveals how contested and elusive the term and its use are, requiring a necessary and broader redefinition, maybe an expansion of its semantic reach, and perhaps even a radical re-articulation.

Indeed, conventional appeals to solidarity often rely on a somewhat partial and even Manichean assumption, one which implicitly suggests a clear distinction between subjects and objects, donors and recipients, profit and not-for-profit actions, or the West and the rest. Such a perspective conceives of solidarity mainly, if not only as a kind of altruistic and disinterested gesture, rejecting all other possibilities of even tactical alliances and forms of help and cooperation with and among people on the move as impure and unfitting.

As we know, solidarity is a concept with a deep-rooted and heavy sociological and political meaning. From a political perspective, it is mainly understood

through the lens of the Marxian notion of class solidarity, intended as a form of consciousness of the common exploited, oppressed and subaltern condition shared among those who have 'nothing to lose but their chains'. It is, therefore, a political notion that reveals itself to be deeply materially (and materialistically) rooted. It played a central role both in terms of class struggle and on an international or internationalist scale (from the unified working class and labour struggle against capital up to the 20th century antifascist and anticolonial liberation movements). Yet, it still relies upon an implicit common and shared experience, a kind of proximity even at a distance, and a common class identification. On the other hand, the most immediate sociological reference to solidarity goes back to Durkheim's idea of 'organic solidarity', intended as a kind of glue or energy which holds together different interests and functions within the rationalised framework of the modern nation-state, preventing society from falling into anomy. Both legacies turn out to be somewhat useful in our case, either because of the materialistic and international approach emphasised by Marxian tradition or for the relational and regulative one stressed by the Durkheimian one.

On the one hand, solidarity toward and among people on the move may be inscribed within a specific political horizon as a process of (even class) subjectivation beyond (and against) national boundaries and forms of belonging. On the other hand, the Durkheimian perspective highlights a rather impersonal and operational functioning which prevents a given situation from falling apart. In a way, the idea of solidarity stressed here includes both meanings, as it seeks to combine the political and material dimensions of an act of subjectivation (of defiance, disobedience, and common consciousness) with a more relational and impersonal approach to solidarity intended as a form of social interaction and exchange, beyond overdetermining moral judgements and partitions.

Indeed, in the case of border transgression and unauthorised mobility, if we understand solidarity as a peculiar relation whose main outcome consists of directly supporting people on the move, enabling or producing the very possibility for their life, stay, movement and crossing a border, we end up facing a mainly practical dimension, one which stems not only from moral intentions and ethical-political orientations but which is also based on actual, material and effective conditions and exchanges.

More generally, as is the case with all conceptual categories, beyond their political and sociological legacy, the notion of solidarity entails both a specific genealogy and a form of translation, thus requiring tracing the trajectories drawn by the concept, its inner movements, and different declinations in both time and space. In doing so, we start from the assumption that its ethical or moral signif-

icance notwithstanding, even the original Latin meaning of the term, related to the idea of a common obligation, *in solido*, of indebted people, suggests a form or kind of relation that is materially determined. Further, we do have to reckon how far, moving away from the Western tradition and a Eurocentric perspective, the concept takes on different meanings and a different weight. Without pretensions to an exhaustive genealogical and comparative exercise, it is sufficient here to stress the need for a new standpoint on solidarity by decentering the gaze and adopting a different perspective (arguably from the Global South and arguably decolonial) as the privileged angle from which the mainstream research narrative founded on political and humanitarian oppositions can be unsettled. Unsettling, to us, is another way, perhaps a complementary one, of making solidarity «uneasy», to quote David Roediger (2016), both by broadening its geopolitical array – thus provincialising Europe – and by extending its field of application beyond the conventional distinction between disinterested altruistic gesture and materially oriented practices and exchanges. All of this suggests, in turn, the need for a different and more inclusive notion of solidarity. We could even talk about a relational approach, one that sees solidarity as something that is not so much embodied in individual moral and political positions and intentions but rather in the practical outcomes triggered by it. In this sense, solidarity is conceived of as a fuel, energy or even, following Gabriel Tarde (1903), as a flow of electricity circulating among multiple nodes and poles, thus subverting Western political ontology by privileging the fluidity of processes over the definition of actors.

For this reason, we suggest that, although it may seem counterintuitive, some unconventional encounters and instances of cooperation among people on the move could be seen as forms and effects of solidarity in their own right. As Sharam Khosravi & Mahmoud Keshavarz argue (2022), we could even ask ourselves whether those who are regarded as smugglers and thus criminalised might turn out to be active vectors of a peculiar form of solidarity. By the same token, and regardless of their own beliefs on borders and solidarity, Tunisian fishermen searching for economic value in the engine of a shipwrecked boat in the Mediterranean could also be acting as 'conductors' for all those travellers trying to reach Lampedusa. Addressing these instances means paying particular attention to the actual and material dimensions of a set of interactions, which can be referred to as a different, unsettled, and perhaps less comfortable idea of solidarity. And it also suggests a possible critique of the political economy of solidarity. That is to say, to plunge oneself into the hidden abodes where the modes of production of solidarity can be observed, addressing different material instances and situations which characterise the routes followed by many

migrants and people on the move, wondering whether it is still a matter of solidarity and, if so, of what kind.

The basic question at stake here concerns solidarity as an effective concept, one which can still help us to make sense of different situations where any pure political and moral gesture ends up being, in a way, clouded or blurred. At this level, it is likely that the Western theological-political burden of that concept, if it is still necessary, is not enough to explain a whole set of mixed encounters and relations. Yet, precisely because of its historical and political weight, the notion of solidarity has not to be dismissed but rather enriched and enlarged.

To unsettle solidarity thus represents a way to test and detect the extent to which such a concept can be stretched and extended, up to the point of conceiving of it as the fuel or energy enabling migrants' movement and their routes. Through a materialistic and geographically reversed approach, a critique of the moral and political economy of solidarity lets us envisage the blurred and somehow unsettled dimension of a 'solidarity at large' as a way of both exceeding and provincialising Europe, its historical genealogy and the colonial legacy hanging over its political and theoretical concepts. Suggesting a blurred and impure concept of solidarity is not a matter of cynicism or (cruel) optimism, nor is it about transgressing and betraying a historical and political heritage. Rather, it means offering a broader and more capacious concept, which can encompass both a political gesture or action and the punctual/practical dimension of an exchange that goes beyond a simple gift once we recognise that there is no inherent contradiction between the two, that a gift is always a form of exchange with strings attached, much like an exchange is more than just an economic relation or transaction.

Such a broadened, blurred, and somewhat uneasy idea of solidarity could be thought of as the inner energy needed to produce what Stefano Harney and Fred Moten refer to as the «Undercommon» (2013), which in turn can be conceived of as an underground railroad made of multiple hidden routes and passages fostered by solidarity actions: a communal dimension which always comes after, beneath and under the apollonian surface of Western political categories and the selective, murderous geography of a borderland.

Ruptures

The very idea of undercommon is central in the way we suggest thinking about migrant and solidarity routes, that is, the second of the words composing the acronym of our research project. And, even at this regard, it could be useful starting with an etymological or genealogical exercise.

Broadly speaking, routes can be conceived of as mobile spaces that are at times produced, crossed and inhabited by people on the move. Namely, they are segments of mobile biographies that take shape, define, form, and transform themselves spatially through their relationship with given contexts. These contexts, in turn, also take shape, define, form and transform themselves through their relationship with the subjects that are actively involved in route-making.

In the context of restrictive and prohibitionist border regimes, unauthorised migrant routes are ruptures in the supposedly ordered fabric of governmental policies and practices of migration management and control. This resonates with the very etymology of the word: the Latin 'rŭpta(m) (vĭam)', literally 'broken way', meaning a way that is opened up for people to go where previously there was no way to go. A route thus is always a break, and it requires a 'breakthrough'.

Yet, the term 'route' has been increasingly appropriated by governmental and intergovernmental actors, who use it to design their policies of migration and border control. In other words, they try to turn routes into borders. This poses challenges for research: as in the case of solidarity, should we look for alternative terms, or should we rather defend the original meaning of the word, attesting to the creative, autonomous and breakthrough power of migration?

Conceiving of the route as part of the border regime, however, also suggests that a route can be seen as the mobile expression of an itinerant human border, insofar as every person on the move carries the border of their own status, which will have an impact on the process of route-making, a process that is largely unpredictable.

Routes, indeed, cannot be precisely planned in advance in their spatial and temporal details. They have to adapt to the context. How long it will take, where I will stop, which detours I will have to make, and how they will affect the space-time length of my journey, are all questions that remain open until the end. The end itself is uncertain: it can be the originally intended destination (if there was ever one) or a different one, but it can also be the starting point, in case of failure or forced return, or any other place in the case of death. Any outcome, in turn, can trigger new reactions, inspire new journeys (e.g. from relatives aiming for reunification) and thus generate new routes.

The unpredictability of routes opens up spaces that must be filled, contentious spaces that are inevitably political. Thus, route-making should also be understood as a political act and routes as an ever-changing, mobile political infrastructure.

To define routes in this way implies looking at them as the material outcome of specific forms of agency and cooperation among people on the move. This, in turn, gives back the idea of forms of organisation built upon relations, actions

and behaviours that do not necessarily correspond and often exceed traditional Western political categories. In these terms, routes could be understood as material expressions of what Partha Chatterjee (2006), referring to the subaltern resistance in Bengali against the governmental logic of the British Raj, described as a 'political society'. Similarly, we could conceive of routes in terms of as many subaltern infrastructures, that is, as political assemblages whose material and immaterial fabric often overlap, transgress and exceed the governmental and necropolitical logics of border regimes.

Thinking of routes as subaltern infrastructures also means recognising their potential exceeding character vis-à-vis any Eurocentric approach in governing them. Eurocentrism, by the way, is also visible in the tendency of European policymakers to mainly focus on routes to Europe as a consequence of their appropriation of the route concept. In so doing, it is often overlooked how migration routes crisscross the entire globe in each and every direction. The scattered dimension of routes seems to complicate and de-westernize any discrete and clear geography and to further marginalise and provincialise Europe while suggesting and directly producing a more enlarged scale, the idea of a Europe at large whose limits and borders, even in terms of sovereignty, do no longer pertain and refer to it.

On the base of such an exceeding and unpredictable character, it is possible to outline a few further considerations. The first one regards the terminology. In migration and border studies, literature on journeys does not provide clear definitions of the different words used to define a migrant's movement across space. Accordingly, as mobile spaces, routes often overlap and blur themselves with corridors or simple trajectories and hypothetical directions. Yet they diverge from the former as directly produced by migrant movement and solidarity actors, while corridors, as institutional apparatuses, directly reflect an attempt to govern and control them. Anyhow, the relation between the two seems to be not so linear and rather mimetic or isomorphic (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). A corridor may always reverse itself into a route or a rupture, as much as a route can always be turned into a forced (even humanitarian) corridor (Kasparek, 2016a).

Research on terminology reflects the need to address the unpredictability of routes and their appropriation by governmental actors, but it also reflects the need to grasp the variety of actors, motivations and power relations that take part in processes of route-making, as a collective work of cooperation and a (blurred) solidarity outcome.

A further consideration regards the collective knowledge implied in route-making. There is a word in ancient Greek, the one of *métis*, that seems to provide a

conceptual lens for the analysis of such a heterogeneous process. According to Jean-Pierre Vernant and Marcel Detienne, *métis* is a form of practical intelligence that operates on the mobile and shifting terrain of antagonism, enabling oneself to turn an unfavourable situation around. It is a peculiar form of practical knowledge (that one of Ulysses, for instance) that directly tackles a hostile environment by establishing some forms of alliance with the territories and their human and non-human or natural and technical agents.

The violence proper of the borders and of a border regime may prompt migrants to define their condition and journey in warlike terms, calling themselves 'soldiers' and seeing the terrain as a 'battlefield'. On a more nuanced and defying vision, a recurrent metaphor is one of a 'game' or an 'adventure'. In both cases, specific, practical and tactical knowledge is required. And it is a knowledge that relies less upon physical strength than on ordinary cunning intelligence. As a matter of fact, migrants can succeed in defying the forces of control by subtraction, by making themselves invisible, by camouflage, by outwitting their opponents, by using subterfuges, and by employing space in a creative way. Adopting the concept of *métis* is, therefore, a way to reckon with the creative power of migration as well as the active role played by migrants in the process of route-making.

Yet, as a war and even as a 'game', both route-making and border crossing reveal themselves to be an increasingly tragic and lethal kind of game, littered with deaths and disappearances. Deaths and disappearances could be interpreted in terms of as many interruptions of the route − after all, the verb 'to interrupt' has the same etymology as 'route'. Interrupted routes could be thus conceived of as 'ruptures in the rupture'. It is worth engaging with the productive power of interrupted routes, asking which new routes are generated by such 'ruptures in the rupture'. Family members or solidarity actors may embark on new, unplanned journeys to the capital of their home country to request investigations into the fate of their disappeared relatives or into the responsibilities for their deaths. Sometimes, they travel to the intended destination, believing or hoping that their loved ones are still alive, in a bid to trace them or at least find and identify their remains. When people die, their bodies (and sometimes the objects that were travelling with them) may be returned to the country of origin. The interrupted route thus lives a new life. The route changes, instead of ending, but in a fully unintended way. Death and disappearances, in sum, speak to the (un-) intentionality and (un-)predictability of routes.

Abolition (democracy)

We opened this preface by suggesting an almost hidden predicate binding the two words (solidarity and routes) at the centre of the research project, providing it with both a theoretical orientation and a political commitment. The word 'abolition' sounds like a glue linking both of them, suggesting that there are neither solidarity nor routes without an implicit, more or less conscious, abolitionist stance or a practical an affective drive against the prohibitionist order proper of border regimes.

The term 'abolition' may be dated back at least to the early 19th century. More precisely, to the heterogeneous constellation of movements and struggles against slavery, exploitation, and racial and gender oppression in the pre-Civil War US that hereafter precipitated into the material construction of an abolitionist infrastructure like the Underground Railroad. It is a word that resonates in a powerful text that W.E.B. Du Bois wrote in 1935, *Black Reconstruction*, addressing the 'ephemeral summer' of what he defined as an «abolition democracy» prompted in the aftermath of the US Civil War in the wake of the 13th amendment and the formal abolition of slavery. In that book, Du Bois described in these terms the uncertain yet open (and quickly disattended) situation triggered by the fugitive slaves' desertion and escape from the plantation industry as the direct outcome of a general «strike» against the «peculiar institution» that had been posed at the first chapter of the US material constitution. That flight was materially built on specific routes that, in turn, have been produced and crossed by runaway slaves supported by other free blacks and a certain number of urban abolitionists, black and white. Although historically and politically betrayed by the renewed chains of racial (and industrial) capitalism, one of the Underground Railroad was a powerful story, one to reverse Toni Morrison's phrase, the blues at the end of *Beloved*, «not to pass on». The power of that story resides precisely in the capacity to invent, cross and inhabit a kind of counter-space against the racialised and violent one imposed by the chains of slavery and the economy of the plantations. Our specific idea of routes is, in a way, indebted and somehow built upon that historical instance, its subterranean or under-common dimension and its broken chains. It translates, reverberates, and prolongs itself into the notion of as many subaltern infrastructures that, like in the case of the anticolonial movements against the chains of the British Raj, reveal themselves to be implicitly abolitionist.

Today, though violently countered, repressed and criminalised, the need to figure out a renewed abolitionist movement and lexicon, as well as an updated idea of abolition democracy against the violence of borders and of a border regime, is in the air and increasingly stronger. Yet, as Ruth Gilmore and Angela Davis main-

tain in their works (2022, 2024), the word abolition has less to do with the (yet necessary) act of erasing, deleting and dismantling (a border, the prison system, a given situation of oppression and exploitation), than with the one of producing something new in common, or undercommon.

If we should try to establish a relation, a kind of intimacy or linkage between the specific historical interruption (a rupture, indeed) produced by the Underground Railroad and its possible resurfacing and resonant presence in present days within and around EU-rope, or the US, we should have firstly to wonder what idea of abolition drives and prompted an illegalised act of flight, what kinds of encounters and support makes it possible, what kinds of route those movements and encounters build up. As many historians maintained (Apteker, 1943; Blight, 2004), runaway slaves did not escape to create a new America; rather, more immediately, they freed themselves from its chains, escaping from as many spaces of terror, forms of subjugation and scenes of subjection. But it was precisely this basic gesture of subtraction, this 'general strike', that directly challenged the material constitution of a country and its racialised assumptions, thus producing a possible, fleeting and betrayed new abolitionist landscape, an «abolition democracy» in Du Bois's perspective. The same could be said for other, different and renewed zones of terror infesting the present (in Libya, Tunisia, Turkey, but also the US and within EU-ropean detention machine) and for the renewed experiences of subtraction, escape and flight that animate the current illegalised movements and routes towards and through Europe. Since it is precisely this basic gesture of interruption, the escape-route from those zones of terror, the search for a better life, the act of a border transgression and the aid and support it encounters along the way from other solidarity actors, that produces, as many underground routes, pointing towards a possible «abolition democracy». Abolition, in this perspective, does not limit itself to the act of erasing and dismantling a given border regime, and it rather encompasses and produces a broader counter-space, a series of routes enabling people to both cross and inhabit them: to stay when the pressure around forces to move, following the logics of an increasingly transit labour and of a government of mobility through mobility (Tazzioli, 2020); and to pass and move beyond when the violence of border regime apparatuses imposes blockages, leaving people stuck and trapped along a border, an island or within a detention and deportation centre.

For this reason, a renewed abolitionist horizon must be articulated in terms of both a right to move and mobility, against the violence of border apparatuses and their detention machine, as well as of a right to stay, to neither be deported nor evicted, against the relentless logics of expulsion governing new sovereignty drives and renewed racial and capitalist logics. «For all those unavailable to servitude».

This book

The book represents the work of the SOLROUTES collective of researchers preparing for the fieldwork and reflects a period of self-formation that lasted from February 2023 to September of that year. On the one hand, it depicts state-of-the-art research on solidarity and the border regimes in Tunisia, Morocco, Turkey and Belgium – spaces of transit and border transgression at the foreground of our research initiative – on the other hand; it clarifies the ways of a public sociology and ethnographic methodology that is intended to be generative, participatory and based on artistic languages. Lastly, special attention is paid to the digital spaces and networks which contribute to widening the possibilities of movement by sharing information about the 'atmosphere' of the routes. From this starting period, and thanks to the endless debates that have nurtured it and culminated in the SOLROUTES kick-off meeting in September 2023 in Genova, comes precisely the idea of a materialist look at solidarity within a new abolitionist horizon, a hypothesis that needs to be tested through fieldwork and a conceptual work of cross-comparison that will engage the researcher's collective in the coming years.

1. SOLROUTES: framing the nexus between solidarity and migration routes

Livio Amigoni (University of Genoa)
Rassa Ghaffari (University of Genoa)
Dorian Jano (University of Genoa)

A declaration of intent[1]

The current book has been crafted to compile discussions and research work conducted by the members of the ERC SOLROUTES (Solidarity Routes)[2] research group over the inaugural year, subsequently presented at the Kick-off Meeting[3] in Genoa. The research project seeks to answer a pressing question amidst these conditions: *How can we gain a comprehensive understanding of unauthorised migration routes, their emergence, their transformations, and the imaginaries and the social spaces they engender by scrutinising Europe from the margins?* To confront this challenge, the project thoroughly examines solidarity networks that facilitate migrant transit from diverse perspectives, a facet of migration that has received little attention in prior studies. The collective investigation is taking into account the

[1] This chapter reframes and summarises the main ideas of the SOLROUTES Project, written by a collective of researchers composed of Jacopo Anderlini, Enrico Fravega, Luca Giliberti, Federico Rahola and Luca Queirolo Palmas.

[2] To learn more about the project, the researchers involved, the fieldwork, and its events, see the SOLROUTES website. Link.

[3] Seminario internazionale: And (As) The New Abolitionism. Collective Knowledge for Debordering Eu-Rope. Link.

broader context of *Europe at large*, which encompasses EU countries with more stringent internal border policies, Mediterranean countries on the EU's borders, and the Outermost Regions of the EU in South America and the Indian Ocean, where novel border policies are undergoing testing.

SOLROUTES, acknowledging the turbulent dimension of migrations and the dynamism of migrant trajectories (Papastergiadis, 2000; Schapendonk *et al.*, 2018), endeavours to present an alternative perspective to the predominant push/pull paradigm commonly utilised by policymakers and stakeholders to comprehend non-state solidarity with migrants[4]. This paradigm often perceives solidarity as an undesirable pull factor – unless it aligns closely with principles of «humanitarian governance» (Agier, 2008; Fassin, 2007) – and, therefore, in conflict with the policies that aim to achieve selective and ordered migration management. In contrast, SOLROUTES regards mobilities and migrant trajectories as relentless and unpredictable actions, challenging the idea that managing migration means pushbacking people and closing borders.

At the EU level, 'solidarity' frequently translates into the distribution of the 'burden' of refugees and undocumented people among member states (see the *2020 EU Pact on Migration and Asylum*), with only a few instances of humanitarian corridors being opened. The central tenets of this perspective are the security and the socio-economic needs of the receiving societies. However, the «autonomy of migration» (Mezzadra, 2006) theory emphasises migrants' agency and provides an analytical vantage point to observe and interpret the production and variability of the border regime. Following this approach, while social networks composed of migrants and citizens (Boyd, 1989; Schiller *et al.*, 1995) have been extensively studied to explain settlement patterns in receiving societies and their impact on sending societies (the consequent cultural and material transformations), the significance of solidarity networks and practices has been largely overlooked in migration studies.

Exploring acts and actors of solidarity is indeed fundamental for grasping the support mechanisms available to migrants. Nonetheless, a comprehensive understanding necessitates an examination of emic networks and practices among migrants themselves. These internal networks, as highlighted by scholars such

[4] We adopt Scheel and Tazzioli perspective here when they define a migrant «as a person who, in order to move to or stay in a desired place, has to struggle against bordering practices and processes of boundary making implicated in the national order of things» (2022, p. 10).

as Nina Glick Schiller and Ayşe Çağlar (2009) in their work on transnational social fields, illuminate the intricate web of support and resilience within migrant communities. By delving into these grassroots structures, researchers uncover invaluable insights into the informal systems that sustain migrants throughout their journeys. Such studies, informed by Nicholas Van Hear's research (1998) on migrant networks, not only deepen our comprehension of migration dynamics but also inform the development of more effective support systems and policies. Incorporating an examination of emic networks and practices among migrants is not only crucial for understanding the complexities of migration dynamics but also for decolonising and de-westernising our research perspectives. Scholars like Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) and Edward Said (1978) have argued that mainstream research often imposes Western-centric frameworks onto non-Western contexts, marginalising indigenous knowledge and perspectives. By centring the experiences and agency of migrants themselves, as advocated by decolonial scholars such as Walter Mignolo (2000) and Aníbal Quijano (2000), researchers can challenge these hegemonic narratives and shift towards more inclusive and equitable methodologies. This approach acknowledges the diversity of voices and epistemologies within migrant communities, contributing to a more nuanced and just understanding of migration phenomena.

Hence, the project aims to introduce a novel and innovative approach to address the disjunction between state mobility governance and migrants' agency. It delves into the concept of unauthorised movements, perceiving it as a variable social construct that can be analysed through the solidarity networks framework. In the wake of a relentless hardening of the EU's borders, 'transit migration' has become synonymous with 'migration pressure' (Collyer & de Haas, 2012), strictly associated with unauthorised movements on the fringes of Europe (Düvell, 2012) and at reemerging internal borders. Certain critical studies advocate for a focus on the concept of 'transit space" or 'lives in transit', emphasising that individuals in transit are constantly seeking spaces with better opportunities to reshape their trajectories (Bredeloup, 2012; Fontanari, 2019). In recent years, scholars have moved away from viewing borders as fixed lines that divide countries, instead adopting a more layered and multi-dimensional approach that brings together specific functions (Parker & Vaughan-Williams, 2009). In this sense, the border is considered a 'method' used not simply to include and exclude but to divide and organise mobilities hierarchically, producing what has been termed «differential inclusion» (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013). Transit spaces, thus, can be seen as «border assemblages» (Salter, 2013), where 'circulations' are the result of friction between regulative power and migrants' drive for autonomy. In this scenario, the governance

of migration has been impacted by a 'logistical turn', which has led to the development of specific apparatuses, infrastructures, data flows, spaces, and «worlds» (Rossiter, 2014) that regulate circulation through the (de)acceleration, diversion, containment, and pushback of individuals with limited citizenship rights.

To advance scientific knowledge, SOLROUTES examines solidarity networks as a pivotal yet underexplored component of border assemblages and constitutive force of people movements. To achieve this, four main dimensions of solidarity will be examined:

1. The actors *(Who they are?).* This dimension focuses on identifying the various actors engaged in solidarity efforts, being either individuals, ethnic or familial groups, and NGOs with different religious, humanitarian, or political beliefs and backgrounds. These actors may encompass citizens, migrants in transit, or settled migrants, being rooted in or external to the local context, connected with or disconnected from other actors on local and transnational levels. They can be volunteers or professionals equipped with different resources. Special attention will be given to the personal histories and biographies of these individuals, with a focus on their gender, age, and socio-economic status, to understand their perspectives and experiences better.
2. The practices *(What do they do?).* This aspect involves reconstructing the tangible manifestations and materiality of solidarity, such as caregiving, facilitating mobility and border-crossing, offering hospitality, and dwelling in transit. It encompasses a range of tactics, from ephemeral gestures to structured and transnational practices, humanitarian actions, and political appeals, among others.
3. The means *(How they do it?).* This dimension investigates the discourses and symbolic meanings employed by solidarity actors when addressing significant themes like 'Europe', 'the journey', 'care/health', and 'solidarity'. It also delves into the cultural objects they create and distribute, such as guides, maps, artwork, visual materials, and texts, shedding light on knowledge production and distribution.
4. The relational field *(How do they interact?).* In this case, we aim to deepen our understanding of the interactions and dynamics between various actors involved in unauthorised movements and solidarity networks. Specifically, in the context of a contentious and generative dimension of solidarity, conflicts, cooperation, porosity, and exchanges with other key actors within and across nodes, such as smugglers, facilitators, settled migrants,

migrants on the move, border control officers, local authorities, policy-makers, anti-migrant groups, and producers of cultural and media content will be examined. The overarching objective is to discern whether the evolving relationships among these groups may result in shifting boundaries between social groups and be one of the possible outcomes of the nexus between unauthorised movements and solidarity networks.

SOLROUTES then employs the concept of 'solidarity networks' as a comprehensive framework to encompass the multidimensional cartography described above. Essentially, the initiative aims to uncover and explicate the various manifestations of heterogeneous solidarity practices, including their modes of operation, values, evolutionary trajectories, and embeddedness within a complex web of constraints and resources. These solidarity networks and actions will be scrutinised and understood for their dynamic adjustments and adaptations to the restrictive circumstances across *Europe at large*, thereby shaping productive encounters and opportunities for mobility.

Spotlight on routes, nodes and corridors

SOLROUTES endeavours to explore the research question on a broader scale, envisioning *Europe at large* as a crossroad of circulations filtered and forced by border controls and externalisation practices, as well as by solidarity network and debordering initiatives. This includes studying routes, corridors, and nodes intersecting the EU, its peripheries, and its outermost regions. Additionally, the project seeks to problematise and expand the very definitions of these terms, opening a theoretical and methodological debate on our understanding of these concepts and their concrete application in the field.

By doing this, SOLROUTES pushes its focus beyond migrants and refugee agencies to encompass a more diverse and often invisible geography of solidarity encounters. Drawing on a «postcolonial turn» (Appadurai, 1996; Chakrabarty, 2009), this perspective allows us to conceive Europe as a place that is constantly being reshaped, enlarged (in a way 'provincialised') and reimagined by routes extending far beyond the confines of the EU. The concept of a 'node' is used here to refer to the social and temporal transitional space along the routes, which transcend mere geographical dimension and give rise to varied and contingent assemblages. These assemblages include centralised platforms, digital networks, camps, encampments, gateways, and passages, which emerge and overlap.

The dichotomy between centralised platforms and decentralised networks is increasingly evident in the context of the 'digital border' being progressively implemented in the EU. This digital border relies on an extensive array of infrastructure, including satellites, drones, and CCTV cameras, to gather large-scale information on geographical, visual, and biometric traces on border crossings (Broeders, 2007; Tsianos & Kuster, 2016). At the same time, migrants themselves are using digital technology to maintain connections with their broader support networks, and friends and relatives (Frouws *et al.*, 2016; Gillespie *et al.*, 2016). Meanwhile, decentralised networks rely on a constellation of digital tools and ephemeral infrastructure constituting the socio-technological backbone of transit support networks (Heller *et al.*, 2017). The case of AlarmPhone, an independent monitoring and rescue service operating in the Mediterranean, is a powerful example of the potential of these networks.

Corridors are punctuated by multiple institutional camps designed for purposes of control, confinement, classification, and selection − a model embodied by the EU hotspot approach (Anderlini, 2020) − and often justified under the guise of «humanitarian reason» (Fassin, 2012). Insularity further emphasises these functions, trapping unauthorised migrants in offshore camps on remote islands or in countries at the fringes of Europe (Ticktin, 2009), subjecting them to temporal unpredictability (Andersson, 2014a), and a politics of geographical and social distancing (Mountz, 2015). However, wherever institutional camps exist, encampments and makeshift settlements may arise, becoming places where lives in transit and other types of encounters can develop with less scrutiny. These locations are not just temporary stations or springboards for debordering, facilitating subsequent steps along a route, but they also serve as sites of creativity and social interaction. They may host schools, churches, and small businesses of all kinds, where new forms of citizenship and city reinvention can develop (Agier, 2002; Sigona, 2015). These encampments are often buoyed by solidarity networks that bolster them with basic infrastructure and resources.

At the same time, in the transit zones, it is common to come across actual walls, checkpoints, gateways, underground and secret passageways that either facilitate or impede movement. However, these spaces typically emerge from the same movement of migrants and are often situated on the fringes of political and national borders, such as the Alpine or Balkan route (Queirolo Palmas *et al.*, 2021; Tudoroiu, 2017) or within the maritime routes that weave through seas and oceans. Drawing from Benjamin's concept of *Passagen*, these spaces are ambivalent, representing both the act moment and a specific crossing point. They are ephemeral – lasting only for as long as it takes to cross − and contextual, dependent on objective circumstances

(such as accessible path at a given time) and subjective conditions (such as available resources or health status). The nature of these gateways and passages often shapes the knowledge, encounters, and cooperation between migrants and solidarity networks. Activities in these sites can vary from smuggling and trafficking to police surveillance, sea patrol, and anti-immigrant and racist attacks.

Moving from these premises, the research team intends to pinpoint approximately 50 significant nodes situated along routes and corridors within the regions delineated by the overarching framework of the SOLROUTES project. SOLROUTES' team is composed of various actors from the academic, activist, and artistic fields and diverse backgrounds, united by a solidaristic and abolitionist frame.

Four doctoral candidates will undertake a two-year investigation, conducting fieldwork across four nodes in diverse territories inside and outside the European Union (EU). Each will be supported by a postdoctoral researcher, who will research ethnographic caravans moving between and around those places. Moreover, principal investigators, artists (photographers, video-makers, and drawers) selected by the project, and other professional figures will intermittently accompany the researchers, aiming to foster a collaborative dialogue between research and artistic methodologies in representing the research outcomes.

SOLROUTES focuses on three Mediterranean countries − Morocco, Tunisia, and Turkey − at the fringes of the EU and where the EU externalisation policies are most visible and striking. These countries have been subject to EU border control policies through logistical, military, and financial support to prevent unauthorised migration and promote deportations and pushbacks. Additionally, these countries – including Libya, which, for safety reasons, will be observed indirectly from the Tunisian border zone – have served as primary departure points for movements toward Europe (Boubakri, 2015; Mouna *et al.*, 2017; Ribas Mateos, 2016), often functioning as 'buffer zones' where migrants become stranded. As a result, these countries can exert political pressure on the EU by selectively opening their borders (Andersson, 2014b; Umek *et al.*, 2019). In 2011, the so-called Arab Spring unravelled much of the externalised European borders, opening new passages towards the North. According to Frontex data (2021), more than 660,000 irregular border crossings into the EU along the central and western Mediterranean between 2015 and 2020. In the eastern Mediterranean, Turkey has represented one of the key migration paths towards the EU. Between 2015 and 2020, Frontex recorded more than 1,270,000 irregular arrivals into the EU from this country. At first glance, the solidarities in these areas are characterised by heterogeneous local and transnational networks, which comprise NGOs, religious associations, and humanitarian groups (Danış & Nazlı, 2019; El-Shaarawi & Razsa, 2019; Milan, 2019).

The Mediterranean Sea has evolved into a transnational battleground where novel migration policies are being developed and enforced, such as the EU's 'hotspot approach' that turns certain areas into containment and selection sites (Tazzioli, 2018). This maritime space is shaped by the interplay between border security and militarisation policies, surveillance systems like EUROSUR, and the determination of migrants to move (Esperti, 2020; Heller *et al.*, 2017; Mezzadra, 2020). Within the scope of SOLROUTES, our attention is directed toward the emergent humanitarian fleets and autonomous Search and Rescue (SAR) networks that are being promoted by civil society as new actors and technologies of solidarity.

Within the EU mainland, corridors and routes are subject to the selective re-emergence of internal borders and intergovernmental efforts to block and channel «secondary movements» (Ambrosini *et al.*, 2020). Regrettably, this governance approach often results in massive irregularisation of migrants and asylum seekers (Jansen *et al.*, 2015), who find themselves "stuck in transit" within the EU (Brekke & Brochmann, 2015) in searching for legal status. Our project will scrutinise Belgium's involvement in secondary movements and innovative solidarity projects promoted by civil associations. Belgium is also a key decision-making centre for EU migration management (Depraetere & Oosterlynck, 2017; Vandevoordt, 2019), hosting the liaison offices of Frontex, EASO, and the Migration and Home Affairs Directorate. We will focus on grassroots solidarities, institutional and EU-agency actors, and international NGOs that lobby for EU policies on unauthorised movements. The second half of the SOLROUTES project, starting from 2025, will focus instead on and around the Outermost Regions of the EU, such as the Canary Islands, Guadeloupe, French Guiana, Martinique, Mayotte, and La Réunion, where the EU encompasses remote areas that play a crucial role in migratory systems that are both pertinent and poorly understood. According to Benoît (2020), the Caribbean and Indian Ocean can be considered the EU's outermost «walls». SOLROUTES will concentrate on French Guiana and Mayotte to comprehend the nexus between solidarity and unauthorised movements in these Outermost Regions, where corridors and routes crisscross countries such as Haiti, Brazil, Suriname, the Comoro Islands, DR Congo, Rwanda, and Burundi (Antoine, 2019; Benoît, 2015; Laëthier, 2012; Sahraoui, 2020). As a result, both regions have many migrants, accounting for approximately half of the population, with a significantly high percentage of undocumented migrants. These regions are a critical testing ground for experimenting with smoother and more efficient mobility management, even though they are outside the European geographical area within the «contradictions of its reception crisis». In 2020, Mayotte and French Guiana deported more individuals than mainland France (Cimade, 2021). While there is particular visibility and widespread stigmatisation and racism towards mi-

grants, contributing to significant social conflicts surrounding unwanted migrations (Vives, 2017), there is also a growing sense of solidarity and support for migrants taking shape, fostered by local associations and international NGOs.

Spotlight on solidarity

Since the onset of the so-called 'migration crisis' in 2015, the term 'solidarity' has been extensively employed by transnational networks across Europe that support migrants in transit. While these solidarity networks have gained increasing importance and visibility in contemporary Europe, they have only recently begun to receive attention in migration studies, leaving much to be explored (Rygiel, 2011; Fontanari & Borri, 2017; Tazzioli & Walters, 2019). Despite being a foundational concept in our academic disciplines (Durkheim, 1933), often framed in a nationalistic context, and playing a pivotal role in 20th century political history, the notion of solidarity has frequently been overlooked in social sciences and political theory (Alexander, 2014; Kymlicka, 2015). However, solidarity has now become the focal point of emerging scholarly interests and a growing body of research on migration, bridging anthropology, political science, human geography, and sociology (Birey *et al.*, 2019; Bauder, 2020; Della Porta & Steinhilper, 2021; Giliberti & Potot, 2021; Queirolo Palmas *et al.*, 2021). In Europe, solidarity networks have been extending hospitality, creating care spaces, sharing practical knowledge, distributing essential goods, and aiding in border crossings for migrants and refugees on the move rather than merely criticising legally questionable institutional practices (Giliberti, 2020). Babels (2019) has demonstrated that this 'grassroots hospitality' forms part of a dimension of citizenship situated between the personal and the political. When states neglect their duties, solidarity networks may intervene with compensatory, humanitarian actions (Dijstelbloem & Walters, 2019). Alternatively, taking a more confrontational and political stance, they engage in civil disobedience (Lendaro, 2018), direct social activism (Zamponi, 2018), and overt transgression, as seen in the No Borders movements (King, 2016).

While traditional understandings have often portrayed political and humanitarian actions as distinct categories, recent scholarship indicates a merging of the two (Gerbier-Aublanc, 2018; Agustín & Jørgensen, 2019; Siapera, 2019). This blending is in response to contemporary attempts to criminalise humanitarian endeavours under the label of 'solidarity crimes' (Fekete, 2018; Taylor, 2020), resulting in NGOs, associations, and activist groups encountering institutional and legal obstacles across Europe as they strive to provide rescue and aid to unau-

thorised movements (Institute of Race Relations - IRR (2017)[5]. Despite scholars emphasising the nuanced roles of intermediaries and facilitators within migrant routes (Ambrosini, 2017; Zhang *et al.*, 2018), these activities are increasingly perceived by both the public and law enforcement as akin to smuggling.

In this evolving landscape, criminalised humanitarian efforts increasingly resemble political acts, while political actions, compelled to operate within emergency contexts, adopt characteristics akin to humanitarian endeavours. Many support groups undergo a process of «ad hoc federalism» (Giliberti *et al.*, 2020), forming broader advocacy coalitions to aid migrants in transit. Drawing from frameworks in civil society and social movement studies (Della Porta, 2020), these interactions and experiences can catalyse collective action, positioning migrants and solidarity networks within a public sphere that is increasingly European and post-national. Support groups may be either endogenous, comprising residents, or exogenous, involving activists, associations, and NGOs converging in transit areas (Giliberti & Queirolo Palmas, 2020). Additionally, specific groups establish transnational linkages across EU borders, fostering connections between citizens and migrants (Ataç *et al.*, 2016). Moreover, migrants in transit cultivate practices of mutual assistance and collaboration during their journeys, often relying on kinship or ethnic solidarity networks in their countries of origin, during the journey, and in their destination countries.

The dynamic power relations between those offering solidarity, the 'providers', and those receiving it, the 'beneficiaries', have predominantly been scrutinised through the lens of humanitarian governance (Ticktin, 2006; Fassin, 2007), leaving unexplored the gender and generational dynamics within solidarity networks and unauthorised movements (Mountz, 2011; Scheibelhofer, 2019). Notably, most 'beneficiaries' tend to be young and male, while 'providers' exhibit a more diverse gender representation. This trend is particularly evident in specific European transit areas, where women play significant roles in driving these efforts. SOLROUTES recognises these gaps and imbalances in the existing literature and seeks to reframe solidarity as a multifaceted temporal and spatial context of interactions that reveal and create permeability and impermeability while reshaping hierarchies and boundaries (Barth, 1998) within and among various social groups in transit spaces. This entails a dimension where the uniqueness of the journey and the social identities of migrants continually evolve through multiple experiences and encounters along the routes, as well as the visions for the future fostered within networks of solidarity (Vandevoordt & Fleischmann, 2021).

[5] Humanitarianism: the unacceptable face of solidarity. Link.

Furthermore, we aim to disrupt established Western paradigms surrounding solidarity, seeking to expand and redefine traditional concepts by advocating for a more inclusive understanding that transcends moral intentions to emphasise practical outcomes and relational dynamics. We aim to challenge conventional ideas, exploring instances where the boundaries between altruistic assistance and economic interests become blurred. Through ethnographic narratives, we provide lenses for analysing and critiquing the political economy of solidarity. The theme of solidarity's impurity recurs, highlighting situations where the distinction between pure altruism and economic motives is challenging to discern. While cautioning against complete amorality, we advocate for a contextual evaluation of each situation. We propose an ethical principle, particularly in the context of unofficial border regimes that limit resources and privatise knowledge.

We argue for a dynamic and fluid conception of solidarity inherent in diverse interactions and relationships, challenging the conventional notion of solidarity as a static attribute of distinct entities. This proposed 'solidarity at large' concept extends beyond Western epistemologies, urging a more inclusive perspective. We advocate for an 'undercommon' viewpoint that transcends and critiques established geopolitical orders. In doing so, we propose a nuanced examination of solidarity across different contexts, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of this intricate and evolving concept. By undertaking these endeavours, SOLROUTES aims to shape a fresh perspective on solidarity studies within the field of migration research.

Structure of the book

This book is the outcome of a collective work developed jointly during the first year of the SOLROUTES project, which culminated in the organisation of the Kick-Off Meeting in Genoa in September 2023[6]. The event's title, *Solidarity and (as) the New Abolitionism. Collective Knowledge for Debordering EU-Rope*, tells of the theoretical and foundational pillars of the project. Progressing from these theoretical coordinates, the book analyses how solidarity is constantly produced and reshaped by various actors along specific migration routes and what social, political, and humanitarian impacts are produced locally. Indeed, the chapters were written by participants of the event and SOLROUTES researchers before the beginning of their fieldwork; therefore, they can be regarded as exploratory research aimed at informing subsequent experiences in the field.

[6] For the complete program of the event, see Link.

In the second chapter, *Going to the Fieldwork: Critical Reflections on Methodologies and Ethics*, the authors set the project's methodology, proposing critical reflections on positionality, relationships, lives and digital research methods. During the project's first year, reflexivity was constantly exercised through collective dialogues to problematise the dynamics of power and position that every field research inevitably raises, with particular emphasis on the researcher/participant dichotomy. Then, the importance of using creative methods in knowledge production is stressed as a key feature of the project. It is precisely through the power of art that the researchers will try to transform narrations and make people think through the redefinition and placement of cultural objects. Then, the Generative Narrative Workshop (GNW) is presented as a research tool to implement and embody the nexus between solidarity networks and unauthorised movements. The collective narrations, raised and gathered in the GNWs, can be synthesised and transformed into 'cultural products' such as documentary videos, art exhibits, songs, diaries, artefacts, etc. Finally, the research techniques (field and audio notes, interviews, volunteering, drifting, counter-mapping) utilised in the multisite ethnographies are presented and discussed.

The third chapter, *Following the Routes: Turkiye, the Border with Iran, and the Balkans*, delves into the unauthorised migration routes originating in Iran and Afghanistan, traversing Türkiye, and proceeding through the Balkan Route towards the EU. It investigates the complex interplay of connections, tensions, and solidarities among these regions, emphasising the support networks that assist refugees and asylum seekers. The analysis foregrounds the dual forces of borderisation and de-borderisation, shaped by the EU's intensified border control policies and their role in producing illegality. It further explores the under-researched smuggling and migration dynamics along Türkiye's southeastern border with Iran, highlighting the broader implications of the EU-Türkiye Statement of 2016 on migratory decision-making processes within Türkiye and the Balkans.

The fourth chapter on *Migration, Borders and Solidarity in Tunisia* summarises the developments of migration-related dynamics and control policies in Tunisia since the country was co-opted into the European border regime in the 1990s and sheds light on initiatives from civil society actors in solidarity with people on the move. It first provides an overview of Tunisia as a country of emigration, immigration and transit. It describes how human mobility from and through Tunisia has gradually been subjected to restrictions in the last decades. Then, it describes the development of civil society in Tunisia and relevant initiatives in solidarity with migrants from the Ben Ali era to post-revolutionary Tunisia. The chapter also embeds migration in the economic and political crisis of the last few years, fuelling anti-migrant sentiments among the population. The country's instability led to the

authoritarian turn imposed by President Saïed, which culminated in the latter's xenophobic speech of February 21st, 2023 and the following instances of generalised violence on sub-Saharan migrants, with solidarity initiatives from the Tunisian civil society trying to stem the racist drift. Finally, the chapter describes the Tunisian asylum system and the role of UNHCR and addresses the issue of Tunisia as a (non-) safe country for Tunisians and foreign migrants alike.

The fifth chapter, *Migrations, Mobilities and Borders in Western and Central Sahara*, focuses on the international migration between sub-Saharan Africa and North Africa as one of the most significant migratory phenomena on the continent. While many studies have documented some of the logic behind it over the last few years, only some have assessed it through the lens of the solidarity concept. Through the interplay of actors from civil society, border crossings and discrete economic actors, this chapter, based on a literature review, seeks to understand what empirical, methodological and theoretical perspectives the study of migration routes between the Sahara and Morocco could provide in the coming years. In this chapter, these perspectives for study are based on reconsidering the European understanding of solidarity, which is often torn between political commitment and humanitarianism. They attempt to integrate a materialist approach captured in the daily life and long history of border economic configurations.

The sixth chapter, *Solidarity Unveiled: Navigation the Nexus of Migration and Resistance in Belgium*, reports on the circumstances and related social and political dynamics of the influx of refugees generated in Belgium, one of the four research 'nodes' of the SOLROUTES ERC project. The first section aims to set Belgium in the context of the Long Summer of Migration and to highlight the challenges and struggles generated by the arrival of protection seekers. Subsequently, we will discuss the crisis of reception, the restrictive asylum policies implemented, and the main issues faced by refugees in Belgium. In the second section, we focus on the (re)emergence of civil refugee support acting in solidarity with migrants and on conceptualising those actions and networks. Some authors have focused on the humanitarian versus political motives underlying the engagement of grassroots civil initiatives, others on the intersections and tactical coalitions between people on the move and their allies. To conclude, the third section presents the leading organisations and associations operating to assist and support migrants.

The seventh chapter, *From Greece to the Alps: Solidarity Flows along Migrants' Trajectories*, explores how transnational solidarity flows are structured and reproduced along the Balkan and Alpine migratory routes and analyses their dialectical relation to political, social, and economic border processes. State thought frames migratory movements along the Balkan route as a form of 'transit migration'

aimed at reaching the territory of the European Union and unauthorised mobilities along the Alpine route in terms of 'secondary movements' within the Schengen area. In this chapter, we will look at this multiplicity of routes through the experience of migrant subjectivities, considering the European space as a 'battlefield' where mobilities are constantly rearticulated in the encounter with border policies and solidarity flows. In particular, this chapter focuses on solidarity flows by examining three crucial dimensions of migrants' lives: the ability to travel and cross the multiplicity of borders within the European space, the possibility of finding decent housing solutions, the ability to work and earn money in moments of stasis during the journey. The study was carried out in the transit migration hubs of Athens and the Alpine route, where the authors positioned themselves within associations and collectives struggling to support migrants' self-determination. Keeping in touch over time with people on the move through the Balkans and the Alps allowed the researchers to analyse migrants' efforts to carry out transnational mobility practices and projects across Europe's borders and the forms of solidarity that are enacted to support these efforts.

The eighth chapter, *Designing, Reshaping, Inventing Biographies and Paths: Anthropopoietic Metamorphoses*, examines various emic networks with a focus on the self-representations of people on the move and the networks that shape their movements and identities. Emphasis is placed on the latter through a comparative analysis of online networks in three distinct regions: the Persian-speaking Southwest Asia, the Arabic-speaking Maghreb, and the predominantly French-speaking sub-Saharan Africa. The study scrutinises the diverse communication forms that influence migratory movements and identity construction, both pre-migration and during migration.

The last chapter, *The Jacket*, is an illustrated graphic novel created by a collective of researchers – sociologists, anthropologists, psychiatrists, educators and poets – as one of the unplanned outcomes of an ethnographic fieldwork at the French-Italian border. In the specific context of Susa Valley and Briançon, the crossing takes place thanks to the action of multiple solidarity networks, and also through the provision of clothing that circulates continuously within a transnational space. The illustrator, with a transposition of Michelangelo Pistoletto's *Venus of the Rags* inside the clothes depository of a refugees' shelter (the starting point to cross for the people on the move), suggested the authors use Frantz Fanon's words of *Black Skin, White Masks* as the voice over of the drawings. The contribution focuses on the opportunities opened by the encounter between social sciences and graphic storytelling as an avenue for innovative methods in research and as a challenging language for back translation; it represents an attempt at public sociology and an exploration of the generative-participatory methods adopted by the SOLROUTES project.

2. Going to the fieldwork: critical reflections on methodologies and ethics

Livio Amigoni (University of Genoa)
Rassa Ghaffari (University of Genoa)
Massimo Cannarella (University of Genoa)
Enrico Fravega (University of Genoa)

«*It matters what ideas we use to think other ideas (with). It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories to conceive of anthropology (and ethnography as well) as the knowledge practice that studies relations with relations, that puts relations at risk with other relations, from unexpected other worlds.*» Marilyn Strathern

«*Science is an essentially anarchic enterprise: theoretical anarchism is more humanitarian and more likely to encourage progress than its law-and-order alternatives*.» Paul Feyerabend

Epistemology: the role of reflexivity and positionality

The choice of beginning this document with some reflections on ethics and epistemology is not by chance: concerns related to the researcher's positionality vis-à-vis the field and the participants and the capacity to reflect on the effects of our work on those who take part in it are an integral component of the methodology of any research project. Besides, we believe that creative methods – such as those to be employed within this project – arise and develop a range of constructivist epistemological approaches, which inquire into the conditions of scientific knowledge production and the role of researchers (Giorgi *et al.*, 2021).

The concept of reflexivity provides social researchers with a means to understand the way that elements such as gender, nationality, age, and social class – to name a few − intersect with and produce social change in contemporary modernity (Ruspini, 2018). First developed within feminist scholarship (Harding & Hintikka, 1983; Harding & Norberg, 2005), reflexivity is, above all, the capacity to dialogue with oneself and the world and represents an opportunity to act in the social reality (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). It is a process of awareness aimed at giving meaning to our actions, which are plural and rely on cultural forms (Weber, 1966), and stimulating new ones. Through reflexive actions, it is possible to promote change (Nuzzaci, 2011) by questioning the 'naturalness' of social phenomena and contributing to unravelling the symbolic system that sustains collective living. The researcher 'travels' between cultures, and in the frequent boundary crossings, this position implies that habits of reflexivity are fostered.

Participant observation is the primary research tool we will implement in this project, and it engages in numerous complex acts of interrogating the self at the same time as interrogating the other. In other words, ethnography involves the whole person; this is its distinguishing feature as a research method (Jordan, 2001). Indeed, Longhurst defines reflexivity as a practice to examine our own «embodied subjectivity» (Longhurst, 2010). Contemporary ethnographic research calls for sustained and heightened self-reflexivity and demands that the researcher's self be foregrounded as a filter of everything learned. The acknowledgement that age, gender, outsider status, and lived experience of the researcher will open up some avenues of discovery and inhibit others has become axiomatic, and contemporary qualitative social scientists consider how researchers and informants negotiate a reality between themselves.

The researcher's value system influences, orients, and shapes the work by reflecting one's political positions and ethical orientations. Feminist research has developed the idea of positioning to make the research process more transparent from an ethical perspective and to recognise the power relations that are inevitably inscribed in research relationships. Positionality is thus determined by where one stands about 'the other'. More importantly, these positions can shift and may, at different times, outweigh the cultural identity we associate with insider or outsider status (Narayan, 1993).

Indeed, more recent analyses have exposed the power-based dynamics inherent in any research and have suggested that power is something to be aware of and negotiate in the research process. Since the 1940s, indeed, social scientists have begun to challenge the traditionally hierarchical relationship between research and action, between those doing research and those being studied, thus replacing

the extractive and Fordist research typical of the colonial model with a more flexible approach that can benefit the communities involved (Kindon *et al.*, 2007).

In particular, feminist and decolonial scholars are concerned with foregrounding women and minorities' experiences, with participants having an equal relationship with the researcher and the research experience being empowering and transformative (Lather, 1991; Cotterill, 1992; Reinharz, 1992). This has been one of the main challenges and concerns of our project, as we have been and still are critically questioning the forms of research restitution that is possible to imagine with vulnerable subjects with whom we cannot guarantee prolonged contact or who may not find the outcomes of our research useful.

Participatory action research increasingly focuses on the political empowerment of people through participation in knowledge construction, such as in the case of the theatre of the oppressed and the different creative approaches that our project will try to develop. Here, the researcher is no longer supposed to be the one who extracts knowledge and shares it with the audience but is intrinsically harnessed in its creation of knowledge, with participants being the colleagues equally in control (Merriam *et al.*, 2001). Giorgi, Pizzolati, and Vacchelli (2021) define 'methodological reflexivity' as attention to the methods and approach employed during the research.

Every researcher also struggles with representing the 'truth' of their findings and allowing the 'voices' of their participants to be heard. Understanding and fairly representing participants' perspectives is a crucial ethical point. The creative practices adopted by the project also aim to integrate as many values, beliefs, and imaginaries (such as the concept of solidarity and the plurality of meanings it can assume) that are indigenous to the people in question, creating dialogic counter-narratives and making them key aspects of the intervention.

This becomes utterly important while using creative methods such as the ones employed by the SOLROUTES project: in this case, adopting a reflexive approach means paying particular attention to the implications of the epistemological choices that are made when deciding to undertake research using specific creative tools, and being aware that the knowledge produced through these techniques is always the outcome of the interaction between the researcher and participants' positions in a social, cultural and historical context (Giorgi *et al.*, 2021).

During the preliminary training of the SOLROUTES project, reflexivity was constantly exercised through collective dialogues to problematise the dynamics of power and position that every field research inevitably raises, with particular emphasis on the researcher/participant dichotomy. These reflections constantly permeated our first months of field research in Oulx, Ventimiglia, Saluzzo, Mazara

del Vallo, and Genoa. The collective discussions following each stay allowed us to critically examine, for example, the issue of the ongoing negotiation of roles and positions between academics and activists. We have observed how many activists refuse to participate in a logic of value production in favour of external subjects (the academia, the researchers) and research tools considered reductive and schematising. Concerns related to access to the field, the relationships with the participants, and epistemic extractivism have also been debated, highlighting the need for shared ethical guidelines and mutual in-depth reflections.

Public reflexive sociology

Our research approach moves in the wake of public and activist social science (Burawoy, 2005), which positions itself on the side of the subalterns and aims to contribute to their emancipatory processes. Our points of departure are Burawoy's two questions: how the external world we investigate enters and shapes the practice of sociology − that is, the question of reflexive sociology − and how the practice of sociology enters and shapes the external world, or the question of public sociology (Burawoy, 2005).

The public reflexive approach involves the explicit positioning and siding of the researcher, as well as their involvement in and with the situations and people they investigate to generate and bring together reflexive knowledge on solidarity networks, people on the move, and other key actors. It recalls the new generation of social researchers and ethnographers, arisen since the early years of the Third Millennium, who embody the reflexive turn of the ethnographic practice and advocates for a politicisation of the social sciences: the so-called «militant ethnographers» (Boni *et al.*, 2020) or «ethnographic activists» (Brotherton, 2023), moved by political tension and aimed at generating an effective and concrete change of the existing power dynamics. As Juris and Khasnabish (2013) outline based on their experience as an activist and researcher with the Movement for Global Resistance (MRG) in Barcelona, militant ethnography is not only an alternative research method but also a political praxis. This approach considers it necessary to turn the research object into a subject and then give back part of the power of representation and challenge the positivist epistemology of distance – the science that finds its condition of truth in the distance between the studied object and the subject of enunciation – and to believe in a research tool that is also a common and innovative practice (Palmas, 2021). In her study of everyday violence in a poor shanty town in northeastern Brazil, Nancy Scheper-Hughes describes how she was coaxed into political organising by her Bahian informants and how this led her to call for a «barefoot anthropology»:

> The more my *companhieras* gently but firmly pulled me away from the "private" world of the wretched huts of the shantytown, where I felt most comfortable, and toward the "public" world of the Municipio of Bom Jesus da Mata, into the marketplace, the mayor's office and the judge's chambers, the police station and the public morgue, the mills, and the rural union meetings, the more my understandings of the community were enriched and theoretical horizons were expanded (1995, p. 411).

Moreover, while most of the academic studies on solidarity and migration focus on Western states and organisations' perspectives, SOLROUTES embraces Burawoy's (2005) invitation to provincialise our sociology, to bring it down from the pedestal of universality and recognise its distinctive character and national power by incorporating and shedding light on the variety of nonwestern, indigenous solidarity practices that take shape along the routes (Bauder & Juffs, 2019).

Within the project, the public and reflexive dimension will be pursued thanks to the choice of collaborative and participatory ethnography (Lassiter, 2005) and volunteering practices, reshaping the relationships between researchers, participants, and other actors through the cooperative production of texts, objects, and images along the routes. As Becker pointed out (1998), the usefulness of social research perceived by participants is one of the conditions for building trust, accessibility, involvement, and in-depth knowledge. The sensitivity of the research field – exposed to vulnerability, violence, uncertainty regarding legal status, criminalisation, and surveillance – makes this type of ethnography the most capable of coping with such risks, assuming perceived and objective threats directly from the perspective of actors participating in the research. The six local Ethnographic Antennas[1] and are based in crucial transit areas. The research structure aims at a) generating and bringing together reflexive knowledge on the corridors/routes involving solidarity networks and migrants and b) enacting a public sociology to amplify its outcomes.

Indeed, the purpose of the project proves to be both cognitive and transformative as it combines scientific soundness with a public and participatory sociological approach (Anderlini *et al.*, 2022) and considers a dialogic and practical interaction with different audiences and actors as an essential stage in the research process (Burawoy, 2005). The effort of reporting on and back-translating targeting multiple publics in multiple ways is regarded as a key element in a continuous research process rather than as a fixed moment of ex-post dissemination of findings. As Latour

[1] Ethnographic Antennas are research locations where an eighteen-month ethnography will be led by PhD researchers.

wrote, sociology has a public responsibility to pay attention to vulnerable and precarious lives and to seek to establish the conditions that offer them a «livable and breathable home» (Latour, 2010, p. 488); to this end, the discipline can «develop strategic knowledge in the public practice of social science» (Back & Puwar, 2012).

Live methods

A creative wave of social science has recently been crashing onto the shores of methodological tradition, casting free a flotilla of methods described as mobile, interactive, live, and relational and suggesting new methodological crossovers at the intersection of social research and creative practices (Vannini, 2015).

In line with the idea of sociology, adequate to contemporary cultural productions, live methods (Back & Puwar, 2012) will allow experiments with new forms in producing and representing research data, collaborating with artists, developers, filmmakers, photographers, illustrators, and art curators. Working with such actors enables new modes of sociology to be developed and performed. Live methods involve immersion, time, and «unpredictable attentiveness», allowing for a «transformation of perspectives that moves slowly over time, between fieldwork sites and the academy» (Back & Puwar, 2012). SOLROUTES conceptualises routes as a lived-in social infrastructure produced by the nexus between solidarity networks and unauthorised movements, a space of dwelling, hospitality, and care; the multi-sited approach it adopts allows researchers to stay on, live on, and follow the route rather than diving into a single cultural and social location. The novelty of this approach consequently suggests that sociological craft is extended into technical realms that require us to care about new skills and techniques.

This is an increasingly popular trend in the social sciences (see the HOMInG project and Annalisa Frisina's works, 2021; 2016). Part of the promise of live methods is the potential for simultaneity in research and the possibility of re-ordering the relationship between data gathering, analysis and circulation. Their development and diffusion within social research have been primarily fostered by the growing awareness of the intertwining of research's methodological and ethical dimensions with the emerging needs of inquiry that touch on aspects affecting daily life practices (Giorgi *et al.*, 2021). Live methods seek to improve our capacities towards an engaged «artful craftiness to the craft of sociological methods.» This can be done collaboratively in real-time to produce a pluralisation of observers, which opens up new possibilities for «crowd-sourced» or transactional data (Back & Puwar, 2012). Live methods shared with participatory and feminist approaches pay attention to forms of reciprocity and balance of power differentials, recognising the

importance of sharing and treating participants as bearers of expert knowledge. In research that relies on such methods, participants are allowed to express their identities and experiences – and their representations of these identities and experiences – through a process of creation and reflection on what is created (a performance, a story, an artefact). It is precisely through the power of art that the project will try to transform narrations and make people think through the simple redefinition and placement of a cultural object. Art will also help overcome language barriers and foster encounters and exchanges that all can understand. Moreover, the figure of the artist, who no longer uses their studio to produce works but carries out work in the field, directly and in close relation to the context, highlights how the methods adopted for the conception of work follow more and more dynamics linked to the contingencies of the present, than to the idea of beauty. The acronym 'artivism', which merges the words artist and activist, perfectly evokes a new frontier of political art with a social background aligned and marked by a civil commitment.

In the SOLROUTES project, the innovative research tool to implement this approach will be the Generative Narrative Workshop (GNW). This relational, generative, and transformative space will bring together languages and techniques from film and visual sociology (Queirolo Palmas & Stagi, 2015), art-based research (Leavy, 2018), and graphic ethnography (Ingold, 2016; Nocerino, 2016). By doing so, SOLROUTES aims to develop a deep relationship with solidarity actors and migrants in transit, generating prototypes for collaborative working practices across disciplines and observing their representations, experiences, and practices while enabling more traditional research methods through interviews, life histories, and observation. It is an invitation to encourage a playfulness that undermines and interrogates prevailing research conventions (Back & Puwar, 2012). Thus, in producing these crafts, Puwar and Sharma invite us to consider «learning new strategies for telling society and for affecting and persuading audiences» (Puwar & Sharma, 2012, p. 22). For instance, curating public performances and exhibitions involves morphing and becoming «apprentices in the craft of curatorship through practice» (Puwar & Sharma, 2012, p. 23).

Within the research group, a lengthy process of pondering these methods and their use in our project has been carried out. In particular, there has been much discussion about how to make these moments of creation and reflection with participants genuinely participatory and how to make them beneficial for those who take part in them. Another insight that emerged from one of the field research experiences is the distinction between collaborating with artists and using the artistic techniques they provide. Hence, the need to combine epistemological discourses at all stages of the research process is transparent; regardless of the researcher's

individual choices, live methods invite to deconstruct, explore, and reason around the regimes of visibility and invisibility in social research of the power relations that are established among the different actors involved, and about the space that is given to marginalised or subaltern voices (Giorgi *et al.*, 2021). Some dilemmas that emerged in the research group's first months of work include: How can people be enticed to participate in these practices? What kind of restitution is possible? What are the forms of participatory moments that consider the individual characteristics of each participant? How can we avoid falling into mere extractivism and, on the contrary, make these techniques beneficial for those who participate? How can the participants' privacy be preserved and a safe space created?

Digital ethnography

Almost three decades ago, Appadurai noted that «Electronic mediation and mass migration mark the world of the present» (1996, p. 4). The tools and devices for research craft are being extended by digital culture in a hyper-connected world, allowing new possibilities to re-imagine observation and generate alternative forms of research data (Back & Puwar, 2012). Ethnographic research has been invigorated and transformed over the past years with analyses of textual discourse in digital communication spaces (Kavanaugh, 2020), with a stimulating growing body of literature on media, the mediated visualisations of borders, border crossing, and migration beginning to show (Bayramoğlu, 2022). From web forums that provide to subcultural groups and facilitate the discussion of subaltern topics and causes to online comment forums that allow readers to interact with mainstream (and alternative) news content, Web 2.0 has offered platforms to create and circulate counter-discourses and amplify subaltern groups voices, narratives and representations (Kavanaugh, 2020); indeed Nancy Fraser refers to these spaces as subaltern counterpublics, that function as

> discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter-discourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (1990, p. 67).

Thanks to the felt anonymity of Internet communication, the rapid expansion of digital technology has «democratised» access to mass media (Rodman, 2003), aided in the «demarginalising» of persons with stigmatised social identities (McKenna & Bargh, 1998; Koch & Schockman, 1998) and expanded their embodied networking opportunities (Kavanaugh & Maratea, 2016).

The growing global adoption of information and communication technologies

(ICTs) has dramatically altered various migration dynamics (Leurs, 2018). On the one hand, it includes an increasing reliance on digital technologies for top-down governmental border control, surveillance, and migration management by State authorities; on the other, smartphones, social media, and applications are used by PoM as new channels to access resources and information, to communicate, entertain social relations and participate in political events. The rapid developments in migration that occur in conjunction with the spread of ICTs raise considerable theoretical, methodological, and ethical challenges (Leurs, 2018) and opportunities for social research.

Moving from these premises, SOLROUTES will implement innovative forms of digital ethnography, defined as the study of the interactions, representations, and spaces produced by actors through digital technologies (Murthy, 2008; Pink *et al.*, 2016), combining participant observation with qualitative 'digital methods' for data gathering. That is, ethnographic methods, initially designed for studying cultures in the physical world, are used to study cultures in virtual worlds (Boellstorff *et al.*, 2012). This approach aims to reveal learned and stratified practices, meanings, and representations along corridors and routes, collecting through the digital scape the actors' experiences at various times and locations, thus empowering ethnographers by permanently updating their work in the field. Through the flows of information and data along the routes, it is possible to analyse how digital technologies, devices, and interactions shape actors' practices (Jeandesboz, 2017). Thus, this digital turn will allow them to modulate their activities and maintain an active relationship with actors and key informants in the field during the whole research process, enabling a longitudinal coverage, even in case of forced removal from the field due, for instance, to critical events. Further, this enables the researchers to collect data (that will be secured and anonymised) throughout the research period following movements, interactions, and exchanges among participants within digital platforms in public and private groups, chats, and channels. The direct participation of researchers in the digital space will allow them to reflect on these forms of digital social relations and self-reflect on their influence on them (Markham & Baym, 2009).

While scholars typically use digital ethnography either to investigate communities that only exist online or to gain access to social phenomena that are otherwise inaccessible, one of the distinctive ways in which SOLROUTES implements digital fieldwork is to observe participants during the journey as active creators of a shared knowledge able to shape mobilities and to bring authorship and agency in the production of the visuality of migration to the fore (Bayramoğlu, 2022); one of the outcomes might be, as an instance, the construction of a counter visuality of migration (Mirzoeff, 2011; Bayramoğlu, 2022), what Foucault has termed a «reverse discourse» (1978), or Judah Schept's «counter-visual ethnography», which he describes

as a methodological «commitment to see with historical acuity the relations of production and processes of representation that have structured the present empirical moment…and [which] mobilises the unseen for a right to see» (2014, pp. 216-17).

Another exciting and innovative path of research SOLROUTES has already embarked on concerns the analysis of digital infrastructure (i.e., Telegram channels and groups, social media such as Instagram and TikTok) used together by PoM and individuals offering paid services all along the routes to the EU. Indeed, though the use of the internet and social networks during migration is amply documented in the literature yet, fewer studies have tried to investigate the characteristics of these virtual spaces, often branding them as tools used by 'smugglers' to lure desperate victims (Latonero & Kift, 2018). Social networks play a significant role in shaping the intentions to migrate, the route choice, the method, and the destination country in a circular manner. In making their way to safe spaces, PoM relies not only on the physical but increasingly also on the digital infrastructure of global movements such as social media, mobile devices, and similar digitally networked technologies that comprise this infrastructure of 'digital passages': sociotechnical spaces of flows in which PoM, smugglers, governments, and corporations interact with each other and with new technologies (Latonero & Kift, 2018). That said, PoM's success in reaching its destinations increasingly relies on access to a safe physical and digital infrastructure. This kind of virtual ethnography allows the researcher to be attentive to how a social media platform as a field site acts both as a 'culture' and a 'cultural artefact', which is «variously constructed by users with quite different interpretations of what it means for them» (Hine, 2013, p. 138).

In our project, another launching pad for the innovative use of digital ethnography will be the GNW's environment: in this space, researchers will explore how the research participants and members of their trust networks interact with each other, both online and offline, along the corridors/routes, sharing information and experiences in the form of texts and pictures: traces of their passage and solidarity activities. Thanks to the GNWs, digital and non-digital fieldwork will be strictly interconnected since the physical presence in the field will be a crucial precondition for properly unfolding the digital ethnographic work. The knowledge and trust built between researchers and actors during GNWs will grant access to the digital field.

The Generative Narrative Workshop (GNW)

In the research proposal, we provided preliminary ideas about the GNW. Let us take a step back to elaborate more accurately on this research device. Box 1: Innovative Research Tools: The Generative Narrative Workshops (GNW).

Based on the previous research experience of the PI and his team in the Global South and moving towards new experimentations on a broader scale, the GNWs bring together in-person researchers, diverse types of artists, and a selected group of informants (max 10) to create narrative and storytelling environments (Gubrium & Holstein, 2009). The GNWs' composition embodies the nexus between solidarity networks and unauthorised movements. Making collaborative research objects, such as short videos, photographic portfolios, maps, podcasts, and art pieces in which participants will impress their authorship, will be our way to explore the following questions: *What is Europe? What is a journey? What does it mean to take care of someone/something? What is solidarity*? In so doing, SOLROUTES aims to develop a deep relationship with solidarity actors and migrants in transit, observing and debating their representations, experiences, and repertoires of action, giving room and resonance to unheard voices. Building on the trust developed in collaborative fieldwork, a more traditional research method will also be enabled: interviews, life histories, field notes, and direct observation. The GNWs can be intense and short-term (three intensive days, as in the case of ECs) or more spread out over a longer period (one session a week for three months, as in the case of EAs). A GNW will be organised for each research site mapped along corridors/routes. We called these research sites 'nodes' in order to emphasise the social and temporal spaces of transit where our analysis of the articulation of the nexus between unauthorised movements and solidarity networks will be grounded. Counter-mapping (Campos-Delgado, 2018; Casas-Cortes *et al.*, 2017) will be central to the GNWs, as it will enable to resignify places, actors, and practices along the routes, revealing other border spaces and experiences which can portray the subject's story and collect a common pool of knowledge on circulation opportunities. This practice will promote the visualisation of social spaces (their typologies and topologies) and the exploration of Europe's shifting meanings and representations across the routes, ultimately building a connection between the acts of making (map/graph, sketch, drawing) and storytelling. (…)

The GNWs will constitute an empowering experience and a training and exchange environment where participants can appreciate the usefulness of the research for their trajectories, develop skills in the making of visual objects, storytelling, and speaking out, expanding their knowledge of asylum and digital rights, and nurturing their social capital. The GNWs will enable an extensive data set to be transformed into collaborative research objects, widening their circulation and fostering their back-translation effect among different audiences. Research assistants among migrants or solidarity actors, especially among those participating in the digital ethnography, as well as artists and other professionals, will be involved with short contracts and recruited thanks to local academic partners in each Ethnographic Antennae to guarantee the effectiveness of GNWs and the willingness to join in with research participants.

Within this framework, GNW is conceived as an ethnographic method: drawing on, blending, and integrating the aforementioned research approaches; addressing the issues of reflexivity and positionality of researchers; aiming to construct a safe place of relation and narration, built in cooperation by researchers and research subjects. Along these lines, GNW can be considered a collaborative environment that has enabled the rise of collective narrations. A place, or a virtual place, where positionalities and reflexivity of researchers and research subjects are put at stake and negotiated. Here, collective narrations collaboratively take shape through various participative and expressive techniques – allowing a horizontal share of views, information, analyses, and stories. These collective narrations, raised and gathered in the GNWs, can be synthesised and transformed into 'cultural products' such as documentary videos, art exhibits, songs, diaries, artefacts, etc. Consistently with a cooperative and reflexive approach, the same collective narratives and cultural objects are examined and discussed within the GNW. These 'cultural objects' can thus be used to construct public counter-narratives useful to research participants, allowing them to share their points of view with a broader audience and circulate de-stigmatised views about migration and solidarity.

GNW as an open-source method

GNW is not a method that sticks strictly to a guideline. There is only one way to make a GNW. Collective participation and joint elaboration of narratives are required. However, participation and cooperation techniques used in making GNWs can be different and must be adapted to participants' interests and attitudes. So, each GNW will entail different degrees of co-participation, as well as different challenges for researchers. Therefore, consistent with the idea of 'open source', each researcher using GNWs contributes to the development and adaptation of the method to different research contexts.

GNW as a safe relational environment

A high level of reciprocal trust and knowledge is needed to create a GNW. Participants should feel free to talk, interact, and share their views without feeling judged, neither by researchers nor by other participants. Hence, GNW requires a deep understanding and knowledge, gained over time, of participants' conditions and needs.

GNW as a plural space

GNWs are joined by researchers, research subjects, and research coworkers with strong expertise in a specific expressive language (e.g., artists, photographers, video-makers, songwriters, theatre directors, etc.). Research coworkers join GNW

upon invitation, either by researchers or by participants. The choice of the expressive language through which the 'cultural object' will be created is a matter of discussion in the GNW.

GNW as a collective storytelling space

The GNW aims to facilitate the rise of a collective narrative, or counter-narrative, by creating a space that enables horizontal relationships and active participation. However, power and knowledge imbalances between researchers and participants can only partially be eliminated. For while group discussion can be horizontal, the issues deemed valuable for constructing the cultural object are subject to researchers' power of veto and choice, such as the public use of images produced in the GNW. Hence, the GNW is not a neutral space; instead, it is a space crisscrossed by conflicts and negotiations, frictions, and forms of cooperation driven by participants' and researchers' interests and positionalities. These frictions and negotiations are also crucial moments of analysis and interpretation and contribute to the general findings of the research in each node. The collective character of narrations raised in the GNWs is also meant to be a way to overcome individual perspectives and raise awareness of commonalities in participants' statuses and conditions.

GNW as a space of co-creation

Drawing on the University of Genoa Visual Sociology research group's experience in visual sociology and art-based research, GNW is conceived as a lab for the creation of 'cultural objects'. Different degrees of participation and time frames (from several months up to several years), together with different possibilities and sensitivities, lead to different elaboration processes and outputs. Nevertheless, 'making something' together with research subjects allows researchers to forge a deeper relationship with them, raising spontaneous views, reflexivity, in-depth narrations, and emotive involvement.

In this perspective, the 'cultural object' is both the ground for raising participation and the output of a GNW.

Research techniques, inter-actions, and participation

As has been extensively analysed in the literature, transnational migration processes require specific methodological approaches that increasingly employ multisite ethnographies (Marcus, 1995; Hannerz, 2002) and research methods that are indebted to different disciplinary traditions: participant observation, interviews, life histories, oral histories, documentary analysis, and, increasingly, photogra-

phy and video. Across the 50 crucial nodes of migratory and solidarity routes in Europe, Africa, Asia, and Latin America, various research techniques will be performed, siding, expanding, and building on GNWs as a space of encounters and voice. Those techniques will vary according to the contexts, the constraints, and the opportunities.

Field and audio notes will be used to record experiences and to reflect upon the encounters we will undergo. Moments of detachment and breaks from fieldwork and research will help manage the intense and critical situations in which we will meet and reflect on our actions and positioning. In this way, the field diaries will be our tireless travelling companions that guard the insights, contacts, and stories. We will use an online platform to store the material and make it accessible to other researchers on the team. This will allow the team to be constantly updated about other fields, conduct research in a coordinated, comparative manner, and bring the identified themes into dialogue.

Life She/He stories and interviews. Life she/he stories will be conducted with people with whom relationships of trust and exchange are built. This is to reduce misunderstandings about the conversation's purpose and make the narration as natural as possible. For instance, migrants often find themselves having to tell their life stories in various, and more or less, institutional contexts. Examples of these are the commissions that assess asylum applications, police interrogations, and interviews with NGOs carrying out dedicated services. In these contexts, the stories told directly affect one's status, for instance, obtaining documents, getting released from prison, or accessing specific services. Therefore, the researcher will be directed to mark a distinction with this type of situation by prioritising the relationship and sharing the knowledge acquired.

The semi-structured qualitative interview will be conducted with various actors, including migrants, solidarity actors, local authorities, and border guards. This broad spectrum of actors will allow us to approach the theme of solidarity from different perspectives and grasp its various facets and nuances. Moreover, given the multi-sited research, we will be able to interview people in different locations, trying to capture their connections and mutual understanding of each other.

In dialogues, space will be left for people to ask questions, which will make it a two-way conversation and capture the interests, doubts, and issues that people want to explore more in-depth. This information also serves as the basis for investigating topics of interest to the informants and for intercepting common discourses and desires circulating. Such two-way relationships will make it possible to become an informant yourself on specific solidarity issues (logistics, habits, legal, contacts) and, in some ways, return knowledge accumulated during the research project.

The recorder's use will be carefully evaluated because it often creates fear and coldness in the interviewees compared to when we chat without it. Interviews will be conducted in English, French, Arabic, Farsi, etc., depending on the interviewees' preferences, the researchers' language skills, and the possibility of having a translator available. The language barrier could be a significant obstacle, especially in the ability to go deep and grasp the nuances of certain topics.

Volunteering and engaging in experiences of solidarity will be key tools to access the fields in a participative manner and with the idea of knowing by doing. In recent decades, there has been a growing interest in studying and applying volunteering as a research technique with unique characteristics and guidelines. Sociologists and political scientists increasingly view volunteering as an expression of core societal principles, such as solidarity, social cohesion, and democracy (Hustinx *et al.*, 2010). Even so, volunteering remains a complex phenomenon that needs to be clearly defined and often spans various activities, organisations, and sectors. The definition of volunteering is difficult to pin down, and it is challenging to generalise findings from studies. However, the various perspectives and approaches demonstrate the richness and versatility of volunteering scholarship. For instance, Wilson and Musick (1997) propose an «integrated theory of volunteering» based on three assumptions: that volunteering requires human, social, and cultural capital; that it is productive work done collectively; and that it is guided mainly by ethical principles. Militant ethnography, on the other hand, aims to address some of the objectivist shortcomings common in traditional research approaches (Juris, 2007). To grasp the concrete logic generating specific practices, researchers must become active practitioners; this usually involves assisting in organising events and workshops, facilitating meetings, contributing to strategic and tactical discussions, taking political stances, and participating in mass direct actions. The work can also be interpreted within the framework of 'action research', in which the researcher is actively involved in the field, and other actors are seen as subjects rather than objects of research. The research is aimed at achieving micro-social change, often within a group, rather than merely increasing knowledge (Cannarella in Queirolo Palmas & Stagi, 2015).

During volunteering, sharing knowledge and information that will help support illegalised people during their journeys will also be possible. Indeed, one of the most significant actions concerns logistical support and sharing essential information in the various areas crossed by migratory routes. These journeys often last for months or years, passing very different territories, often non-linearly and with abrupt plan changes. In those situations, direct contact with local solidarity persons and groups could be vital in sharing resources or giving an account

of the territory, its gateways, and risks. Indeed, due to the mobile nature of the migratory routes, the support network and its study must be spread across the territories and communicated constantly to anticipate the needs and be effective.

Drifting is an action research approach that combines mobile and activist research practices, in which knowledge is constructed by researchers and participants while moving together through everyday environments. The social reality is uncovered and constructed while navigating the field and engaging in a discussion inspired by the participants' experiences. As an activist research approach, drifting relies mainly on its feminist application and is similar to what Guy Debord experimented with in the situationist practice. In the present research, drifting has the potential to reveal what immigration policies mean in terms of the concrete everyday realities of undocumented migrants, as well as identify possible cracks in which to subvert it.

Similar techniques called *monitoring* have been developed by activists at the French-Italian border. It consists of patrolling with informants in certain areas or situations to grasp as much information as possible and understand the dynamics that are taking place. It is the attempt to focus 'on the everyday', on illegitimate practices and resistance to them. In this way, different perspectives and postures can confront and merge, giving rise to in-depth knowledge and practices. For instance, being present during episodes of police repression allowed activists to report abuses, take care of specific needs, and intervene when it was possible. However, it is also true that, often, when white observers are present, the police have a different attitude towards migrants than when they are not seen.

In recent years, the academic world has experienced increasing interest in *participatory mapping approaches* because of the possibilities to boost interactions by using accessible and free-ranging visual methods in an individual or group setting. There is a long history of participatory mapping seeking to understand location-specific human values, conflicts, resistance, behaviour, preferences for land use, and public projects. Using maps constitutes a critical site for understanding relations of power, inclusions, and exclusions and how those are negotiated and contested spatially. Indeed, mapping is fascinating because it allows participants to move from description to depiction to theorising the reason for how they have represented features on the map through drawing and talking. In this way, the process of questioning and reflection on specific issues is performed using maps, pens, colours, and words with individuals or groups. The creation of the map is an integral part of the information construction and collection, which must be added to other research techniques (audio interviews, videos, written texts) and analysed and understood considering the process implemented.

Mapping will be a valuable tool in approaching the multi-sightedness of the SOLROUTES project and the aim to map spaces and social practices distributed among multiple and often unpredictable locations. Moreover, counter-mapping will be used to unearth hidden practices and meaning, bringing together actors' experiences at different times and locations, thus empowering ethnographers and participants by permanently updating their work in the field.

Finally, *migration and solidarity traces* (different objects left intentionally or abandoned along migration and solidarity routes) will be used as an analytical starting point to study solidarity. Indeed, our research proposes an innovative perspective based not only on the often-used oral testimony but also on artefacts, namely physical remnants of the journeys, solidarity initiatives, and border crossings produced and left by people on the move. These artefacts can take the form of personal notes, pieces of information for other migrants, maps, drawings, poems, songs, and so on. Scholars pointed out how these traces are often used by people on the move to exert agency and control in a context characterised by exclusion and restrictive immigration laws. Most of the time, the walls of the shelters, immigration offices, and solidarity spaces are where artefacts are left, often in the form of drawings and writings. Indeed, looking at migration from the migrant perspective is crucial to challenge EU border enforcement and narration because it offers a unique entry point for understanding how borders and routes are experienced, handled, and negotiated. More importantly, these traces are a powerful testimony and essential for migrant representation. For instance, an archive of contemporary migration and solidarity initiatives could be produced as collaborative knowledge that may involve migrants, activists, academics, and anyone sympathetic.

3. Following the routes: Türkiye, the border with Iran, and the Balkans

Lülüfer Körükmez (Ege University)
Rassa Ghaffari (University of Genoa)

This chapter aims to provide an overview of the state of the art concerning the routes of unauthorised movements that, departing from Iran and Afghanistan, pass through, often stop in Türkiye, and eventually continue through the so-called Balkan Route towards the European Union (EU). To do so, it looks at the entanglements, tensions, and connections between these three different areas, as well as the solidarity practices and networks that assist refugees, asylum seekers, and people on the move (PoM) in the Turkish territory and along the Balkans.

The common thread linking these routes is the role of the forces of borderisation and de-borderisation in producing illegality: in each area, the intensification of EU's pressure to reduce the flows reaching Europe has led to tighter collaboration with local governments and the development of counter-migration and counter-smuggling policies within the frame of what has been defined the «Europeanisation of migration and border policies» (Hess & Kasparek, 2017, p. 2). Although some of these countries do not lie along the EU's physical entry point, the EU's externalisation governance extends to faraway places where migrants travel, raising the question of whether and how the EU cooperation affects border and migration management (Augustova, 2021).

This analysis relies on İkizoğlu Erensu and Kaşli's assumptions (2016) that the experience of transit is hardly spread homogeneously across a country and cannot be isolated at any one scale. People smuggling and crossing along Türkiye's other borders with Iran has been side-lined in policy and research despite its crucial nature in current migration and other geopolitical dynamics in the region

(Augustova & Suber, 2023). Hence, an exhaustive analysis of the situation in Türkiye cannot refuse from looking at its south-eastern border and, consequently, the routes and flux of migration from both Iran and Afghanistan and their continuation in the Balkans. Indeed, it is shown that the package of policies associated with the EU-Türkiye Statement of 2016 influenced refugees and migrants' decision-making in Türkiye and on the Western Balkans route to Europe (Kuschminder *et al.*, 2019).

The chapter is structured as follows: in the first section (1), it considers the routes from Afghanistan and Iran to Türkiye, trying to stress their role and influence. However, most research on migration in Türkiye focuses on Syrian refugees, those who have been intercepted along the Turkish-Greek borders while trying to move onward to the EU during the last few years have been predominantly Afghan nationals, followed by people from Iran, Pakistan, and Iraq, who have entered Türkiye from Iran (Augustova, 2021). Subsequently (2), the chapter discusses the development of the legal framework that underpins the categorisation of migrants in Türkiye as well as the causes of the production of several types of illegality. Türkiye plays a primary role today in both the geographic organisation of migration routes towards Europe and in the externalisation of its border control measures (İkizoğlu Erensu & Kaşli, 2016; Sert & Danış, 2021). Indeed, it is among the crucial countries on the fringes of the EU where policies of border control, in the means of logistical, military, and financial support aimed at containing unauthorised migration, have been implemented most effectively. The next section (3) comprises a mapping and summary of solidarity grassroots networks and associations on the field, the latter being particularly relevant since one of the aims of the SOLROUTES project is to explore the functioning, the articulations, and the cultural imaginaries of local and trans-local networks which share shelter, knowledge, resources, and connections with people in transit to and from Türkiye. In the last section (4), the chapter looks at the Balkans as a key transit space located on the edge of political and national borders. The persistence of the Syrian conflict, the intensification of EU pressure to reduce the number of PoM reaching Europe, the turmoil in Türkiye's other borders with Iran, and most recently, the Taliban's take-over of Afghanistan in 2021 are all factors contributing to an unprecedented flow through the country to Europe, taking part in the so-called 'Game' through the Balkan route, which has recently gained prominence (Bjelica, 2016; De Genova, 2020). The document concludes by looking at solidarity networks and actors providing a plurality of services to PoM along the route.

Looking Backwards at the Route: The Iran-Türkiye Border

This section aims to improve the understanding of the Afghan and Iranian migratory movement towards Türkiye, which is intensely associated with regional preconditions in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran.

Türkiye's eastern border with Iran is central to the European Commission due to its comprehensive border security system approach, which means managing migration along its future frontiers. Indeed, broader EU-Türkiye cooperation measures increasingly influence the border landscape and migration around Van, the main transit passing point for those coming from Iran and Afghanistan. The two parties have not only recognised the need to develop better bilateral migration and border approaches at the Iran-Türkiye border but have also been working to develop several military and technology projects, including the construction of a wall and a barbed-wire fence along the border with Iran, together with the deployment of surveillance systems, towers, and drones (Augustova, 2021). Indeed, migration management has been re-delegated farther away from the EU's borders to an environment where exclusionary and militarised measures have been present and normalised for decades due to Türkiye's conflict with the *Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê* (Kurdistan Workers' Party, PKK).

The passage through the border from Iran to Türkiye has been important for those who flee the multiple conflicts that have afflicted Central Asia over the last forty years – from the 1980s Iran-Iraq War (Çetin, 2020) to the 2011 Arab Spring (İçduygu, 2020), to the most recent Taliban's take-over of Afghanistan in 2021. While public and political debates about EU-Türkiye migration cooperation have centred on the country's western borders (i.e., with Greece), rising levels of EU-Türkiye migration cooperation along the eastern border with Iran and the increasing precarity of migration journeys there have been largely ignored (Augustova, 2021; Augustova & Suber, 2023).

Recent emigration from Iran dates back to the Islamic Revolution of 1979, when many opponents to the new State, as well as many religious minorities, had to leave the country. It has been estimated that 300,000 to 1.5 million Iranians entered Türkiye after the 1979 revolution and stayed there until the end of the 1980s, and according to some estimates provided by Akcapar (2009), the number of Iranian nationals with irregular status in Türkiye fluctuated from 10,000 (İçduygu, 2003) to 100,000 to 200,000 (Içduygu, 1996), and even up to 500,000 (Narlı, 2002) between 1990 and 2000. Beyond the Western countries, Türkiye has become another top destination for Iranians. According to the Iranian Refugees' Alliance, in 2019, Türkiye ranked fourth in the list of countries that

received the largest numbers of first-instance applications from Iranians, while in 2023, Iranian asylum seekers totalled about 15,000 individuals, making them the third largest asylum-seeking population in the country (UNHCR, 2023).

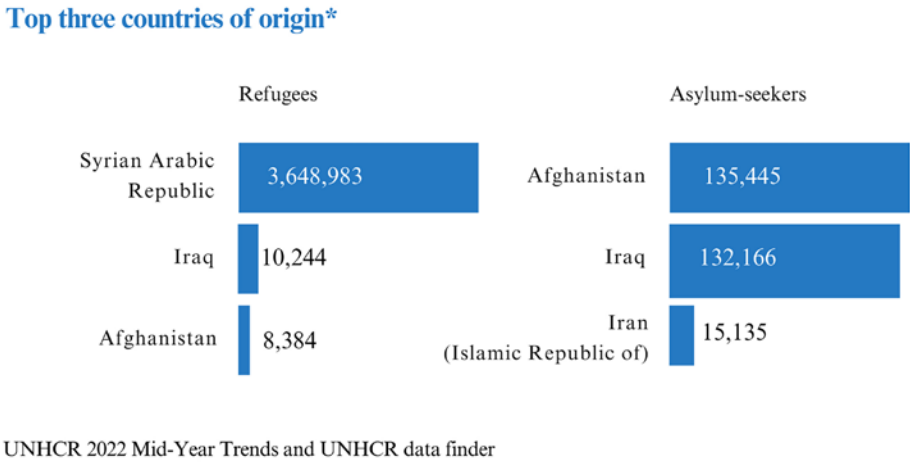

Figure 1: Top three countries of origin of refugees and asylum seekers in Türkiye, February 2023. Source: UNHCR – Refugee Statistics 2023.

Akcapar (2009) asserts that despite their different immigration status, most Iranians think of themselves as temporary or transit migrants who are stopping in Türkiye on their way to reach the EU, though some chose to remain there, where a minority obtained residence permits and even citizenship (Kirişci, 2000; Pahlavan, 2004).

Witnessing Iran a strong culture of migration (Khosravi, 2007), for Iranians, emigration often stands in between a rational investment and an urgent necessity; family and personal connections play a relevant role in shaping and developing the idea of emigration, and above all in addressing the *ressortissants* toward political asylum, which seems the best option available (Rivetti, 2013). In his research among Iranian asylum seekers in Türkiye, Akcapar (2009) found out that almost half of his respondents had resorted to human smugglers at one point to enter the country illegally, only a tiny minority successfully entering with legal documents but later trying to exit it resorting to smugglers. In research conducted ten years later, Augustova confirms that there has been an increased demand for human smuggling due to the lack of legal and safe means of travel for migrants fleeing their home countries across the border (Augustova, 2021). The monitoring of digital channels and groups used by Iranians and Afghans planning to leave the country, conducted by one of the authors of this chapter, highlights that 1) Türkiye is still the first point

of passage to Greece and the EU and 2) the presence of well-established Iranian networks offering paid services all along this route to the EU.

Since Türkiye is still holding the geographical limitation to the 1951 Geneva Convention on Refugees, asylum seekers from Iran have to be resettled elsewhere outside the country, for instance, Van, as the closest city to the Iranian border, has a proportionally high number of Iranian asylum seekers, and so there is much research focusing on this area, along with Istanbul, as one of the main urban cities to which they gravitate (Akis Kalaycıoğlu, 2016).

A comparable discourse applies to Afghans. Today, Afghans are the second biggest displaced population in the world, following Venezuelans, with Afghanistan currently the source of one of the largest and longest-lasting crises of «protracted displacement[1]» (GAR, forthcoming). Despite this, the Afghan migratory movement, representing a *sui generis* case concerning its protracted war and violence over four decades, does not receive adequate attention from the international community anymore. In 2015, Afghans were the second largest refugee group within the massive migratory movement from Türkiye to Europe, after Syrians. Since then, they have become the largest migratory group pursuing dangerous routes to reach Europe for asylum. In this journey from Afghanistan to Europe, Türkiye is located on their way as the country of both transit and destination, connecting diverse transnational networks, and indeed is the third country hosting the largest number of Afghans after Iran and Pakistan (GAR, forthcoming). Certainly, most people crossing the Iran-Türkiye border are Afghan nationals (Augustova, 2021). The majority of Afghan refugees interviewed in Türkiye by Kuschminder *et al.* (2019) were leaving Iran due to increasing restrictions on movement, their inability to secure legal work and education opportunities, and increasing deportations to Afghanistan; while many seek to settle in Türkiye temporarily or permanently, others continue non-stop to other regions, mainly in the Global North. The current circumstances signal a much-required attention to Afghan refugees and their long-lasting precarious living conditions, which in Türkiye have been further worsened since the early 2010s.

According to research by GAR (2021), Afghans in Türkiye live on the margins of precarity. Invisibility enforced by their living conditions simultaneously inter-

[1] UNHCR defines «protracted displacement» as «a situation in which 25,000 or more refugees from the same country have been living in exile for at least 5 consecutive years in a given host country, and find themselves in a state of limbo, unable to return or without rights to live permanently elsewhere» (Crawley & Kaytaz, 2022, p. 6).

sects with the blindness of the international community and civil society towards them. Due to their unauthorised and invisible life, they are abandoned by the regimes of international protection as well as the scope of civil society, whose aid and assistance become inaccessible to them. Based on forthcoming research by GAR done between September and December 2022, Afghans are being pushed to illegality by the Turkish state because their applications are not accepted by the Migration Ministry − not by law but *de facto*. Second, some Afghans come to Türkiye to work in agriculture, especially as shepherds. The authorities turn a blind eye and let them work in areas far from cities. NGOs are not allowed to assist or give aid to unauthorised migrants. So, Afghans are not able to apply to legalise their existence in Türkiye and cannot access proper assistance from NGOs because they are unauthorised.

Although both Iranians and Afghans on the move embark upon arduous treks across the Iran-Türkiye border with a well-defined goal − to move from illegality to legality − their chances of formalising their status upon arrival in Türkiye are almost none: Türkiye's ability and willingness to deport and push back un-wanted migrants in Europe is driven by its negotiations with the EU. As a result, migration management has been re-delegated farther away from the EU's borders to an environment where exclusionary and militarised measures have been present and normalised for decades due to Türkiye's conflict with the PKK. The 2016 Statement failed to create more legal cross-border channels and, thus, put pressure on Turkish authorities to create more repressive policies along their borders with non-EU countries (Augustova, 2021).

State of the art about migration, borders, and refugees in Türkiye

In the last three decades, the types, flows, sources, and routes of both authorised and unauthorised migration have become more diversified, leading some scholars to talk about a «new age of migration» (İçduygu, 2005) in Türkiye. It is within this framework that in addition to its well-established role of being a country of emigration across Africa, Asia, and Europe (Yıldız, 2021), from the 1990s, Türkiye has progressively also become a key country of immigration and transit taking on a vital role in EU's migration regime and externalisation processes (İkizoğlu Erensu & Kaşli, 2016). Türkiye has been pursuing EU membership since the Helsinki Summit of 1999, where its candidacy was officially recognised; the country's legislation must incorporate the *acquis communautaire*, which includes the migration and border policies of the EU. In this section, the state of the art on legal and institutional changes and the production of illegality for cer-

tain migrant groups through this legal architecture in Türkiye following Europe's externalisation policy will be discussed.

Until recently, Türkiye had no regulations specific to migratory movements. As a part of the European human rights system since the beginning, Türkiye signed the Geneva Convention of 1951, but with a geographical limitation, that is to say, it only grants refugee status to those coming from EU countries. Despite maintaining the reserve, the country ratified the 1967 Protocol about the Status of Refugees, creating a two-tiered system for refugees: while non-European asylum seekers are permitted to apply for UNHCR, wait for third-country resettlement, and remain in the country during this time, they are not allowed to do so permanently (Muftuler-Bac, 2021). Since its foundation, Türkiye welcomed migrants identified as Turkish and Muslim and perceived as part of the community, which was also established in the 1934 Settlement Law. Only after arrivals due to the Gulf crisis (1990-1991) was a regulation on asylum seekers introduced in 1994, which was a pioneering legal text aiming to control the mass influx of migrants. The government nevertheless inserted a clause declaring that anybody deemed as a threat to the Turkish state might be deported to their native country regardless of the safety of the individual concerned. Thus, the law was far from guaranteeing the protection of asylum seekers. The regulation drew criticism from European governments and human rights organisations (Kirişçi, 2012) for prioritising national security concerns over refugee rights, violating the *non-refoulment* principle (Müftüler-Bac, 2021), failing to provide a comprehensive approach to the asylum procedure and refugee rights (Soykan, 2010), and having problems with capacity and implementation (Üstübici, 2019). While non-European asylum applicants were considered to be transitory and transient, those whose applications were denied either had to return to their place of origin or were made to live in the country illegally.

Between 2003 and 2011, Türkiye established several legislative and institutional frameworks (Özçürümez & Şenses, 2011). National Programme on the Adoption of the Accession Partnership (2008), as part of its EU integration efforts, served as direction for approving an asylum strategy, creating an asylum authority, and signing a readmission agreement with the EU (Müftüler-Bac, 2021). The same year, in cooperation with UNHCR and IOM, the Migration and Asylum Bureau and the Bureau for Border Management were established, which «is indicative of the institutionalisation of the migration bureaucracy» (Üstübici, 2019, p. 8).

The outbreak of war in Syria and the arrival of Syrians in masses enforced the introduction of new regulations, which has been another milestone in the country's migration governance. At the very beginning of this massive migration, the

Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD) was given the mandate to coordinate their reception needs. It took more than two years to make legal adjustments, and in April 2014, two major developments were enacted: first, the Department General for Migration Management (DGMM) was established to fix the lack of coordination among the institutions working on migration and asylum. Next, the Parliament passed the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP) as a continuation of the Europeanisation process of the Turkish migration regime. Within this new law, article 91 made it possible to grant the Syrians temporary protection (TP) consisting of three elements: an open-door policy for Syrians; the right of *non-refoulement* that hinders forced returns to Syria; access to basic public services such as health, education, and to a limited extent, the labour market. Although not specified in the law, in practice, Syrians have been granted the right to stay in the country indefinitely.

The EU-Türkiye Readmission Agreement in 2013 was an effort of the country to become an EU member, which commenced the Visa Liberation Dialogue, and at the conclusion, Türkiye pledged to remove the geographical reservation from the Geneva Convention (Kaya, 2021). The Readmission Agreement's implementation date was planned to be October 2017; however, it was accelerated to March 2016 after the 2015 summer. The 2016 coup attempt and its aftermath, a two-year period marked by numerous human rights violations and the *de facto* suspension of the Parliament, dealt a blow to the dreams of Visa Liberalisation and EU membership. However, Türkiye's gatekeeping role already had been fortified.

The EU-Türkiye Statement, which was put into force on 18 March 2016, has determined an important shift in mass migration routes from the Balkan route towards the African one (starting in Egypt and Libya and usually ending in Malta and Italy). According to scholars (Chetail, 2016; Heck & Hess, 2017; Roman *et al.*, 2016; Rossi & Lafrate, 2016; Peers, 2016; Yıldız, 2021), although the Statement aimed to decrease irregular migration, to disrupt smugglers 'business models', and to open safe routes for people on the move, it has instead increased their vulnerability and exploitation to a considerable extent. Moreover, it is a highly contested issue whether Türkiye can be considered a safe third country as it maintains its geographical limitation to the Geneva Convention (Ulusoy, 2016). In her research on the modus operandi of migrant smugglers in the Aegean region, for instance, Yıldız (2021) argues that this policy development has had some unintended consequences concerning the services of smugglers operating in the Aegean region. First, contrary to its aims, the Statement did not decrease demand for smugglers but left many people stranded in Türkiye. Secondly, to

some extent, this further increased their vulnerability and exploitation. For Hathaway, by rationalising the criminalisation of smuggling and increased commitment to border controls, the Protocol raises fundamental human rights concerns regarding the «increased difficulty faced by refugees seeking the legal protections to which they are formally entitled under the Refugee Convention» (Hathaway, 2008, p. 35).

Until 2018, UNHCR played a key role in Türkiye's legal and institutional architecture in the field of migration and asylum, handling both regular and irregular migration. Since then, UNHCR's mandate and responsibilities regarding asylum-seekers and refugees, regardless of their legal status, have been taken over by the Presidency of Migration Management (then Directorate General of Migration Management-DGMM). Before this, UNHCR could receive asylum applications, conduct RSDs, and carry out third-country resettlement for individuals it considered eligible. In the case of Syrians, since the TP regime was established, Syrians have been prevented from applying for any form of international protection. As written by Heck and Hass, «being stuck in this state of legal limbo applies not only to Syrian migrants, but also to other international asylum seekers who see themselves trapped under the disempowering circumstances resulting from the EU- Türkiye deal, the Turkish bureaucracy, and UNHCR policies» (Heck & Hess, 2017, p. 48). After the transfer of UNHCR's capacity, there has been criticism of a lack of transparency in the reception of asylum applications and the RSD process, as well as obstructive behaviour by the Migration Presidency.

The number of refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers passing through Türkiye to Europe has decreased since the height of the so-called 'European migrant crisis' in 2015, but the route remains significant. The 1951 Geneva Convention, the EU border infrastructure, and the legal infrastructure in transit countries all shape and constrain Türkiye's current migration management (Üstübici, 2019), and the distinction between categories of asylum seekers and irregular migrants is increasingly hazy (Gökalp Aras & Şahin Mencütek, 2018).

Türkiye receives thousands of transit migrants, chiefly from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, and some other Asian and African countries, who mainly intend to go to the other countries in the European Union. According to the UN Refugee Agency, in February 2023, Türkiye hosted the world's largest refugee population for the ninth consecutive year, with close to four million refugees and asylum-seekers under international protection. There is also estimated to be a large, unregistered refugee population that is excluded from these figures (Kuschminder *et al.*, 2019).

Year ↓	Country of Origin	Country of Asylum	Refugees under UNHCR's mandate	Asylum-seekers	IDPs of concern to UNHCR	Other people in need of international protection
2022	Afghanistan (AFG)	Türkiye (TUR)	10,581	128,813	0	-
2022	Iran (Islamic Rep. of) (IRN)	Türkiye (TUR)	5,114	13,084	0	-
2022	Iraq (IRQ)	Türkiye (TUR)	11,855	122,629	0	-
2022	Syrian Arab Rep. (SYR)	Türkiye (TUR)	3,535,898	0	0	-
2022	Unknown (null)	Türkiye (TUR)	2,043	5,621	0	-
2022	Ukraine (UKR)	Türkiye (TUR)	2,768	2,189	0	-

Figure 2: Number of asylum seekers and refugees in Türkiye by nationality.
Source: Refugee Data Finder, UNHCR 2022.

That of the Syrian refugees is an exceptional case worth dwelling on a little more deeply. In the initial stages of the Syrian conflict in 2011, Syrian refugees mostly clustered in southern Türkiye close to the Syrian border. However, as the protracted nature of the crisis became apparent, they began to move to big cities such as Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir. Syrians under the TP regime have to register in certain cities. It is only there that they can access the rights granted to them. Intercity travel is only possible with permission from the authorities of the province where they are registered. However, due to the difficulty of finding a job, kinship relations, etc., many Syrians live in cities other than the ones they are registered in, which renders them irregular within the country. It should also be noted that not all Syrians are under the TP. When a Syrian under the TP living in a place other than the registration city is subjected to any form of identity check, they are either sent back to the cities where they were registered or deported to Syria. The number of those who have been granted citizenship through the much-discussed 'exceptional citizenship' is reported to be around 223,881 by the end of 2022 (Mülteciler Derneği, 2023), although there is no data available to the public. In addition to those in the country with residence permits, there are also a large number of irregular Syrians.

Although Türkiye was partly successful in realising the rules of the TP Regulation aligning with the EU *acquis*, the discursive frames used by the *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (Justice and Development Party, AKP) government and relevant state actors in approaching Syrian refugees have led to a de-Europeanisation of migration and asylum processes. Moreover, the increasing polarisation and complication of Turkish political life in the last decade have also meant a shift in the political discourse and the framing of Syrian refugees as 'guests', which, for Kaya (2020), is no longer sustainable, neither in terms of accommodating their urgent

needs nor in coming to terms with an increasing of racist and xenophobic attitudes among the local populations. Political parties in the country securitise the Syrian refugee crisis through their political discourses, which results in the rise of xenophobia among the population; members of the CHP, for instance, claim that the Syrians are the source of major crimes and unemployment (Gulmez, 2019). The 2023 earthquake and the 2023 political election have further exacerbated this situation; the AKP administration began enforcing severe regulations after concluding that the migrant issue could undermine its chances of regaining the elections. As a result, the number of deportations increased, and a 'deconcentrating policy' began to be implemented.

The growing economic and financial crisis in Türkiye in the aftermath of the failed coup attempt of 15 July 2016 shaped further societal and political divides and divergence in a way that has led to the scapegoating of Syrian refugees by many native groups as well as to the rise of Arabophobic feelings. As a consequence, emphasis is now on the return of the Syrians either to their home cities or to the zones under the government's control, which is in the process of being constructed by the international forces at the Turkish-Syrian border (Kaya, 2020). Amid this growing stream of the return discourse, Syrians under TP started to feel even more threatened when the gas drilling polemic came up between the EU and Türkiye on the shores of Cyprus in the summer of 2019, which resulted in the Turkish Foreign Minister's statement regarding the unilateral suspension of the Readmission Agreement, which has been subject to instrumentalisation by Türkiye as a bargaining chip with the EU. The crisis resulted in the EU's financial assistance sanctions on Türkiye; in return, Türkiye announced it would suspend the Readmission Agreement operating since March 2016. However, returns can still take place under the EU-Türkiye Statement from Greece to Türkiye. Such destabilising factors and the ongoing ambiguity about the future have made some of the Syrians consider fleeing to the Greek islands.

For people other than Syrians who are not under international protection, access to basic rights is not possible. It has become quite challenging for them to submit applications for international protection; nearly exclusively, those with several vulnerabilities can submit their request. Increased migration to Türkiye, on the one hand, while making registration more difficult, results in the growth of illegality. Deportation is a continual threat for those who cannot or do not want to register. In addition, they are forced to work informally in conditions of precarity to continue their journey or to earn a living in Türkiye.

Since a few years ago, Afghans have been singled out, demonised, and criminalised, becoming the focus of hostility and xenophobia since reports of huge

groups of single men entering the nation surfaced. In keeping with this, the government enforces stricter regulations on Afghans to demonstrate that they have effective migration control. Afghans were deported in considerably greater numbers than other nations. In addition, random identity checks on streets and deportation procedures have escalated. According to MMP, about 110,000 unauthorised people were deported in 2022, and among them, 61,617 Afghan nationals were deported by 206 charter flights (İçişleri Bakanlığı, 2022).

Civil society and solidarity in Türkiye

The number of NGOs and civil initiatives that assist migrants, refugees, and the PoM in Türkiye has increased both quantitatively and qualitatively since the start of the migratory flows from Syria in 2011. Solidaristic acts of citizens emerged as a reaction to the arrival of displaced Syrians; however, they faded considerably in a few years. Hence, while the literature on NGOs is much broader (Mackreath & Sağnıç 2017; Sunata & Tosun, 2019; Özgür Keysan & Şentürk, 2021; GAR, 2022), research on solidaristic acts and movements is rare (Dağtaş & Can, 2022; Karakayalı Polat, 2018; Körükmez, 2018; Genç, 2017; Ataç *et al.*, 2016).

As Türkiye has been the target of both immigration and transit flows due to natural disasters and political and economic unrest in the region, and because it is on the route to the EU, civil actors and NGOs emerged before this flow, though in a way that cannot be compared to today. In the 2000s, Türkiye became a 'waiting room' for PoM from African countries for both those waiting to cross the border and those waiting to finalise third-country resettlement of UNHCR. In this period, associations serving refugees, albeit on a small scale, were established amid the transformation and expansion (and NGO-isation) of civil society in Türkiye as a direct result of the objective for full accession to the EU between 2000-2010s.

In the face of the influx of refugees fleeing the war in Syria, the state and non-governmental organisations, as well as citizen humanitarianism and individualised forms of compassion and solidarity (Stanarević´& Roković, 2021), have emerged. Informal solidarity initiatives in various forms mobilised without receiving funding but depending on donations from individuals, mostly in big cities such as Istanbul, Izmir, and Ankara, as well as a high number of refugee receiver cities such as Gaziantep and Kayseri. Their worldviews, resources, and issues/problems differ greatly. However, many of the initiatives later changed their status to an association, either for legal or financial reasons. Nonetheless, there are comparatively fewer attempts in Islamic faith-based networks to turn into of-

ficial associational organisations. This is partly because there is less monitoring of these organisations' fundraising and relief efforts. Since the 1990s, some of those networks have been assisting PoM, along with the country's other marginalised groups. On the other hand, it was only after the 2010s that migrant solidarity movements emerged from leftist circles (Genç, 2017), which, as mentioned above, also faced sustainability problems.

In the early days of the Syrian migration, international humanitarian agencies needed to collaborate with local associations due to the lack of authorisation and difficulty in meeting the needs of such a large number of people. In this period, while some of the NGOs established in the 1990s adapted their activities to the new context, new ones were also founded to meet the mounting needs. Humanitarian organisations in eastern Türkiye, especially in the border provinces, and Islamic charitable organisations in major western cities mobilised to meet the urgent needs of refugees. Rights-based civil society organisations, in the face of these emerging needs, rapidly began the process of institutionalisation (GAR, 2022).

In the 2010s, Türkiye steered towards an increasingly authoritarian regime, and at the same time, the pressure on civil society increased. The failed *coup d'état* on 15 July 2016, marked a turning point in the field of migration. During the two-year long state of emergency period, the country was governed by emergency decrees. In this process, more than one thousand non-governmental organisations, including organisations serving Syrian refugees, were closed down, and many of them experienced fear of being closed down (Altunkaynak Vodina, 2019) by the decrees, and some INGOs had their Turkish registration documents revoked. INGOs continue to provide humanitarian aid to refugees in Türkiye in collaboration with local NGOs and Turkish official institutions (such as the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency, AFAD, and Turkish Red Crescent) (Aras & Duman, 2018). The Turkish government wanted to establish and maintain its absolute regulatory role in the migration and civil society fields to control the monetary sources flowing into this area through civil society and to continue using immigrants as a chip in international negotiations (Körükmez, 2022). In December 2020, the government further increased the pressure on civil society by enacting a new law titled *Preventing the Financing of Weapons of Mass Destruction* under the guise of 'fighting terrorism', which has been a conveniently accepted argument within the society.

In addition, official surveillance of NGOs varies greatly between cities and has a significant impact on how they operate. The control and repression in border cities, especially in Kurdish cities, are higher than in western big cities. When

working with PoM groups who are not under TP or international protection, this disparity is most pronounced. Renting homes, providing accommodation, and accompanying them to places such as hospitals, even if done unintentionally or for humanitarian reasons, were made illegal in 2019 by an amendment to the LIFP. The amendment has been criticised for containing very vague wording, leading to arbitrariness and interpretation by law enforcement forces. Therefore, NGOs are subject to legal limitations when offering services to those without documentation. Their financing, on the other hand, frequently targets particular groups. In other words, contributors decide who gets the money and what kinds of activities can be funded. Therefore, NGOs currently can only provide minimal or no funding for PoM.

Despite these limitations, it is important to present a framework of civil society actors working in the field of migration and asylum in Türkiye because, as will be seen in the details below, other actors functioning as associations or foundations also provide support to persons not under international protection or TP in numerous ways.

The relationship between the state and civil society, however, cannot be simplified to a top-down approach or state repression of civil society (Danış & Nazlı, 2018). Rather, we can speak of a plural civil society with different ideologies, aims, forms of organisation, and modes of operation. Therefore, neither clear-cut nor inclusive classification is possible. Instead of attempting to be exhaustive, the following pages will present a broad picture based on its salient characteristics.

Regular only-refugees and migrants NGOs

Since the arrival of Syrian refugees, civil society has accelerated the adoption of an international neo-liberal humanitarian aid regime with the onset of INGO and other donors. The drive for efficiency has led to a proliferation of highly specialised NGOs, working with limited objectives and target groups under schemes of projects that have prevailed despite the complexity of the migration phenomenon (Sözer, 2019). Furthermore, due to the restrictions of donors, NGOs have to limit the 'beneficiaries' of their programs based on nationality and legal status as well as gender and age markers as signifiers of vulnerability. The authoritarian regime surge in the country, on the one hand, and the increasing pressure of political and financial control on NGOs, on the other, have caused them to withdraw into a service-only framework rather than advocacy so that they can function without becoming a target. In reality, the state makes it simpler for NGOs to function in circumstances where they do not openly criticise the administration and collaborate closely with it.

Islamic NGOs

Islamic NGOs refer to Islamic moral norms and duty-oriented terminology and provide social reproduction in a morally upstanding manner, connecting the private domain to the traditional collective ideals of the family, country, and Islam (Atalay, 2019). Following the values that refer to Islam and Islam brotherhood, those NGOs tend to serve more Muslim refugees, being criticised for enhancing selective humanitarianism (Karakayalı Polat, 2018). Nonetheless, a faith-based understanding of solidarities can mobilise a vast number of resources for refugees through large NGOs as well as individual and 'occasional solidarists', which are vital for PoM.

NGOs for women/feminists NGOs

Women and children, as well known, have been the primary target groups of humanitarian aid and NGOs of any kind, and the Turkish case is not an exception. NGOs with diverse trajectories have assistance and/or programs of any kind for women refugees, although with different aims and methods. Keysan and Şentürk (2020) have shown varieties of understanding NGOs (that were sub-classified as Philanthropists, Professionals, and Feminists). The feminist movement has an exceptionally long history and is still one of the strongest in Türkiye in the face of authoritarian rule that seeks to curb the rights of women and LGBTİQ+ communities. The movement has created its civil society, including NGOs. Since the number of refugees increased in Türkiye, those NGOs also launched programs for refugee women. Due to the funding regimes of donors, some of them have become only refugee women NGOs. Yet, the solidarity vs. charity dichotomy and the inclusion of refugee women's experiences in programs are problematic, and social hierarchies, tensions, and mutual distance are entangled (Dağtaş & Can, 2022).

Human rights organisations

After the *coup d'état* in 1980 and following the strengthening of an authoritarian regime, the first human rights NGO was established in 1986. NGOs advocating for human rights and organisations working in specialised rights areas, such as LGBTİQ+, have flourished in the 2000s. These groups have begun to operate in the area of immigration and asylum, much as women's organisations. If the NGO has a special program, such as rehabilitation of torture survivors, they include refugees as well. In addition, some of the human rights NGOs follow racist attacks, lynching incidents, as well as rights violations conducted by the police, gendarmerie, and other authorities. Their work is priceless under a neo-liberal authoritarian regime where many NGOs cannot face the authorities. However, many of them operate without any special program or training to work with refugees.

Migrant-led organisations

Türkiye grants the right to establish and be a member of associations for persons who have the right to reside in the country. Almost all migrant associations are organised based on nationality or ethnicity. Among these, Syrian and Afghan associations stand out. The majority of the associations established by Syrians mostly work cross-border on the Syrian territory controlled by Türkiye. Founded by naturalised Afghans who arrived in Türkiye in the 1980s and 1990s, these associations play an informal gatekeeper role in ensuring that their newly arrived co-nationals receive aid and humanitarian protection (Karadağ & Sert, 2023). The majority of these associations are pro-government. They usually try to keep a low profile and avoid open criticism of government policies because, on the one hand, they have to work with the government to work cross-border, and on the other hand, they trust the AKP government to accept migrants. In addition, the AKP is a preferable alliance in the face of the opposition's anti-migrant stance.

Other organisations

Despite the limited scope of the civil society space in Türkiye, certain institutions work for refugees in the face of unprecedented fluxes of migration from Syria, in addition to ongoing ones from Afghanistan, Iran, and African countries. Municipalities, bars, professional bodies, and unions have assistance and programs for refugees in various forms and degrees.

While meso-level actors municipalities have the potential to play a significant role in providing service and support, however not all take it due to the political polarisation that is closely related to attitudes towards the refugees in the country. The municipalities of AKP have a more pro-refugee stance, while opposition parties nourish anti-refugee and exclusionary rhetoric. Hence, even though some of the opposing party's municipalities assist refugees, they choose to keep a low profile on the matter to avoid criticism from their supporters.

Unions' and professional bodies' positions regarding refugees are quite complicated and problematic. Depending on the political view and affiliation, some have a positive attitude and more visibility to advocate for the refugees; however, without any concrete action.

Bars are vital in the struggle for refugees and their rights to train solicitors for cases of PoM and those who are not under international protection, to watch the violations, and to warn the other about the possible consequences of amendments. Most importantly, since in recent years, detention centres have become inaccessible for observers, NGOs, and human rights defenders, bars and detainees' lawyers

have become almost the only actors that can have information about what happens inside the walls where violations happen frequently.

The Balkan route: the informal geography of 'The Game'

The denomination of 'Balkan Route' describes the movements of PoM who originally entered Europe through the Bulgarian-Turkish or Greek-Turkish land or sea borders and then proceeded through Bulgaria or Greece and FYR Macedonia towards Serbia and further to countries of the EU (Bobić & Janković, 2017).

Although unauthorised transit migration flows have a long-established history in this area, dating back to the 1980s, the route gained predominance during the so-called 'long summer of migration' in 2015 when an unprecedented number of refugees driven by war and violence from the Middle East entered Europe from Türkiye to Greece (Thorpe, 2019). This increase should be at least in part attributed to the breakout of civil wars in the Arab region after 2011 and the subsequent advancements of the Islamic State (IS) and denotes why these paths have been privileged over others at that particular point in time (Della Porta, 2018). Its analysis and monitoring are crucial for two main reasons: First, for a substantial number of people, Türkiye is one of the very first steps of the route to enter the EU. Second, the Balkan region constitutes a fundamental component within the EU's externalisation strategies as Europe extends eastward toward Türkiye as the perhaps most enduring Orientalized frontier (Mastnak, 2003).

The shift to this previously marginal path for irregular entry into the EU led to the collapse of the EU's external border in the Aegean and turned the long-standing problem of the deficient common asylum policy, which disproportionately affected the southern member States, into a full-fledged crisis (Weber, 2016). The emergence of this route has suddenly shifted the geographical gravity of refugee-related migrations, complementing the existing maritime routes in the Mediterranean with new overland itineraries (Bobić & Janković, 2017).

The 2016 EU-Türkiye Deal sanctioned the formal closure of the Balkan Route to the PoM (Stojić Mitrović *et al.*, 2020), stopping the flow across the Aegean Sea practically overnight (Weber, 2016). With this official 'closure', pathways into the EU became scarcer, creating a legal limbo where thousands of people suddenly remained abandoned in dire living conditions (Bobić & Sankovic, 2017). While it is not the aim of this section to address the deal specifically, it is crucial to remember how the package of policies associated with it has been influencing PoM's decision-making in Türkiye and on the Western Balkans route to Europe from 2015 onwards (Kuschminder *et al.*, 2019).

Figure 3: Map of the Western Balkans route.
Source: Kuschminder *et al.*, 2019.

How the functioning of the route has developed in the last decade remains an important element of investigation, especially if put about the presence of new walls on the borders of several Balkan countries and, at the same time, the continuity of the border crossings along what has become a structured route in the core of Europe (Bobić & Janković, 2017). Over the past years and despite the emergence of some clear patterns, migration flows through the Balkan Route kept on changing as a reflection of the variable articulations of the route, the different migration management strategies implemented by the single countries, and the area of origin of the individuals. It has been possible to witness a substantial rise in the number of people attempting 'the Game' that is how PoM of different nationalities describe their efforts to informally travel to Western Europe via the Route with irregular means and claiming asylum in several European states (Cvejić & Babović, 2014; Minca & Collins, 2021). In this context, the Balkan Peninsula has become increasingly weighty for informal movements since it has experienced the emergence and the consolidation of a key route used by thousands of individuals, travelling through Türkiye, Greece, FYR Macedonia, Serbia, and Croatia to reach their final destinations in Europe. According to the report made by the organisation *RiVolti ai Balcani*, in 2019, more than 15.000 people crossed this route, of whom 5,300 Afghans, 4,600 Syrians, and 1,500 Iraqis (*The Balkan route. Migrants without rights in the heart of Europe*, Godin &

Donà, 2021). Although these numbers are really low compared to those of 2015, they nevertheless highlight the weight of this route.

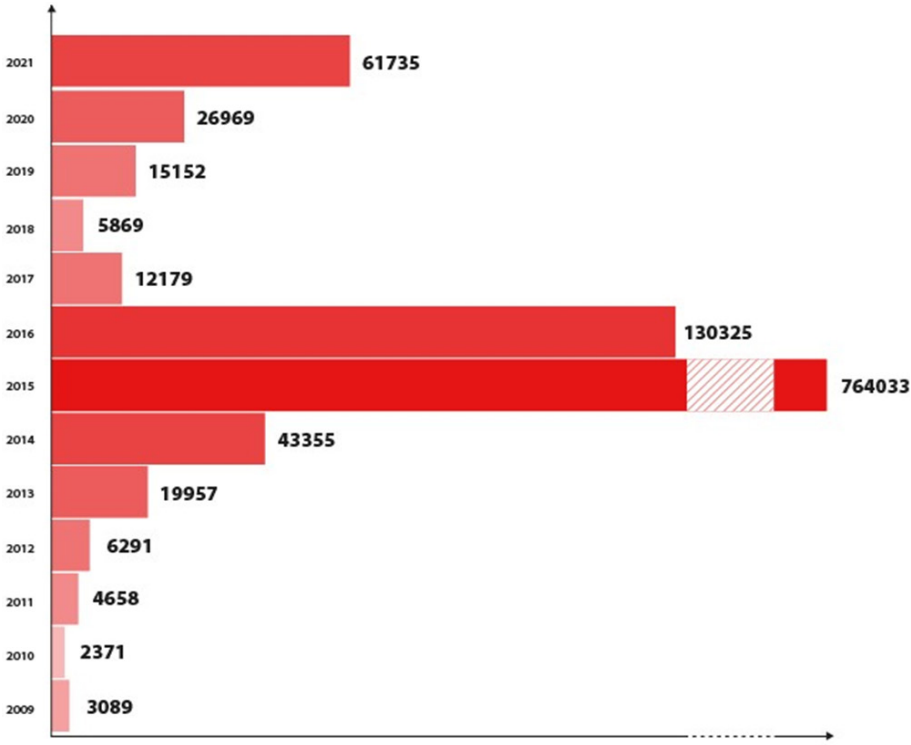

Figure 4: Illegal border crossings on the Western Balkans route in numbers.
Source: Frontex, 2023.

As reported by several PoM met during previous fieldwork at the Massi shelter in Oulx in the past months, their trajectory is not linear but fragmented: the routes are often followed in counter-intuitive and creative ways through anti-geographical or zigzag journeys that are influenced by the concrete obstacles in the field.

Solidarity in the Game

For Milan and Pirro (2018), the long summer of migration has seemingly provided the occasion for the mobilisation of an entire range of collective actors since the issue of immigration had overridden concerns such as the economic situation for the first time since the break-out of the Great Recession. Such involvement in support of migrant populations took different forms, involved rather different actors, and took place in various locations.

Figure 5: Picture taken at the Massi shelter in Oulx, February 2023.

There exists currently a vibrant and active network of organisations and individuals performing politics of solidarity and altruism along the route, interpreted as forms of contention ranging from civil disobedience to solidarity action (Della Porta, 2018), whose most crucial activity consists of offering solidarity to the PoM, monitoring, and reporting the violence and responsibilities of European authorities and States. All of these activities can be ultimately interpreted as reactions to the poor responsiveness of public authorities: indeed, solidarity acts

aimed to overcome the limited (financial and human) resources available to civil initiatives in support of migrant populations (Milan & Pirro, 2018). The main initiatives carried out by these actors can be summarised as follows:

First Aid on the spot to people who cannot access public healthcare systems, preventing diseases through the distribution of hygiene kits, scabies packs, and laundry service, and also covering the cost of the treatment for cases in need of specialized medical care, such as dentists, dermatologists, or ophthalmologists. Psychological support, cultural mediation, and translation services are offered as well.

Distribution of food packs and warm clothes, including shoes, blankets, or sleeping bags, to provide the people with means for their self-protection. Also, some associations distribute shopping vouchers so that people can exchange them for food or hygiene items in local stores, choosing what they need at each moment. One of the most active organisations in this field is *No Name Kitchen*[2], an independent association working alongside the Balkans and Mediterranean routes to promote humanitarian aid and political action for those who suffer the difficulties of extreme journeys and violent pushbacks implemented by European authorities. Founded in 2015, *No Name Kitchen* is a highly organised movement with a consolidated presence along the Western Balkan route that operates on principles of solidarity, respect, and dignity, offering food, clothing, medical assistance, and other essential services to those in need. The movement aims to address the gaps in official aid and advocate for the rights of displaced people while also fostering connections and empathy within communities. Operating largely through volunteer efforts, *No Name Kitchen* emphasises the importance of direct action and mutual aid in responding to the ongoing refugee crisis. Another important presence on the field is *Collettivo Rotte Balcaniche Alto Vicentino*[3], an Italian grassroots collective dedicated to supporting refugees and migrants, particularly those travelling along the Balkan route. Founded in Vicenza, Italy, the collective operates on principles of solidarity, social justice, and human rights. It provides practical assistance such as food, shelter, and medical aid to individuals on the move, often collaborating with other organisations and volunteers to maximise impact. Additionally, the collective engages in advocacy efforts to raise awareness about the challenges faced by refugees and migrants while also working to address systemic issues contributing to their displacement.

[2] No Name Kitchen. Link.

[3] Collettivo Rotte Balcaniche Alto Vicentino. Link.

Advocacy activities and collection of the testimonies of people who suffer abuses at the borders to produce monthly and special reports on illegal pushbacks to raise awareness and advocate for a change in policymaking at the national and UE levels. Since 2016, ASGI[4] (*Associazione per gli Studi Giuridici sull'Immigrazione*) has been working on the Italian-Slovenian border, the Adriatic ports, and along the Balkan route through monitoring activities, strategic causes supporting the freedom of movement in the Schengen space, the creation of a group of Italian and foreign experts who actively collaborate to study legal strategies and actions to protect the rights of foreign citizens, advocacy activities, and activities to support individuals working in the field through technical support and training. Another grassroots NGO dedicated to helping refugees is the volunteer-run group *Are You Syrious?*[5] operating in Greece, Bosnia, Serbia, and Croatia, which advocates open borders and fair treatment for all the PoM and provides daily support to refugees and asylum seekers.

Against a backdrop of institutional closure and the difficulty of several opposition parties taking up a humanitarian position without facing setbacks in their support rates, pro-migrant activists in the route evidently face significant constraints in their mobilisations, as Amnesty International commented in the 2018 report *Pushed to the edge. Violence and abuse against refugees and migrants along the Balkans route*, both the *Are You Syrious?* and the *Centar za Mirovne Studije* (CMS) in Zagreb, have suffered serious consequences in terms of accusations and pressure for their work, being discredited in the media on several occasions by the Croatian Ministry of the Interior and seeing the preclusion of the social activities carried out inside and outside the camps for many years. Other organisations in Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina suffered similar fates in 2019. The NNK and Aid Brigade NGOs have been subject to repeated harassment and checks by police to the point of criminalising their work.

Conclusions

The overall aim of this chapter was to bring into dialogue the different dimensions that contribute to making Türkiye, its border with Iran, and the Balkans such crucial nodes in both the geographic organisation of migration routes towards Europe and in the externalisation of its border control measures (İkizoğlu Erensu & Kaşli, 2016; Sert & Danış, 2021).

[4] Associazione per gli Studi Giuridici sull'Immigrazione. Link.

[5] Are you Syrious? Link.

The chapter suggests that the externalisation project of European borders, implemented to «improve their capacity for migration management and refugee protection, prevent and combat illegal immigration» (European Council, 2004) and achieve «greater political, security, economic and cultural cooperation» (European Council, 2004), does not only move outwards from the European centre, and then straightforwardly get implemented by the passive 'others'; the case of Türkiye epitomises how these other actors are geopolitical subjects with their counter-discourses and strategies as well as their co-constitutive roles in shaping the very framework of the process (Karadağ, 2019).

A migrant-sending, migrant-receiving, refugee-hosting, and transit migration country all at the same time (Kuschminder *et al.*, 2019), the situation of Türkiye cannot be fully comprehended without a broader perspective that takes into account both its nature as a destination for millions of Iranians, Afghans, and Syrians who, voluntarily or not, stop here, and as a transit hub for those who, for the most part, decide to continue their journey to the EU via the Balkan route. Mapping the broader implications of EU-Türkiye cooperation on migration across diverse borders is of immense importance, especially as the 2016 statement is being renegotiated and a new chapter in EU-Türkiye relations is about to open (Augustova, 2021).

These pages have also attempted to provide an overview of civil initiatives and solidarity in Türkiye and the Balkan route, the latter being a constantly shifting battleground where EU and various government policies collide not only with increasingly fluid and changing flows but also with the growing number of both local and international solidarity and altruism initiatives.

In Türkiye, many solidarity groups had to convert to association status due to the financial and political difficulties of existing as civil initiatives outside of independent and formal organisations. Rising anti-immigrant sentiment and racism have stifled 'citizen humanitarianism'. It is not possible to understand the nature of civil society and solidarities without showing the processes, acts, and actors through which certain groups are illegalised. For this reason, this chapter shows how illegality is produced as a result of Türkiye's EU accession process and externalisation policy. This legal architecture and Türkiye's increasing pressure on civil society exclude illegalised groups from benefiting from civil society actions. When the low capacity of solidarity groups that are not organised as NGOs is added to this picture, then thousands of people are left without any support. At the same time, there is hardly any work on solidarity between settled refugees and PoM, and we know truly little about what is happening in this area. The Turkish leg of the SOULROUTES project will make an important contribution to filling the gap in solidarities literature.

4. Migration, borders and solidarity in Tunisia*

Paolo Cuttitta (University of Genoa)
Nadia Chaouch (University of Genoa)

Tunisia is a major country of departure of boats trying to reach Italy along the so-called Central Mediterranean Route[1]. In 2023, events such as President Saïed's speech and the following racist attacks on sub-Saharan migrants in February, the signature of a deal with the European Union in July, as well as the repeated waves of mass deportations thrust Tunisia into the international spotlight.

This chapter summarises the developments of migration-related dynamics and control policies in this country since Tunisia was co-opted into the European border regime in the 1990s and sheds light on initiatives from civil society actors in solidarity with people on the move.

Section 2 provides an overview of Tunisia as a country of emigration, immigration and transit alike. It describes how human mobility from and through Tunisia was gradually subjected to restrictions in the last decades, both before and

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[1] From their Euro-centric perspective, governmental institutions, including the European border agency Frontex, conflate all the routes arriving in countries of the European Central Mediterranean, namely Italy and Malta, under the label of 'Central Mediterranean route'. However, embarkation countries include Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Lebanon and Turkey. Thus, the 'Central Mediterranean route' covers not just the central but almost the entire southern Mediterranean. While accepting this definition for this report, we would also like to stress the limits that come with it.

after the 2011 revolution. The section provides figures about foreign residents in Tunisia, Tunisians residing abroad, and people (both Tunisian and third-country nationals) attempting sea-crossing to Italy.

Section 3 describes the development of civil society in Tunisia and relevant initiatives in solidarity with people on the move, from the Ben Ali era, with very few existing NGOs and only minimal room for manoeuvre, to post-revolutionary Tunisia, with the arrival of international NGOs and the mushrooming of local civil society organisations.

Section 4 embeds migration in the economic and political crisis that has affected Tunisia in the last few years and has also fuelled anti-migrant sentiments among the population. It argues that the country's instability led to the authoritarian turn imposed by President Saïed, which culminated in the latter's xenophobic speech of 21 February 2023 and the following instances of generalised violence on sub-Saharan migrants, with solidarity initiatives from the Tunisian civil society trying to stem the racist drift.

Section 5 describes the Tunisian asylum system and the role of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and addresses the issue of Tunisia as a (non-)safe country for Tunisians and foreign migrants alike.

The Tunisian migration and border regime: an overview

Emigration, immigration and transit

Tunisia has long been a country of emigration. According to recent estimates, around 1.5 million (primarily male) Tunisian citizens (12.5% of the total population) live abroad (Boubakri, 2021), with France (52.5%), Italy (14.1%) and Germany (8.2%) hosting three-quarter of all Tunisian migrants aged 15 or more, according to a report of the National Institute of Statistics and the National Observatory of Migration (INS and ONM 2021, p. 15). Emigration is part of the lived experience of hundreds of thousands of Tunisians (211,000 aged 15 or more, according to INS and ONM, 2021, p. 34) who have returned to their home country after a period abroad. Finally, emigration is also part of the imagination of many (especially young) Tunisians who consider leaving their country a desirable option (one out of five aged 15 or more, according to INS and ONM, 2021, p. 4).

In the 1990s, because of European countries' new restrictive visa regime, many Tunisians wishing to work in Europe could no longer cross the Mediterranean regularly. As a result, informal sea-crossings to Italy began, with southern Sicily and its minor islands Lampedusa and Pantelleria serving as the landing points (Boubakri, 2006).

Gradually, Tunisia also became a springboard to Europe for people from other North African and sub-Saharan countries, who mainly entered the country's territory by air or by land, by crossing the Libyan or, to a lesser extent, the Algerian border (Boubakri, 2004, pp. 14-16). Thus, Tunisia also turned into a transit country. At the same time, increasing numbers of foreign workers (Boubakri, 2004) as well as students (Boubakri & Mazzella, 2005) from both the Maghreb (Boubakri & Mandhouj, 2009; Ould Ahmedou, 2009) and sub-Saharan countries (Mazzella, 2009) settled in Tunisia, which eventually became a country of immigration, too.

As of January 2020, the population of foreign residents in Tunisia was estimated at 58,990, with men and women equally represented, accounting for 0.5% of the total population of 11,708,370 (INS and ONM 2021, p. 57). Their regions of origin were the Arab Maghreb (37.0%), other African countries (36.4%), Europe (18.5%), the Middle East (6.5%) or other regions (1.6%) (INS and ONM 2021, p. 597). According to a survey presented in the same report, 60% of them wished to remain in Tunisia (INS and ONM, 2021, p. 71), while around two-thirds of those wishing to leave aimed to return to their home countries (INS and ONM, 2021, p. 72). The results regarding the intentions to leave or remain would likely be very different if such a survey were carried out today after the series of xenophobic attacks that started in February 2023 (see later in this section, as well as section 4, for details). More recently, in July 2023, Tunisian Interior Minister Kamal Feki declared that «the number of immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa in Tunisia is 80,000, including 17,000 in Sfax» (Tunisie Numérique, 2023), while non-governmental sources estimate much lower numbers, between 20,000 and 50,000 (Gnet News, 2023).

The Tunisian border regime

Tunisia was among the first countries in the EU neighbourhood to be targeted by the nascent externalisation policies of the EU and its member states, which aimed at metaphorically shifting their borders outside EU territory after the entry into force of the Schengen agreements. Italy and Tunisia signed a first agreement on readmission and police cooperation in August 1998 and a second one in December 2003. Each country thus accepted to readmit into its territory its citizens residing irregularly in the other country. Tunisia was rewarded with increased development aid and reserved shares in legal immigration quotas to Italy (Cuttitta, 2006; Cuttitta, 2008). In March 2003, Tunisia also ratified the Protocol against the smuggling of migrants, which is part of the 2000 United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. In early 2004, «in response to Italian and

EU pressure and concern over the increase in illegal migration from the Tunisian coast» (Boubakri, 2004, p. 23), Tunisia introduced three new laws. Two aimed at tightening controls on boats[2]. The third introduced high penalties for smugglers as well as for a broad category of facilitators[3]. This law went as far as to introduce the obligation for anyone to denounce any activity related to smuggling that they would know of, thus potentially criminalising any form of solidarity.

Tunisia stepped up border controls along its coastline, and from 2004 on, the points of departure of sea-crossings to Italy shifted to Libya. From 2005 to the end of 2010, the number of departures from Tunisia was negligible. Not only sub-Saharan and other third-country nationals but also Tunisians themselves used to travel to Libya and embark from there.

In 2011, the year of the so-called Arab Spring, the fall of Ben Ali resulted in a power vacuum which *de facto* lifted border controls. Within a few months, over 25,000 Tunisians took the chance to set off from their country's shores and reach Italy by sea. At the same time, nearly one million people fleeing Libya, including around 100,000 Libyan families (Boubakri, 2015, p. 27) and hundreds of thousands of third-country (mostly sub-Saharan) nationals, crossed the Ras Jadir border and sought shelter in Tunisia. Libyans could more easily integrate into the social fabric of the country: first, because of their economic conditions[4]; second, based on a 1973 bilateral agreement, they have the right to enter Tunisia and reside and work there; third, because of the cultural affinity between the populations. This is also why Libyans (with only a few exceptions) did not apply for refugee status. The other people escaping Libya were dependent on the reception mechanisms established by the international community instead (see section 3).

The new government, however, soon resumed police cooperation with Italy. A new bilateral agreement was signed on 5 April 2011. Tunisia agreed to readmit Tunisian citizens arriving in Italy after that date. Border controls along the coastline were also resumed, and departures from Tunisia almost zeroed in the next

[2] Loi n° 2004-3 du 20 janvier 2004, modifiant et complétant le code de commerce maritime, *Journal Officiel de la République Tunisienne*, 6, 20 January 2004; Loi n° 2004-4 du 20 janvier 2004, modifiant et complétant le code de la police administrative de la navigation maritime, *Journal Officiel de la République Tunisienne*, 6, 20 January 2004.

[3] Loi organique n° 2004-6 du 3 février 2004, modifiant et complétant la loi n° 75-40 du 14 mai 1975, relative aux passeports et aux documents de voyage, *Journal Officiel de la République Tunisienne*, 11, 6 February 2004.

[4] Before the 2011 war, Libya's gross domestic product per capita was nearly three times as high as Tunisia's (source: Data World Bank.org. Link).

few years. All in all, the country's process of democratisation did not result in significant reforms in the field of migration and migrants' rights, and «the core of Tunisia's immigration regime inherited from the authoritarian era […] remained untouched» (Natter, 2022, p. 1558).

Several further agreements were concluded to limit the freedom of movement and strengthen border controls. These include but are not limited to the EU-Tunisia Mobility Partnership in 2014 (European Commission, 2014), a cooperation agreement with the ICMPD (International Centre for Migration Policy Development) in 2015, which was followed by the opening of an ICMPD's office in Tunis and the launch of projects for «integrated border management» in Tunisia (Naceur, 2022), and two informal agreements with Italy in 2017 (Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 2017 and 2020; ASGI, 2020)[5]. In 2016, Tunisia also adopted a law against the trafficking of human beings, whose implementation seems to be mainly focused on containing migration and facilitating repatriations (Cassarini, 2022).

Departures from Tunisia to Italy, however, gradually increased again in the years following the terrorist attacks of 2015 (see section 4) and skyrocketed in the period between 2020 and 2023. Pressure on the Tunisian government from Italy and other EU countries grew accordingly and resulted in the signature of a memorandum of understanding between Tunisia and the EU on 16 July 2023. Based on this agreement, EU funding «for the provision of equipment, training and technical support» for border management will increase. The parties also stress the aim to «improve the coordination of search and rescue operations at sea», whereby «rescue operations» also include interceptions and forced returns to Tunisia. However, the agreement does not mention the readmission of third-country nationals to Tunisia. Moreover, it stresses that Tunisia does not see itself as «a country of settlement for irregular migrants» and that it will control «its own borders only» (European Commission, 2023). This echoes President Saïed's statement that «Tunisia would not accept becoming a border guard for other countries» (Reuters, 2023).

Sea-crossings: recent trends

According to data from the Italian Ministry of Interior[6], and as shown in Table 1, regularised arrivals of Tunisians to Italy by sea skyrocketed from 5,181 (out of a total of 23,370 people arriving on Italian shores) in 2018 and 2,654 (out

[5] For agreements with other countries in the migration field, see Raach *et al.* (2022).

[6] Dipartimento per le libertà civili e l'immigrazione. Link.

of 11,471) in 2019 to 12,883 (out of 34,154) in 2020, 15,671 (out of 67,477) in 2021 and a record 18,148 (out of 105,131) in 2022. Only in 2023 was there a slight decrease in absolute numbers (17,322) despite the substantial increase in arrivals on Italian shores from Tunisia (see Table 2), which made the share of Tunisian citizens in the total number of arrivals drop from the 2020 record of 37.72% to 10.99%.

Year	Number of Tunisian citizens arrived on Italian shores	Share of Tunisian citizens on the total number of arrivals	Total number of arrivals on Italian shores
2017	6,092	5.11%	119,310
2018	5,181	22.17%	23,370
2019	2,654	23.14%	11,471
2020	12,883	37.72%	34,154
2021	15,671	23.22%	67,477
2022	18,148	17.26%	105,131
2023	17,322	10.99%	157,652

Table 1: Italy: Sea arrivals (2017-2023).
Source: own elaboration of data from the Italian Ministry of Interior.

If we include the number of people intercepted at sea and returned to Tunisia by the Tunisian authorities, we find that, «[b]etween January 2020 and mid-December 2021, Tunisian and Italian authorities intercepted slightly more than 53,000 Tunisians, out of 69,000 total migrants apprehended coming from Tunisia» (Herbert, 2022, p. 8). These numbers testify to the lack of future perspectives that come with the economic and political crisis for (especially young) Tunisians.

While Tunisians were the overwhelming majority, there was also a significant increase in the number of foreign migrants embarking from Tunisia to Italy, which doubled from 2019 to 2020 and again from 2020 to 2021 (Herbert, 2022, p. 10). Sub-Saharans may also arrive from Libya, but most cross the Algerian border (Bonini *et al.*, 2023). Once in Tunisia, they reach the town of Kasserine and, from there, the port of Sfax (Martinelli, 2023). Sub-Saharans then normally resort to more or less organised smuggling services for sea crossings. Tunisians mainly organise their travel autonomously instead, with small groups of people collecting money and buying small boats that they then drive by themselves (Herbert, 2022).

Year	from Tunisia	from Libya	from other countries	Share of arrivals from Tunisia on total number of arrivals	Total
2017	5,200	108,409	5,701	4.36%	119,310
2018	5,799	12,977	4,594	24.81%	23,370
2019	3,633	4,122	3,716	31.67%	11,471
2020	14,685	13,012	6,457	43.00%	34,154
2021	20,218	31,556	15,703	29.96%	67,477
2022	32,371	53,310	19,450	30.79%	105,131
2023	97,306	52,034	8,312	61.72%	157,652

Table 2: Italy: Sea arrivals by country of embarkation (2017-2023).
Source: own elaboration of UNHCR data.

All in all, the increase in crossings from Tunisia (see Table 2) was so high that in 2020, for the first time since 2004, arrivals in Italy from Tunisia (14,685) outnumbered those from Libya (13,012) (UNHCR, 2021). Tunisia surpassed Libya again in the last quarter of 2022 (UNHCR, 2023b) and was still the main country of embarkation for people successfully attempting the Central Mediterranean crossing as of 30 April 2023: of the 42,201 people disembarked in Italy since the beginning of the year, 16,635 had embarked in Libya, 24,379 in Tunisia (UNHCR, 2023c). In the same period, a further 19,719 people were intercepted by the Tunisian authorities while trying to reach Italy (FTDES, 2023a). After four months, the number of people arriving in Italy from Tunisia had more than tripled (73,827 as of 27 August), with the highest peaks being recorded from mid-June onwards. Interestingly enough, the signature of the EU-Tunisia deal on 16 July did not result in a decrease but rather in an increase in arrivals. These grew from 17,596 in the six weeks before the signature to 29,676 (+ 168.65%) in the following six weeks (see Table 3).

Total number of arrivals from Tunisia on Italian shores as of		Weekly arrivals from Tunisia on Italian shores	
4 June	26,555		
11 June	26,799	5 – 11 June	244
18 June	27,644	12 – 18 June	845
25 June	30,549	19 – 25 June	2,905
2 July	33,860	26 June – 2 July	3,311
9 July	37,720	3 – 9 July	3,860
16 July	44,151	10 – 16 July	6,431
16 July	**44,151**	**Total 4 June – 16 July**	**17,596**
23 July	51,510	17 – 23 July	7,359
30 July	53,214	24 – 30 July	1,704
6 August	56,042	31 July – 6 August	2,828
13 August	61,743	7 – 13 August	5,701
20 August	68,058	14 – 20 August	6,315
27 August	73,827	21 – 27 August	5,769
27 August	**73,827**	**Total 17 July – 27 August**	**29,676**

Table 3: Italy: Sea arrivals from Tunisia (June-August 2023).
Source: own elaboration of UNHCR data.

According to UNHCR data, the last four months showed figures (22,448 from 1 September to 31 December) similar to those of the first third of the year. However, 72.55% (16,287) of the arrivals were recorded in September, while October (1,945), November (2,771) and December (1,445) were among the five months with the lowest numbers of arrivals in 2023, the others being January (2,536) and May (1,494). Moreover, each of the last three months showed a clear decrease compared to the previous year. At the same time, while a monthly average of 4,400 people had been reportedly intercepted and returned to Tunisia by the Tunisian Coast Guard in the first ten months (Agenzia Nova, 2023), the number skyrocketed to more than 25,000 in November (Arab News, 2023) and 10,000 in December (Ben Bouazza, 2024). Arguably, these could be delayed results of the EU-Tunisia deal, but only long-term trends will be able to confirm the (in-) effectiveness of the agreement.

What was new in 2023, besides the surge in the number of crossings, is that there were much fewer Tunisian than non-Tunisian citizens among the people arriving in Italy from Tunisia, with nationals from the Ivory Coast and Guinea making up 54% of the total number of arrivals from Tunisia in the first quarter of the year (UNHCR, 2023b). Moreover, many were women[7] and children (Bonini *et al.*, 2023).

According to the testimonies collected by the UNHCR upon disembarkation in Italy, while there was also a growing number of sub-Saharans only transiting via Tunisia en route to Europe, most nationals from the Ivory Coast, Guinea and Cameroon

> had been residing in Tunisia for long periods (at times, for several years) […]. As reasons for leaving Tunisia, many referred to the increasingly difficult economic conditions in the country […]. The insecurity fuelled by the February declarations against sub-Saharan migrants made by the Tunisian President contributed to additional movements out of Tunisia" (UNHCR, 2023b).

Indeed, as explained in section 4, Tunisia's recent authoritarian drift has also encouraged discriminatory and racist acts against the foreign population and black people, only a few years after Tunisia adopted a law on the elimination of all forms of discrimination[8].

Finally, it must be remembered that sea-crossings cannot be safe in the context of prohibitionism. Growing numbers of departures from Tunisia result in growing numbers of casualties: a record 1,313 dead bodies were recovered off Tunisian coasts in 2023[9] (Infomigrants, 2024).

Readmissions

With regard to readmissions, the above-mentioned agreements with Italy were not the only ones: Tunisia concluded readmission agreements with further EU countries (Austria, Belgium, France and Greece) as well as with Switzerland (Cassarino, s.d.). Readmissions to Tunisia, however, also take place from other EU

[7] «In early 2023, [h]igh relative and absolute numbers of women were recorded among Ivorians (32%) and Cameroonians (24%), contributing to make this the sea route with the highest share of women among sea arrivals to Italy» (UNHCR, 2023b).

[8] Loi organique n°50 du 23 octobre 2018 relative à l'élimination de toutes formes de discrimination raciale, *Journal Officiel de la République Tunisienne*, 86, 26 October 2018.

[9] 901 from 1 January to 20 July 2023 (Amara, 2023).

countries on an informal basis. The average return rate from EU countries to Tunisia remains low: 22% in 2019 (European Commission, 2021, p. 85) and 14% in 2021 (European Commission, 2022, p. 163). The degree of cooperation from the Tunisian authorities varies a lot from member state to member state, regardless of the existence of a readmission agreement (European Commission, 2021, p. 86; European Commission, 2022, pp. 165-166).

Importantly, repatriations through readmission procedures are not voluntary. They are rather deportations or forced returns. As demonstrated by Cassarino (2015), the reintegration of returnees is much more problematic if the decision to return is not voluntary and the migration project is abruptly interrupted. Moreover, Tunisians awaiting deportation in Italian detention centres are, first, often subjected to inhuman and degrading treatment, also including arbitrary medical treatment with psychiatric drugs (Rondi & Figoni, 2023). Second, they are not even informed about the possibility of availing themselves of those schemes co-funded by the EU and the Italian government and implemented by the IOM, which provide financial and logistical support to those who accept to return «voluntarily» (EuroMed Rights, 2021, p. 13). As a result, they are particularly vulnerable already before being returned. After their deportation, people do not receive any assistance from the Tunisian authorities either. The lack of support for forced returnees «likely reinforces their physical, psychological, economic and social vulnerability» (EuroMed Rights, 2021, p. 4). As a result, their future will likely materialise in either «a new crossing attempt or marginalisation» (EuroMed Rights, 2021, p. 13).

Civil Society and Solidarity Initiatives

The Ben Ali era

Under Ben Ali, migration was a sensitive issue, one that should not be addressed publicly, while censorship and repression made the free development of independent civil society organisations impossible. The few existing ones were either under the direct control of the regime or systematically harassed and persecuted (Deane, 2013; Weilandt, 2019). As a consequence, civil society engagement in the migration field hardly existed, and migration was nearly absent from the public discourse. This was clearly the case with regard to foreign migrants living in or transiting through Tunisia. For example, the location and existence of detention centres were kept secret (Cuttitta, 2004; Cuttitta, 2006). But this was the case with regard to irregularised Tunisian migrants abroad as well since the very existence of unauthorised migration of Tunisian citizens was perceived as an accu-

sation against the Ben Ali regime: according to a representative of the *Association familles des victimes des migrations irrégulières*, «before the revolution, one could not say anything about poverty and the need to migrate[10]». As the spokesperson of the *Association La Terre pour Tous* put it: «Until 2011, if you talked about the migrants who went missing at sea during the crossing, they would put you in prison[11]». As a consequence, support to foreign (transit) migrants did not go beyond basic humanitarian assistance provided either by the government-friendly Red Crescent[12] (that was and still is responsible for the identification of asylum seekers) or, more or less covertly, by Caritas, while advocacy by independent organisations such as the LTDH (*Ligue Tunisienne des Droits de l'Homme*), the main Tunisian human rights organisation, was very limited. The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) was allowed to open its Tunis office in 2001 after pressures from the Italians on the Tunisian government, and its existence was long entirely dependent on Italian governmental projects, which aimed at preventing Tunisian emigration and initially did not engage in activities supporting foreign migrants. The UNHCR, instead, only had a liaison office in Tunisia until 2011. Despite Tunisia being a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, it had not adopted an asylum law, and the UNHCR's prerogatives and degree of independence were very limited. The UNHCR office was only staffed with one honorary representative, chosen by the UN agency from a list of names provided by the Tunisian government. The UNHCR honorary representative was not granted access to detention centres and could thus not verify whether there were potential asylum seekers among the detainees. He could only receive asylum seekers who had been selected by the Red Crescent in the latter's reception centres. The relevant applications were then examined by the honorary representative and a UNHCR officer based in Geneva. Decisions to grant refugee status (only 7 in 2002 and again in 2003), however, could be revoked at any time by the Tunisian government (Cuttitta, 2005).

The post-revolution era

In 2011, several factors related to the Tunisian Revolution and the Libya war led to a historical turn. First, as described above, tens of thousands of Tunisians at-

[10] Interview with Paolo Cuttitta, Tunis, 25 January 2016.

[11] Interview with Paolo Cuttitta, Tunis, 19 January 2016.

[12] The National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies have, by definition, an auxiliary role to state authorities.

tempted the sea-crossing to Italy, while a much higher number of refugees arrived from neighbouring Libya. Second, fundamental rights such as the freedom of speech and association were finally recognised. The combination of these factors was crucial for future developments in the migration field. Many international NGOs set foot in Tunisia for the first time to manage the 2011 'migration crisis'. The main stage for the relevant activities was the Choucha camp, which was established in the middle of the desert, just a few kilometres away from the Libyan border and the coastline, at the end of February. It hosted people from up to 60 nationalities, of whom two-thirds were Somali (27%), Eritrean (24%) or Sudanese (16%) (Dourgnon & Kassar, 2014), all fleeing the Libya war. The UNHCR's 'liaison office' was turned into a 'country office', and the coordination of the Choucha camp was immediately taken up. Within two years, many of the guests were either relocated to safe countries or repatriated. However, many others were still there. Because the UNHCR was urged to dismantle the camp, it offered 1,500 Tunisian Dinars to anyone who would leave Choucha. While this monetary incentive was officially meant to facilitate integration in urban contexts, it was also the amount of money that was necessary to cross the Libyan border and embark on a sea journey to Italy, which is what most beneficiaries did. When the camp was officially closed, only a few thousand of the former guests remained in Tunisia. Institutional assistance was extremely limited, including for refugees.

At the same time, an impressive number of NGOs were established by the local population. Just two years after the ousting of Ben Ali, Tunisia counted «14,966 associations, that is, one association for every 724 inhabitants» (Eyster & Paoletti, 2015, p. 144). Several of them engaged in migration-related activities. Besides formal assistance offered within humanitarian schemes, spontaneous initiatives of individual volunteers provided a significant contribution (Boubakri, 2015; Boubakri & Potot, 2012; Eyster *et al.*, 2012), especially with regard to the help provided to Libyan refugees (Hoffman, 2012), who were often hosted by Tunisian families. Spontaneous, informal solidarity became thus an important driver in what has been called Tunisia's revolutionised space of migration (Garelli & Tazzioli, 2017).

Last but not least, in the years following the Revolution, foreign migrants in Tunisia were able to establish a number of community-based organisations, mainly aimed at fostering mutual solidarity within the group.

Another significant consequence of the so-called Arab Spring was that Tunisian media could report on migration and asylum issues. Finally, while these topics never became prominent in their agenda, they were no longer ignored by policymakers either. In sum, the 2011 Tunisian revolution and the Libya war made immigration more visible in Tunisia (Cassarini, 2020), and Tunisians «lost

their fear to politicise and mobilise around the issue of migration and border control» (Bartels, 2015, p. 63). From 2013 onwards, thousands of Syrian refugees were arriving (Boubakri, 2015), which contributed to these developments.

In sum, as the president of the Médenine regional committee of the Red Crescent put it, «the revolution has been one for the migrants as well: now, we can talk about them, we can carry out humanitarian work for them[13]».

In such context, what was and what is the impact of Tunisia-based civil society initiatives on the Euro-North African border regime? Academic research has found that Tunisian organisations, all potentially critical of restrictive border policies, were *de facto* excluded from consultations and negotiations, leading to policy-making processes defining EU policies towards Tunisia in the migration field (Roman, 2019). The EU sees Tunisian NGOs as potential partners in implementing its externalisation policies. Consequently, EU programmes aimed at supporting civil society as part of the democratisation process – whereby democracy serves as a disciplinary tool to contain mobility (Tazzioli, 2015) – selectively privilege those organisations that can best serve externalisation (Dini & Giusa, 2020). In the end, NGOs' opposition to European border externalisation in Tunisia can only be indirect and/or limited (Cuttitta, 2020).

Hereafter we mention four examples of Tunisian non-governmental solidarity initiatives of the post-revolution period: the initiative *Boats 4 People* and the associations *La terre pour tous* and *Le Pêcheur*, that all have Mediterranean sea-crossings as their main concern, as well as the NGO FTDES. Then, we briefly touch on the role of community-based organisations.

The FTDES (*Forum tunisien pour les droits économiques et sociaux*) is the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights. It was founded in 2011 and has several local branches throughout the country. Since its establishment, the FTDES has always been vocal in denouncing unlawful migration policies, such as arbitrary detention and deportation[14] (FTDES, 2021; GDP and FTDES, 2020). Its contribution has been crucial to linking the issue of migration with that of democracy building in post-revolutionary Tunisia (Geisser, 2019, pp. 6-7). In doing this, the FTES has paid attention to the *harragas* (this is what the – mostly young – Tunisians who 'burn' the border to Europe are called) as well as to foreign migrants and refugees in Tunisia.

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[13] Interview with Paolo Cuttitta, Tunis, 2 February 2016.

[14] «Tunisian law does not contain specific provisions providing for administrative immigration or pre-removal detention» (GDP and FTDES, 2020, 4).

In 2011, the long-established LTDH and the newly founded FTDES, together with other African and European non-governmental partners, set up a coalition called *Boats 4 People*, aimed at defending the rights of migrants at sea and at making the Mediterranean «a space of solidarity» (Boats 4 People, 2017). This initiative tried to support the families of dead or missing migrants in their attempts to shed light on the fate of their loved ones. Moreover, it organised public actions to campaign for freedom of movement and against the violence of border control policies. Such actions were supposed to include missions at sea to document, denounce and prevent human rights violations (Boats 4 People, 2012) – forerunning what search and rescue NGOs started doing only a few years later – but did not go beyond one sea-crossing from Italy to Tunisia in 2012.

In the summer of 2011, the campaign *From One Shore to Another: Lives which Matter* was launched by the families of about 250 young people who had left Tunisia on five different boats between March and May that year (Oliveri, 2016, p. 161). Relatives of other people who went missing in following incidents joined the campaign in 2012. These shipwrecks had all remained undocumented except one for which no official truth had been established.

> Lacking definitive and reliable proof concerning what really happened during and after the sea journey, many families recognised or believed that they had recognised their sons in some of the videos shown by Italian and French newscasts and in some Italian newspapers […]. A few relatives received SMS or calls from the migrants during the journey, announcing that they had been rescued or that Italian shores were closed. This is why many families strongly believed that their sons were still alive (Oliveri, 2016, pp. 161-162).

Since then, first as an informal group, then as an association called *La terre pour tous* ('the earth for everyone'), they have organised demonstrations in Tunis and journeys to Italy to claim truth and justice for their loved ones from both the Tunisian and the Italian government. In solidarity with the freedom of movement, they hold these governments accountable for border deaths and disappearances (Cuttitta, 2020; Tazzioli, 2018).

Le Pêcheur is the fishermen's association of Zarzis, an important port city in Tunisia's south. Their members have always provided support in the form of food, water or fuel to people at sea whose boats were still able to continue their journey (Cuttitta, 2020). In 2018, the president, Chamseddine Bourrassine, and five further members of the association were arrested by the Italian authorities because, after coming across a migrant boat in distress, they had towed it towards Italian

waters (Chemlali, 2023). Protests were organised by the Tunisian civil society, calling for their release. The families of the missing migrants were also part of this mobilisation. According to anthropologist Valentina Zagaria, a demonstration in front of the Italian Embassy «really helped to put pressure on Italian and Tunisian authorities» (Mzalouat, 2022). After three weeks, the fishermen were released[15].

Among the local initiatives that were made possible by the democratisation process, an important role is also played by community-based organisations established by foreign migrants, such as the *Association des Ivoiriens Actifs de Tunisie* (ASSIVAT) and the *Association des Ivoiriens actifs de Sfax* (AIVAS), to mention but two within the largest nationality group (Cassarini, 2020). Community-based organisations have the double aim of providing mutual support among the members and alerting the Tunisian public opinion about the conditions of (mostly African) migrants in the country. Besides nationality, other kinds of belonging can provide the basis for migrant associations.

> Among the most active sub-Saharan organisations is the Association of African Students and Trainees in Tunisia (AESAT), whose objective is to create a network of solidarity to help sub-Saharan students (most of whom work at the same time in the informal sector to finance their studies) and to challenge the Tunisian authorities on the daily discrimination and racism they suffer from (Geisser, 2019, p. 10).

Community-based organisations, insofar as they are not co-opted by international organisations and governmental donors into the mechanisms of humanitarian migration management (Cassarini, 2020), could be further explored as sites where horizontal (and often mutual) solidarity is performed and power unbalances or asymmetries are reduced or less visible, as opposed to usual types of support offered by international or local NGOs and even activist organisations, that rest on the traditional asymmetry between benefactors and beneficiaries. In the same vein, kinship solidarity among Tunisians, as suggested by sociologist Mahdi Mabrouk with reference to Tunisia's south (Ziadia, 2022), is a terrain of analysis that may help shed light on the role played by family and tribal relationships in the construction of individual migration trajectories.

[15] Besides those from Zarzis, fishermen from all over Tunisia often had to turn «to humanitarian actors to rescue people on makeshift boats or to provide a dignified burial for those lifeless bodies washed up by the sea» (Geisser, 2019, p. 9).

The Authoritarian Backlash

The period since the revolution has not been only one of mobilisation for the freedom of movement and of solidarity with people on the move. The fact that migration became part of daily life also sparked negative reactions. Several factors contributed to turning the phenomenon of foreign migration to Tunisia from the exception to the norm. First, there were new arrivals of foreign citizens: Syrians started arriving after the outbreak of the civil war in their country, while each year, hundreds of (mostly sub-Saharan) people who had embarked for Italy from neighbouring Libya went adrift in Tunisian waters which resulted in them being intercepted and brought ashore by the Tunisian Coast Guard (MSF, 2017). They are called *les rescapés de la mer* ('the rescued from the sea'). Second, a small minority of the refugees who had entered the country in 2011 remained in Tunisian territory. The stabilisation of migration as a structural phenomenon and the growing visibility of migrants did not only inspire solidarity initiatives. They also generated feelings of insecurity and sparked racist and other anti-migrant sentiments among the Tunisian population.

At the same time, economic and political developments caused a gradual backlash against democracy (Günay & Sommavilla, 2020). In 2015, three terrorist attacks in Sousse and Tunis not only prompted the government to adopt exceptional security measures impacting the population's fundamental rights, including prolonged periods of curfew until early 2016, but also had devastating and long-lasting effects on the tourism industry. Consequences on the rights of migrants and the approach of authorities to the migration issue were visible immediately after the 2015 terrorist attacks. As Boubakri (2015, p. 35) points out,

> the mobility of both Tunisians and foreigners no longer arises only in terms of border controls and management of flows but also in terms of the risks that these movements represent at the security level, which paves the way for the return of a security, even militarist, approach to migration flows.

To make but one example, the Tunisian-Libyan border crossing point of Ras Jadir was repeatedly closed as part of the measures adopted against terrorism, but this impacted the mobility of all. Other internal measures, such as the innumerable checkpoints spread all over the territory to intercept potential terrorists, also had an indirect impact on the free movement of undocumented foreign migrants, as it increased the risk of them being identified as 'illegal' and consequently arrested and deported. Similarly, access to migrant support initiatives could be limited by

circumstances unrelated to migration control. The number of migrants visiting the Caritas office on the premises of the Tunis Cathedral dropped dramatically after plain-clothes policemen were deployed to guard the entrances of the church, identifying and searching all the visitors, as the Christian temple had been classified as a potential target of terrorist attacks[16].

In the following years, the economic crisis was further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the Ukraine war, resulting in high inflation and unemployment rates and increasing numbers of families living under the threshold of poverty. Economic and social instability, in turn, paved the ground for a bloodless coup led by President Saïed. Between 2021 and 2022, Saïed declared a state of exception, suspended the parliament and changed the constitution, granting himself almost unlimited powers (Rouland *et al.*, 2023).

Human rights are now heavily restricted, and civil society faces limitations resembling those of the Ben Ali era, with opposition leaders arbitrarily arrested and prosecuted (Human Rights Watch, 2023b). Law 54 of 13 September 2022, on combating crimes related to information and communication systems, has posed a serious threat to the freedom of expression. In the world press freedom index compiled by Reporters without Borders, Tunisia fell from the 73rd position occupied in 2021 to the 94th in 2022 and the 121st in 2023. Journalists, activists, and opponents of the regime have been prosecuted under law 54 (Zaghdoudi, 2023), as well as under the 2015 counter-terrorism law and the Criminal Code. Some have been accused of conspiracy because they met with foreign diplomats who are regularly accredited to Tunisia, including diplomats from France, Italy, and the United States (Ziadia, 2023). This is little wonder as Saïed's action has also heavily impacted the independence of the judiciary: first, by dissolving the High Judicial Council, then by dismissing 57 magistrates (Human Rights Watch, 2023b).

On 21 February 2023, Saïed held a public speech in which he addressed sub-Saharan migrants as 'hordes' and accused them of aiming at transforming the demographic composition of Tunisia and turning the country from an Arab to an African one (Al Jazeera, 2023a). Saïed's speech came just a month after a visit to Tunis by the Italian ministers of interior and foreign affairs, Piantedosi and Tajani. Large-scale arbitrary arrests[17] and deportations followed in the next days and

[16] The head of the Tunis Caritas mission in an interview with Paolo Cuttitta, Tunis, 25 January 2016.

[17] In the first three months of 2023, 3,453 people were arrested for illegal stay (FTDES, 2023a).

weeks, along with racist attacks on black Africans operated by young Tunisians, while many migrants lost their jobs and housing as they were fired by their employers or evicted by their landlords (Amnesty International, 2023; Migration-control.info, 2023). Foreign African embassies organised repatriation flights to protect their citizens. Some – 1,057 until June 2023 (Tunisie Numérique, 2023) – accepted this option, while many others attempted the sea-crossing to Italy.

President Saïed also put forward the argument of the trafficking crime. Importantly, he did this not only to justify stricter measures against irregular migration but also to delegitimise human rights groups and solidarity actors. These are subtly equated to criminals in the President's narrative: «Those who are behind this phenomenon are traffickers of human beings who claim at the same time to defend human rights» (Présidence Tunisie, 2023b). This fuelled mistrust among the Tunisian population towards human rights organisations and other NGOs. The latter are also suspected of receiving money from abroad. Indeed, as pointed out by Geisser (2023, p. 12-13):

> international NGOs, local solidarity associations and critical Tunisian intellectuals are accused of being "criminals" and "traitors" to the state by the Tunisian President's supporters in whose eyes "the question of human rights appears secondary to the imperatives of national security and reason of state.

Saïed's speech triggered many actions in solidarity with sub-Saharan migrants. A large anti-racist demonstration was organised in downtown Tunis on 23 February. Petitions circulated on social networks. The High Commission for Audiovisual Communication also rushed a statement calling on the audio-visual media not to engage in broadcasting hate speech towards immigrants. On 8 March, at the Rio Theater in the capital, a group of artists organised a solidarity day titled *Tunisian Artists Against Racism*, including performances of arts as diverse as dancing, singing, poetry, plastic arts, and stand-up. During the entire month of Ramadan, activists in Kabariya, a popular area in the Tunisian capital, provided 2,000 Iftar tables to passers-by and African students under the slogan *No one will get hungry in Kabarya*. Several grassroots groups promoted initiatives aimed at spreading information about abuses, circulating appeals for urgent needs, collecting donations, coordinating aid, etc.[18] Finally, the Antifascist Front organised

[18] See for example the Facebook group *Citoyen-e-s contre le racisme: groupe d'aide et de soutien*.

a press conference on 13 April to alarm the public opinion on the situation of immigrants and refugees.

Faced with these reactions, the President published a statement denying any racist sentiments from the government, condemning any form of discrimination and announcing several measures in favour of immigrants on 5 March (Présidence Tunisie, 2023a). However, the abuses did not end. Instead, they culminated in clashes between sub-Saharan people and parts of the local population in Sfax in early July 2023, resulting in the collective deportation of hundreds of people to the Libyan and Algerian desert borders, which in turn caused several casualties in both border areas (Human Rights Watch, 2023a; Al Jazeera, 2023b; Al Jazeera, 2023c). A new wave of deportations to border areas began in September and continues until the beginning of 2024. More serious accusations related to human smuggling (Refugees International, 2023, pp. 21-24) and trafficking (Infomigrants, 2023) at the borders between Tunisia and Libya deserve verification.

The question remains as to whether and to what extent Tunisian activists and solidarity groups will be able to resist the current authoritarian drift effectively.

Safe country?

According to human rights organisations, Tunisia was neither a safe country of origin nor a safe third country already before the authoritarian turn (FTDES, 2019). As a coalition of Tunisian and international NGOs pointed out (FTDES, 2023b), this is even more so after the xenophobic drift outlined in the previous section. Still, Tunisia is on the list of safe countries of origin adopted by the Italian government. As a result, the determination of the refugee status of Tunisian asylum seekers in Italy is made through an accelerated procedure (Ben Amor & Costa, 2021).

As regards the protection of asylum seekers in Tunisia, the situation has not substantially improved since the revolution. Despite pressures from the EU[19], and a draft law that has long reached an advanced stage (Zayani, 2019); no asylum law has been adopted because the protection of asylum seekers has never been a priority for Tunisian policymakers. These have been more concerned with issues such as terrorism, unemployment, financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, they fear that establishing an effective asylum system would

[19] For the 2015-2018 period alone, the EU gave UNHCR Tunisia 900,000 euros to expand and formalise the country's protection space. The main aim was the adoption of an asylum law (Délégation de l'Union européenne en Tunisie, 2016).

end up attracting more unwanted migrants to Tunisia and make forced returns of third-country nationals from Europe to Tunisia possible. Tunisia would then run the risk of becoming the EU's African hotspot, which is also why European proposals such as the plan for 'disembarkation platforms' in North Africa have been rejected (Bisiaux, 2020). For these reasons, the UNHCR's activities are not actively supported by the government, and refugees and asylum seekers have only «limited access to essential services» (Jaballah, 2023), if at all (Biggi, 2023). The system has not significantly changed, with only people from a few nationalities being admitted to the asylum procedure managed by the UNHCR local branch and with the Red Crescent still in charge of the preliminary selection. The asylum seekers' access to the labour market is very limited, and rejected asylum seekers are not granted an effective right to judicial remedy (Cuttitta, 2020, pp. 4-5).

Tunisia is not safe for other categories of migrants either (FTDES and Migreurop, 2020; El-Ghali & Chemlali, 2022). People on the move still run the risk of being informally deported and abandoned at the desert borders to Libya or Algeria under Saïed (Alarm Phone, 2021; Human Rights Watch, 2023a), just as was the case under Ben Ali (Cuttitta, 2005; Cuttitta, 2006) and in the post-revolution period (Garelli & Tazzioli, 2017, pp. 32-34). Those who are intercepted at sea are often faced with the violent practices of Tunisian Coast Guard officers who reportedly beat people with sticks, attempt to sink boats and ask for money in exchange for rescue (Alarm Phone, 2022), or leave boats adrift after stealing the engine (Alarm Phone, 2023).

In March 2023, following the massive evictions and persecutions of black people, over 200 refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants started a sit-in outside the UNHCR offices, requesting humanitarian evacuation. After over three weeks of protest, as UNHCR proved unable to assist them, some «entered its premises, causing some material damage, and leading to tense interactions with local police forces» (UNHCR, 2023a). These intervened at the request of the UN agency (Afroplanete, 2023), violently evicted the protesters and arrested «up to 150 people» (FTDES, 2023c). More protesters were arrested over the next few days[20]. This speaks to the ambiguous nature of the UNHCR, which is traditionally split

[20] Something similar had happened the year before. Following the inaction of UNHCR and some dubious choices of the UN refugee agency, a group of around 214 people organised a sit-in in front of the UNHCR Zarzis branch in February 2022. Then, the group moved to Tunis and grew to around 300 people. The demonstration in front of the UNHCR Tunis headquarters started in March, and the last protesters were evicted by the police on 18 June (Biggi *et al.*, 2022).

between its mandate to protect refugees and asylum seekers and the loyalty to host governments, as well as donor states, whose policies often stand in stark contrast to the rights and the well-being of the UNHCR's beneficiaries (Cuttitta, 2020; Valluy, 2007). In Tunisia, UNHCR is also known for having provided state authorities with technological equipment for border management and migration control (UNHCR, 2015), thus exceeding its humanitarian mandate to embrace security-related activities.

Conclusions

From a European perspective, Tunisia is a country of both origin and transit of migration. At the same time, it has long become a country of immigration. Tunisia has recently surpassed Libya as the main country of embarkation for people (both Tunisian and foreign nationals) attempting the sea-crossing to Italy.

This report has reconstructed the gradual involvement of Tunisia in the European migration and border regime, by summarising the main international agreements concluded and national measures adopted from the 1990's to present day.

The report has also provided examples of civil society initiatives (both local and international) aimed at supporting the freedom of movement, in solidarity with migrants and asylum seekers in Tunisia.

While the 2011 revolution introduced the freedom of association, allowing for the establishment of civil society organisations and their engagement in migration-related activities, the economic and political crisis of the last years resulted in a heavy backlash against democracy, which also affected migrants and asylum seekers, as well as the organisations supporting them.

In early 2023, a xenophobic speech by President Saïed sparked anti-migrant sentiments among the population, resulting in instances of generalised violence against black people in the following months. Many sub-Saharans had no choice but to try to reach Italy by sea. While there was a reaction from civil society in support of the migrant population under attack, the current authoritarian drift may further restrict the room for manoeuvre of activists and solidarity groups in the country.

While Tunisia has never been a safe country for asylum seekers, recent developments show that the situation is deteriorating and that the country is not safe for Tunisian citizens either.

In this context, the number of sea crossings and border deaths keeps growing despite the much-advised agreement between Tunisia and the EU in July 2023.

The case of Tunisia demonstrates once again that European border external-

isation does not reach its aim of reducing irregularised migration. It only fuels racist sentiments, exclusionary policies and inhuman practices in the EU neighbourhood, supporting authoritarian regimes rather than solidarity, democracy and the rule of law.

5. Migrations, mobilities and borders in western and central Sahara: theoretical and methodological insights from solidarity studies (Morocco, Mauritania, Algeria)

Camille Cassarini (IRMC)
Michela Lovato (University of Genoa)

The north-western part of the African continent is a central space in the Euro-African migration dynamics (Bensaâd, 2009b). From a geographical point of view, it can be considered a pivotal space, as a true contact point and a node between different political and cultural areas. In this perspective, Morocco can be seen as the real centre of contact between these different areas and societies (Alioua, 2005). However, to fully understand the logic of these connectivities[1] (McDougall & Scheele, 2012), it is necessary to consider the Moroccan migratory space from a perspective that transcends national borders and truly integrates it into a regional and continental perspective. This change of focus stems, above all, from the empirical realities imposed by the structures of contemporary migration routes.

From a geographical point of view, Morocco is a perfect illustration of the entanglement of African routes and societies. Both mountainous, open to the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, but also linked to the Sahara, this geography links lifestyles,

[1] The concept of connectivity, developed by Judith Scheele in her book *Smugglers and Saints of the Sahara. Regional Connectivity in the Twentieth Century* about Central Saharan societies, is intended to offer an innovative theoretical framework for understanding the way in which cross-border practices and mobilities are organised in time and space. By avoiding a statonational or (conversely) overly localist reading, the notion of connectivity aims to follow and restore the relationships linking humans and societies through their activities (spiritual, commercial and, more broadly, economic) by alternating the scales and places making up these relationships.

cultures and societies that are themselves linked to the spaces that delimit them. Morocco's strong connection to the Sahara makes it a space of crucial connectivity both with West Africa (Senegal) and with the Sahelian countries (Mali, Niger) (Peraldi, 2011). The dynamics of these connectivities can be studied in different ways. In the context of a research project on 'solidarity studies', the Euro-African migration routes constitute an ideal scientific object to grasp «their emergence, their transformations, and the imaginaries and social spaces they engender». Beyond the historical depth of migrations and mobilities in North-West Africa, several changes that have affected the Euro-African geopolitical balance have made these migration routes crucial issues in the relationship between North and South (El Qadim, 2015).

Among these changes, two seem to us to be heuristics for understanding the deployment and, at the same time, questioning the logic of solidarity along migration routes. The first change concerns, over a more or less long period of time, the establishment of a reticular border space between the European Union and Africa, particularly in the Western Mediterranean area (Brachet *et al.*, 2011). This legal, political, and technical production has led to profound changes in the construction of migratory routes and itineraries (Ahouga & Kunz, 2017; Andersson, 2014). It has also led to changes in Moroccan society and its place in Africa on a regional and continental scale. It is in this first context that the logic of solidarity regarding people on the move should be questioned. The second change concerns, on a finer scale, the manufacture of mobilities in the Saharan space through and towards Morocco. Indeed, beyond international and Euro-African mobilities, Morocco is affected by mobilities that do not only have Europe as their destination (Alioua, 2005). These mobilities are commercial, trade-related, and, more broadly, circular (Marei *et al.*, 2019). However, they have brought about profound changes in the spaces and territories they cross. The aim is, therefore, to understand how these circulations can also provide a 'fulcrum' for other Euro-African mobilities and their interaction logics.

Thus, we consider the manufacture of borders and mobilities as two types of spatial, social and political dynamics that are interdependent and through which the notion of solidarity deserves to be questioned. To do that, it is necessary to start with a broader look at the region where Morocco is situated. It is necessary to look at the spatial, historical, and political dynamics related to the Western and Central Sahara regions, taking into consideration how migration and mobilities have affected Mauritania, Algeria, and Morocco. These countries are strongly interconnected with each other yet present their own particularities. Once the regional perspective is defined, we can refocus our gaze on Morocco and the recent borderisation process taking place there, redefining politics, spaces and mobilities, and consequently affecting regional balances and relations.

Routes across and within western and central Sahara's

Civil society organisations and the issue of migration

The prevalence of international migration in North Africa suggests that it should be seen as a social phenomenon in its own right, but over the last twenty years, it has entered the political sphere in different ways. These differentiated forms of politicisation depend on a wide range of factors: the nature of the political regimes in place, according to their degree of authoritarianism or liberalism, their exposure to the international and development arenas, the importance and functionality of migratory dynamics in the economies and, finally, the geopolitical strategies put in place by these different states in relation to the process of border externalisation. These different factors help us to understand how 'civil societies' in these countries have dealt with the issue of migration, not only in relation to their own nationals in Europe but also in their relations with foreigners, particularly sub-Saharan Africans, in those countries.

First of all, it seems important to stress the idea that, without succumbing to a form of methodological nationalism, we must not standardise the way in which civil societies operate in the region. Indeed, each of the states we are interested in here has its own historicity, and the civil societies that have been built up there have all experienced their own form of historical trajectory. Without going back over these historicities, it is appropriate to emphasise the extent to which the history of civil society in Morocco is different from the Algerian experience. The monarchical nature of the Moroccan regime, despite years of very strong authoritarianism, did not offer the same spaces for expression as the military regime in Algeria or the Mauritanian one. In Morocco, particularly during the reign of Mohammed 6, these channels of expression allowed the emergence of civil society open to its diaspora and, above all, authorised to invest in 'constructive' ways of arguing in the political arena of the Makhzen. In Algeria, on the other hand, civil society has shown little interest and has not been allowed to invest in this theme, mainly because migration is an issue closely associated with security risks and is therefore reserved for the State apparatus. Whereas Morocco has seen the emergence of a very dense network of organisations with a humanitarian vocation towards people on the move, Algeria limited its advocacy to a few human rights organisations, at least until 2020 and the wave of authoritarian tightening that followed the Hirak movement. From a certain point of view, the situation in Mauritania is similar to that in Morocco, even though the regime is not monarchical but republican. Indeed, despite a succession of coups d'état since the 1990s, 'civil society' has always been considered a 'legitimate' interlocutor, and its existence has never been the subject of debate. The presence of CSOs is dictated primarily by the political regimes in power.

However, the dynamics of these CSOs also depend on their exposure to international arenas, in other words, the worlds of development and humanitarian action. In Algeria, the notion of 'development' has its own historical trajectory: it is considered to be the preserve of the state and its political, administrative, economic and military centralism. As a result, Algeria has shown very little openness to international aid and to the world of development and humanitarian aid. In contrast, Morocco and Mauritania have been calling on international organisations since the 1970s in a wide range of areas to support human, economic and territorial development. The presence of these development circles has helped to 'irrigate' civil society circles with skills, strategies and funding and has led to the establishment of a rent system between international organisations and local civil societies. It was in this context that the migration issue began to emerge in the mid-2000s, both through certain tragic events at borders and through certain international and developmentalist organisations which, with the support of government funding, began to develop a number of co-development programmes aimed at fighting against irregular migration.

At a regional scale, civil society organisations working on these issues can be categorised into three main types.

The first type concerns organisations that operate almost exclusively with international funds and can be considered as local 'operators' of various types of immobilisation mechanisms. Their involvement is generally highly professionalised and operates according to international organisational criteria. These organisations are 'dominant' in the sense that they monopolise most of the funds dedicated to these issues. They are not very critical and are characterised by a form of conservatism that does not question the contemporary mobility order. The sociology of these organisations is characterised by a high degree of internationalisation and employees who are generally involved in humanitarian work. They include many people with dual nationality and young Europeans who have studied development and humanitarian work.

The second type, at the opposite extreme to the first, is made up of organisations that are also internationalised, operating with funds from alternative European worlds and openly fighting for freedom of movement. They are not very professional and operate almost entirely on a voluntary basis. These structures have been set up in opposition to the migration management approach, and a variety of means have been used to help organise local solidarity groups, sea rescues, etc. They can be considered 'dominated' in the sense that they have limited access to funding but are characterised by their strong sociological symmetry with the first category: they also include many people with dual nationality or young Europeans who have studied development and humanitarian work.

Finally, the third type is made up of very small associations whose legitimacy and commitment are based on specific local issues (access to healthcare, integration, etc.) and specific beneficiary groups (vulnerable migrants, etc.). These structures can be formal or informal and are subject to a degree of political flexibility, depending on the material or financial support they receive. Their forms of practical involvement with people on the move make them an object of struggle between the first two categories.

This typology, which is necessarily incomplete and open to improvement, nonetheless refers to the objective structures of the dynamics of civil societies linked to migration in North Africa. Present both on the roads and in border areas, these organisations mesh the territories of mobility in the region and constitute concrete points of entry into the contemporary dynamics of solidarity in the region.

Old and new mobilities: capturing the manufacture of routes in their historical and economic depth

Those three countries (Morocco, Mauritania, and Algeria) are part of the same international migration system (Berriane *et al.*, 2015). Algeria and Mauritania were the countries crossed by 64.5% of the people on the move, as questioned

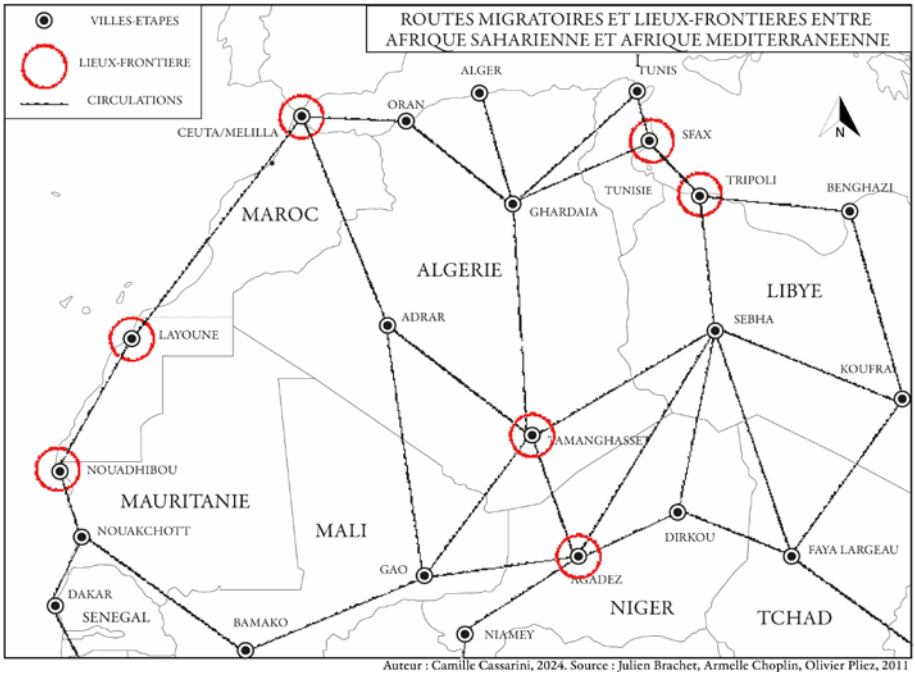

Figure 6: African migration routes.
Source: Julien Brachet *et al.* (2011).

Dernier pays d'immigration avant le Maroc	Pays d'origine												
	Syrie	Côte d'Ivoire	Sénégal	Guinée	RDC	Cameroun	Centr afrique	Mali	Yémen	Autres africains	Autres arabes	Autres pays	Total
Algérie	48,9	35,1	27,6	69,0	57,7	83,1	51,0	78,3	29,8	61,4	15,7	0,0	55,2
Mauritanie	4,9	25,3	57,5	10,8	6,9	,4	6,4	9,2	12,4	3,8	6,1	25,0	9,3
Liban	22,8	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	25,0	7,5
Egypte	8,7	0,0	0,0	2,2	0,0	,4	0,0	0,0	32,3	,5	15,0	0,0	4,1
Mali	,4	14,0	5,5	4,8	8,9	,9	0,0	0,0	0,0	7,6	3,9	0,0	3,9
Libye	2,3	1,8	0,0	,5	1,0	1,3	0,0	8,3	0,0	11,6	15,8	25,0	3,4
Tunisie	3,3	2,7	2,8	1,1	1,0	1,9	0,0	0,0	0,0	2,0	5,5	0,0	2,2
Sénégal	0,0	1,8	0,0	7,4	2,0	,9	3,5	0,0	0,0	3,0	0,0	25,0	1,7
Turquie	4,2	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	2,4	0,0	1,4
Niger	0,0	,6	2,8	0,0	0,0	6,8	0,0	2,1	0,0	2,0	0,0	0,0	1,2
Autre	4,5	18,6	3,9	4,3	22,6	4,2	39,1	2,1	25,6	8,1	35,6	0,0	10,0
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0

Table 4: Last immigration country before Morocco by nationality.
Source: La migration forcée au Maroc, résultats de l'enquête nationale de 2021, rapport détaillé. Haut commissariat au Plan.

in a survey by the Haut Commissariat au Plan in 2021, which shows the importance of overland travel in these migratory routes. However, due to their different geographical positions, they are not affected in the same way by the dynamics of borderisation. In fact, it seems more relevant to analyse them in terms of their own political histories and societies. In Morocco, migration management is inseparable from the political construction of the Makhzen[2], particularly around the emergence, in 2013, of a 'migration diplomacy' oriented towards Africa (Qadim, 2017). In Algeria, the pushback and purely security-based management of foreigners are inseparable from the military nature of the political regime and its «isolationist» geopolitics (Chena, 2016). In Mauritania, the importance of the 'international' dimension of migration management is intrinsically linked to the state's involvement in 'securing' the Sahara and controlling the borders (Ould Moctar, 2023). In this sense, Mauritania offers yet another example of how the security imperatives of spatial control are combined with the challenges of migration control.

Nevertheless, these three countries are structurally experiencing international migration dynamics that have profoundly transformed the places and spaces on and around which they have been built. It is also important to remember that, although these dynamics are much older than European borders, they have also, above all, been structured by important logics of economic complementarities

[2] In the post-colonial period, the term '*makhzen*' refers to the entire Moroccan state and administrative apparatus, with particular emphasis on the system of royal power which governs it.

(Pliez, 2002). In Algeria, Mauritania, and Morocco, the places of foreigners are not new. For a long time (until the 1990s at least), it was defined by temporalities and circulatory mobilities with the countries of origin. Many works agree that the history of intra-African mobilities has been deeply structured by the economic differentials between North and South (Bredeloup, 2021). The example of Libya can, in this sense, be considered particularly representative of these dynamics (Bensaâd, 2012) even if each of these countries has, in its own way, a very long history of international mobilities.

The example of Mauritania allows us to see with acuity the way in which contemporary migratory routes have been based on a deep history of different mobilities, intersecting, linking and producing, through these processes of fusion, routes used and known by modern adventurers[3] (Streiff-Fénart & Poutignat, 2006). The city of Nouadhibou, known as one of the hot spots of the passage to Europe, has experienced a singular development intrinsically linked to the different migratory configurations and their migratory impacts. Created in 1907 under the name of 'Port-Etienne', Nouadhibou has historically been connected to international dynamics, both migratory and economic. Its strong fishing industry has made it a particularly well-known city on a regional scale (Choplin & Lombard, 2008). Since the 1970s, this dynamism has made it a highly attractive area from a migratory point of view. In addition to internal Mauritanian migration, other regional migration dynamics were quickly added, linked to Mauritanian social groups (from the south of the country) and to others whose influence went beyond national borders. This is the case, for example, of several Soninke groups, who connected the city of Nouadhibou to international migration networks from the 1970s/1980s onwards (Choplin & Lombard, 2007). These migrations, in addition to being inserted into economic niches (crafts, mechanics, fishing, etc.), fill the structural deficit of labour not formed by the Mauritanian education system. This is how, in the 1990s, Nouadhibou became one of the most cosmopolitan cities in West Africa. These different migratory layers not only transform the economic structures of the city but also transform the urban space and contribute

[3] From an emic point of view, the term 'adventurer' refers to the way in which certain African migrants represent themselves and their migratory trajectories. As an analytical concept, 'adventure migration' seeks to combine what people on the move have to say about their mobility with what researchers have to say about it. For more information on this subject, read: Sylvie Bredeloup, "Migratory Adventure as Moral Experience". In N. Kleist & D. Thorsen (ed), "Hope and Uncertainty in Contemporary African Migration", Routledge Studies in Anthropology, Routledge, p. 134-153.

to its development. The "*Qairaan*" district, for example, is known to be one of those concentrating many young men wishing to go to the Canary Islands, while the "*Numéros*" district has for a long time been a place of settlement for African immigrants wishing to work mainly in Mauritania (Oumar Ba & Choplin, 2005). Within this city, the migratory layers have thus drawn relational dynamics where 'mobile' and 'immobile' people, through their migratory strategies, maintain the permanence of a migratory route. While Nouadhibou is undoubtedly one of the major border towns in West Africa (Streiff-Fénart & Poutignat, 2008; Ould Moctar, 2023), the gradual northward movement of migratory networks has also transformed North African countries.

In Algeria, far from the large coastal metropolises, it is in the Sahara and its cities that contemporary migration routes find both their origins and their dynamics (Bensaâd, 2008). In Algeria, the first migration routes were, like the situation in Nouadhibou, mainly caused by the project of nationalisation of the Algerian Sahara and the launch of several large development projects (Bensaâd, 2009a; Chena, 2013). Since the colonial period, the city of Tamanrasset has been one of the most important cities in the central Sahara. This strategic position encouraged the Algerian state to develop it and to call upon a workforce that was not available in the north. It was, therefore, from Niger and Mali that these workers came, already drawing, thanks to the Tuareg transport networks, the contours of a regional and cross-border mobility space (Lensari & Bellal, 2019). This situation lasted until the 1980s and even went beyond the Saharan area to affect cities further north. From Tamanrasset, although these migratory networks initially remained confined to cross-border movements, they gradually escaped and connected Algeria to Morocco via the town of Adrar in search of new opportunities. Although the migratory function of the Algerian Sahara remains mainly structured around 'transit', the urban anchoring is not to be underestimated.

For example, there were almost 60 sewing workshops run by African entrepreneurs in the town of Tamanrasset in 2006 (Bensaâd, 2009b), while around the town or outside it, groups of people on the move took over the urban margins and settled there. This is notably the case of a very precise and rich ethnography carried out in the Oued of Tamanrasset, near the neighbourhood of Tahaggart (Minvielle, 2011). Under a bridge, people on the move have created a real social and economic space dedicated to mobility: "The toponymic construction of the 'adventurers' is well organised around the shared migratory experience of transit.

> It expresses part of the contradiction between the migrant's desire to continue the adventure towards places he considers more prosperous and the dead-end situation he experiences in Tamanrasset. The metaphors are cruel: the dream of taking flight like an "Alouette" is shattered on the walls of the "Abribus", a closed space that forbids movement, a waiting room that never sees a bus pass by. Cameroonians, Ivorians, Congolese and Burkinabés can sometimes wait more than three years at the Alouette to raise the funds necessary to continue their journey to the North – Algiers, Oran or Morocco. (Minvielle, 2011, p. 9).

Approaching routes through scales: Local structures and international networks

If the Algerian Sahara is today mainly known for the large waves of pushback organised by the state (Bureau, 2019) towards the Niger borders, especially in Assamaka, it is nonetheless a very important transit area but also a settlement area for sub-Saharan African nationals in search of other futures (Spiga, 2005). Here again, it seems important to understand the migration routes that cross it from a broader perspective than that of Europe. These routes are also the site of various economies and cannot exist without the participation of local actors facilitating or hindering the passage to Europe (Scheele, 2012). From this perspective, it is also worth considering the role of Tuareg groups in the construction of Saharan migration routes (Giuffrida, 2010). Indeed, from the 1970s to the present day, the place of Tuareg groups in the shaping of Saharan migration routes must be considered as central. Their knowledge of the routes, their dominant position in the Saharan economic worlds and their strategic position in Saharan geopolitics have made them crucial intermediaries in the worlds of mobility (Brachet, 2009).

This dominant position is explained both by the transformation of their lifestyles from nomadism to urban sedentarism and by their cross-border spatial hold between Mali, Niger, Algeria and Libya (Grémont, 2011).

> The Tuareg are a heterogeneous Berber-speaking social group, organised around four major poles (Ahaggar, Aïr, Azjer/Ajjer, Azawad/Tademekkat) with complex links between them[4]. They have never been united politically or ideologically but are organised in several socially and politically interconnected constellations, recognising each other's existence in cooperations and rivalries (Kohl, 2013, p.2).

[4] Website of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, African Cooperation and Moroccan Expatriates (accessed in August 2023). Link.

From a certain point of view, Tuareg groups can be considered paradigmatic in terms of the use of space and dispersion as a 'resource', both economic and political. This privileged place, both in mobility and in the places that structure it, invites us to consider the underground and informal economies that shape contemporary migration routes. If the vision of the Tuaregs has long been a victim of a form of romanticisation in the European world, it is appropriate here to move away from this to understand them in the context of a political economy of mobility that is undergoing change, particularly under the effect of the externalisation of European borders in the Sahara (Brachet, 2018). The 'Afrod', the name given to this economy of mobility, has become a space of struggle between different Tuareg groups. The sharp deterioration in security conditions and the increase in controls have contributed to a substantial decline in the market and an increase in transport prices.

The intertwining of migration and trade routes is an interesting way of approaching the question of relational dynamics between actors of mobility and control in this project. As we have just seen, in the Sahara, networks of passage and economic networks are intertwined at the heart of the Tuareg political economy (Bencherif, 2021). However, this reality is not unique to the central Sahara. Two other passage nodes see similar dynamics intersect. The first concerns the region of Meghna and Oujda, between Morocco and Algeria, a hotbed of "*trabendo*", the smuggling trade between the two countries. The second concerns a wider axis linking Rosso, Nouakchott, and Agadir in Morocco and moving people and goods along this Atlantic Saharan route.

Between Algeria and Morocco, if it is known that many sub-Saharan nationals choose to cross the border, few studies have attempted to understand how these mobilities are made possible despite an official closure. Since 1994, following a rise in tensions between the Algerian and Moroccan states (Vermeren, 2022), the border has been closed, and citizens of both countries have been subjected to a visa regime. Since then, all land travel has been officially prohibited. However, as several studies have shown, local societies have never really interrupted exchanges (Moussaoui, 2015). Because they were located on the margins of their representative states, cross-border trade appeared to be one of the only means of subsistence.

As a symbol of links that have not been broken despite the geopolitical reality, local border groups have maintained networks of sociability and notability that make it possible to continue what is known locally as "*trabendo*".

> *Trabendo is a visible, daily activity, approved as much by the trabendistes as by the border guards, the customs and other official actors supposed to monitor the border. Thus, living in this space implies being able to transgress the law, having the right contact to guard against the danger of seizure of goods"* (Moussaoui, 2015, p. 1).

It is, therefore, no coincidence that, on a border of 1900 kilometres in length, the bulk of the 'passages' of sub-Saharan adventurers from Algeria to Morocco take place in this area. Beyond the proximity of two large cities from which it is possible to reach the large Moroccan coastal metropolises, these crossings are, above all, made possible by the existence of an economy of the passage of various goods. If the city of Oujda is particularly known as one of the largest cities for the reception and passage of sub-Saharan adventurers in Morocco (Johnson, 2013), it is largely due to its sociological and economic proximity to the Algerian populations of the Maghna region. The example of this border region shows once again how important it is to consider local logic in the political economy of passage and mobility.

All routes lead to Morocco… and its cities

> The treatment of sub-Saharan immigration in Morocco has largely been reduced to encampments of comrades in the north of the country, expulsions into the desert, dramatic shipwrecks and surreal landings of pirogues on the beaches of Spanish islands. Such an approach leaves in the shade the migration of Moroccans themselves, privileges transit in the definition of Moroccan space and neglects the inscription of sub-Saharan adventurers in urban centres, as well as their installation in the working-class neighbourhoods of the local society (Timera, 2009, p. 1).

To understand the patterns of circulation, mobility and settlement of sub-Saharan populations in Morocco, it is necessary to understand these phenomena primarily through the prism of the places that form their core (Karibi, 2016). After long journeys, the accumulation of multiple skills and migratory experiences, the «adventurers of migration» arrive at the threshold of Europe (Pian, 2007). It is here, at the foot of the border, that the logic of cooperation and tensions between migration actors and control actors are reconfigured (Collyer, 2007). However, far from investing only in the margins of the migration routes, people on the move manage to overcome blockages based on their ability to mobilise resources from different networks of actors (Pian, 2009; Timera, 2009).

As we have seen, the 'crossing' of a border or a larger space (such as the Sahara) is never done without the participation (sometimes under duress, sometimes not) of actors with strong local roots. This configuration is, to some extent, reflected in the way in which people on the move mobilise networks of former travellers and adventurers in Morocco. Just as Nouadhibou, a city that combined different spatial configurations of mobility, Moroccan cities, depending on their geographical

position, are worked on from below by these sub-Saharan circulations. It is in the heart of often popular, relatively cosmopolitan neighbourhoods, where different migratory histories have been superimposed, that adventurers connect, find contacts, reconfigure their migratory projects and develop strategies to pursue their adventure, suspend it or reconfigure it around new imperatives (Dessertine, 2016).

One of the most representative neighbourhoods of these configurations is Takadoum in Rabat. This very old working-class neighbourhood was taken over in the 1990s by several Senegalese people who came to work in the city. From a discreet presence, their installation has become more and more assertive over the years, especially with the arrival of new adventurers. Since the 2000s, Takadoum has become a major place for sub-Saharan Africans settled in Morocco (Ntang & Peraldi, 2011). Beyond transit, various Senegalese or Malian traders began to run African shops and to organise a highly dynamic economy of mobility around these new presences, playing on their knowledge of migration and trade networks (Pian, 2005).

This presence has gradually blended into the urban fabric, with a system of property rentals run by African people and dedicated to the new adventurers. New power relations and new hierarchies of mobility have emerged from this settlement. The figure of the *thiaman* is representative of these relational configurations (Pian, 2008). At the same time, chief, leader, entrepreneur and intermediary (Magallanes-Gonzalez, 2021), the *thiaman* hold their power from their knowledge of the routes but also from their ability to master the uses of the installation.

These multiple presences, although hierarchical according to multiple criteria, sometimes based on nationality but also and above all on seniority, have nonetheless created cosmopolitan spaces in all Moroccan cities where a dialectical relation between mobility and immobility is constructed in multiple social dimensions. Agadir, Rabat, Casablanca and many other cities have thus become spaces where mobility has progressively built social spaces of cooperation and competition in which the fabric of contemporary migration routes is constantly replayed (Khrouz & Lanza, 2015).

These relational dynamics can also be found in religious spaces. Indeed, many people on the move have carried their religious practices and spirituality with them. In Morocco, a Muslim country where the King is also Commander of the Faithful, the African presence is also synonymous with a return of Christian religious alterity (Bava, 2021). For more than 30 years now, this presence has created new religious spaces (house churches, old Catholic churches reinvested…) but it has also transformed the political space of the religious, both in Morocco and in the space invested by the people on the move (Bava & Boissevain, 2020). It is

more broadly a reconfiguration of Christian theologies (evangelical, Pentecostal) of mobility that these presences produce and to which they give meaning. The importance of religion is central to the relational dynamics of solidarity. Investing in the space of the religious allows us to grasp the multiple transformations that the African presence in Morocco brings about at the urban level (churches, etc.), at the political level (Christianity as a new cosmopolitical object), and at the social level (the religious as a space of power).

Therefore, without spaces of settlement and anchorage, there are no spaces of movement. The transformations of the Moroccan socio-urban fabric mentioned above are intrinsically linked to the geopolitical status of Morocco in the construction of European borders in the Mediterranean. The point is not to assert that Morocco is, above all, a space of transit or settlement (Collyer *et al.*, 2012; Khrouz, 2016). As several authors have stated, these statuses only refer to constructed political processes and to theoretically oppose them would be part of these logics. On the contrary, the point here is to think of them dialectically because the 'hot spots' of European borders in Morocco are unquestionably linked to longer anchorages (El Arabi, 2021; Maâ, 2022). Life in the forest, as described in many types of research (Ntang, 2021), its difficulties and its times of waiting constitute the universe of the meaning of adventurers in Morocco today (Mouna, 2020). The cities of Nador, Layoune, Dakhla, Ceuta and Melilla are these hot spots and materialise the intertwining of the logic of movement and borders (Queirolo Palmas, 2019, 2021; Gross-Wyrtzen, 2020).

The Borderisation Process in Morocco

Legal and geopolitical framework

To situate Morocco in the space of regional mobility and geopolitical balances, we consider it a fluid space of passage where different mobilities are intertwined, a crossroads of migratory flows of different natures: movements for work, study, asylum, and *adventure*. Flows that involve Morocco as a country of transit, destination, origin or return. Until the 1990s, internal regulations governing migration were limited and generally not enforced (Perrin, 2016). The situation changes in connection with the process of Schengenisation of the European Union: with the generalisation of the internal visa regime, the restriction of entry for nationals of 'third countries', European borders are built. In the idea of protecting European space, non-member countries neighbouring the EU are involved in border management in order to control and limit entry through a military construction of the frontiers. During this period, the concept of 'transit migration'

emerged and is now seen as a security issue: apparatuses to manage migratory flows are constructed with a securitarian approach. At the legal level, the concepts of *regular* and *irregular* migration are recognised by Law 88-11 in Algeria and the 2008 Immigration Law in Mauritania. The establishment of detention mechanisms and waiting zones, as well as deportation practices, have created a system of border rejection in the three countries considered (Cassarino, 2017) – characterised by the criminalisation of unauthorised migration. This approach to migration not only has implications for national policies on migration flows and border *management* but also creates new balances of power in geopolitical relations between North African countries and the European Union and its member states, as well as within the African region, which is characterised by delicate and often tense border negotiations.

In Morocco, the borderisation process is formalised by Law 02-03, introduced under the government of Mohammad IV in 2003, to regulate the entry and presence of foreigners in the territory (Labayen & Gutiérrez, 2022; Bartels, 2018). This law establishes legal migrant status and its requirements, limiting the conditions of access to employment, health care, education, and social services. Criminal and administrative penalties, such as a ban on re-entry, are provided for those who enter the territory or remain there irregularly; aiding and abetting the irregular entry into or exit from the territory of foreign nationals or citizens is punished by fines and imprisonment. Once the concept of the 'regular migrant' is established, borders are physically erected through the placement of militarised and technological borders and the development of mechanisms and spaces of administrative detention.

This Eurocentric migration policy also impacts people on the move who have no intention of arriving in Europe, who circulate to Morocco from the sub-Saharan area, hence the historical flows of labour-driven mobility, as well as student or religious ones (Cassarino, 2017). In fact, the possibility of regularisation is extremely limited and consequently, access to social services and the world of work is prevented. The presence of undocumented people in the territory increases exponentially: they become particularly vulnerable and are at risk of poverty, marginalisation and, as a result, exploitation and violence. The inaccessibility of housing services pushes many people on the move to precarious housing solutions on the fringes of cities or in informal camps in border areas: spaces that Stock (2020) calls 'limbospaces', as it becomes impossible to leave without documents. On the other hand, there is no establishment of an asylum or reception system for migrants – basic assistance programs have been provided by international organisations operating in the country since the early 2000s, working closely with government policies.

Border management practices involve the systematic use of force and violence, characterised by expulsions, push-backs and casualties, and the reduction of people on the move to degraded living conditions. Such practices have been documented over time by some civil society actors − for a comprehensive example, see the 2018 GADEM report. In border defence, violence is used to discourage people from crossing the border and to push back those who are intercepted from all sides of the border by Moroccan, Spanish, and Algerian police. This is combined with regular raids on informal encampments in border areas and subsequent forced deportations to Morocco's southern and central cities – where people are displaced and confined to informal camps or industrial and suburban neighbourhoods – or to Algeria. In the latter case, people are, in turn, at risk of being deported to the south of the country and then to Mali, following the logic of chain deportations. This «dispersal policy» (El Arabi, 2020) also affects people with regular permission to stay in the territory as the practice of forced internal relocation. In urban areas, violence takes place through continuous raids by authorities and forms of racism by the local population. It is a form of racialised violence that mainly affects citizens of sub-Saharan countries, even people who have settled in the territory regularly and for a long time.

Border devices in Morocco are established and supported by a series of bilateral and international agreements involving the European Union and its member countries, particularly Spain. Europe's request insists on Morocco to engage in deportations of irregular people to sub-Saharan countries and the readmission of irregular nationals from Europe. It takes place in a continuous negotiation, on the one hand with the granting of international funds as a source of exchange, and on the other hand with the use of visas as an offer by Europe to facilitate or deny its entry regime for Moroccan citizens. The visa policy, in parallel with the process of *schengenisation*, becomes increasingly restrictive for Moroccan citizens, who start facing more and more obstacles, bureaucratic and economic, to legally gain access to European Union member countries. While increasing the number of visas granted to Morocco consequently leads to readmissions, the policy remains selective, giving only skilled people the opportunity to migrate legally (Alioua & Arab, 2023; Infantino, 2016).

Morocco's national migration policy changed in 2013, taking a more diplomatic direction with the New Migration Policy − including measures to regulate migration according to international human rights standards. The document is the result of consultations between the government and civil society actors and reports that the intention, communicated with narratives designed to please European partners, is to facilitate regularisation procedures and subsequent legal

residence in the country. As reported by the website of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, African Cooperation and Moroccan Expatriates, the shift involves the «challenge to perceive immigrants as an opportunity and not as a cultural, social or economic threat[5]». As a result, in 2014, the National Strategy for Immigration and Asylum (SNIA) was established, and the body was responsible for coordinating integration and access to health care, housing, employment, and other social services. The System provides regularisation lines for illegalised foreigners based on a number of requirements: by marriage, employment, illness, or after five years of continuous residence. The government launched two regularisation campaigns in 2014 and 2017, giving about 50,000 illegalised foreigners, mostly sub-Saharans, access to one-year legal status (Ghazouani, 2019). Applications for regularisation were granted at a rate of 83.5%, of which 55% were Sub-Saharans (21% from Senegal) (Gross-Wyrtzen, 2020). The residence permit can be renewed for the duration of one year. SNIA is coordinated by UNHCR and IOM under the guidance of the Moroccan government and involves various humanitarian organisations in providing services to legalised foreigners. The situation is different for UNHCR-recognised asylum seekers, particularly Syrian nationals: they are not issued a regularity card but a receipt, which does not guarantee them full access to SNIA services.

Regarding the New Migration Policy, the text has not yet been translated into law and has no de facto legal force – since 2013, two drafts for the asylum law have been arranged and are still in draft Law 02/03 remains the main legislative reference on migration in Morocco. Despite developments since 2013, administrative reforms to ensure long-term solutions have not been implemented, and structural violence and discrimination persist. Sub-Saharan people, in particular, still face barriers to accessing integration and social services despite being officially entitled and are easily involved in exploitative networks and informal labour. The COVID pandemic has increased social vulnerability, isolating many people from assistance and increasing their marginalisation: many, due to movement restrictions and job loss, have not had the opportunity to renew their regularisation[6]. As the Global Detention Project (2021) report highlights, Morocco's migration management policies are still characterised by the use of force, expulsions, arbitrary detentions, and a de facto lack of access to regular status.

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[5] Website of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, *African Cooperation and Moroccan Expatriates*. Link.

[6] See Zine (2020). Link.

This policy promoted the externalisation of the European border to Moroccan territory in order to prevent entry into Europe. The European Union granted economic funds to projects that directly or indirectly required border reinforcement. According to data reported by State Watch[7], since 2001, the EU has allocated around 215 million euros in development funding for projects related to strengthening border security in Morocco: 68.6 million euros between 2001 and 2010 and 140 million euros from 2018 onward. From 2014 to 2022, the European Union (2023) has allocated 2.1 billion euros for Morocco through the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa under the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI-Global Europe) and other funding instruments, such as the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF).

The international presence is not only economic: as has been seen, UNHCR and IOM play a role in the management of Moroccan migration policy and work closely with the State. IOM has been working in the territory since 2001, later formalised in 2007 and UNHCR in 2007. Since the 1990s, the European Union and its member states have funded initiatives to deter irregular migration, encouraging the involvement of IOs, whose presence has increased especially since 2011. The organisations propose initiatives to support the government in managing the flows: information campaigns aimed at sensitising 'possible migrants' not to leave or voluntary repatriation programs. Maâ (2022) and Bartels (2018), studying such initiatives, recognise them as 'border practices', which have a softer form and often co-opt community representatives and immigrants in activities, replicating Eurocentric categories and the purpose of externalising migration management.

During the last few years, there has been increased cooperation between the Moroccan regime and the European agencies, Europol and Frontex, already operating at the Moroccan borders and currently discussing working arrangements (European Union, 2022). Central is Frontex's presence in managing the route from the southern coast of Morocco to the Canary Islands (ASGI, 2022). Operation Hera[8], In fact, was established in 2006 by a cooperation agreement between the European Agency, Mauritania, and Senegal, and a series of bilateral agreements with Spain, to patrol and intercept boats in the Sahara coast. In June 2022, Frontex, in cooperation with the Spanish National Police, launched Minerva Operation, to support border guards at the ports of Algeciras, Tarifa, and Ceuta with migration flows from Morocco.

[7] Data available online, State Watch, report 2019. Link.

[8] Data available online, Frontex. Link.

Insights into border and migration studies in Morocco

The process of militarisation that began in 1990 has affected migratory flows crossing Morocco in different ways. Regarding sub-Saharan mobilities, we consider both circular movements and those directed towards the European gates. In this case, the border created a condition of illegality and subsequent marginalisation and racial violence. Here, the border has affected the original migration projects, forcing those who do not have access to regularisation to leave Morocco or settle those who are rejected at the border and do not have the possibility to continue. The more restrictive conditions of entry into the Schengen area for third-country nationals have also reduced the possibility of regular movement for a large number of Moroccans who do not easily have access to a visa.

With the borders, new kinds of mobilities have emerged, challenging border closure devices and the concept of regular movement. The *hraqa*, from the Moroccan dialect, denotes those who, unable to enter regularly, 'burn' their documents before breaking into Europe (Arab, 2009). By burning documents, people on the move burn evidence of not being considered entitled to enter and taking the right to do it. In the Bambara dialect, it is called *boza* (Mouna & Kchikach, 2020) when the crossing is successful, meaning 'victory'. This image portrays two things. On the one hand, there is the establishment of a physical border, stating, according to a clear geometry of power, who is allowed to pass and who is not. The border acts as a filter, defining what is safe and what is not and incriminating anything that does not meet its parameters.

The process of borderisation in Morocco, at various levels, has established a demarcation between different types of government: in the state-territory-society nexus, on the one hand, and in the implications of the border for state-state relations, on the other. It has taken place through a profound criminalisation of unauthorised movements and the «spectacularisation» of the border (Cuttitta, 2014): it is spectacular the presence of a 12-kilometre-long fence, developed control technologies in Melilla, as well as armed ships patrolling the maritime borders. On the other hand, movements such as the *hraqa* and *boza* are processes by which this setting is 'burned' by jumping the fence, at sea, on foot, and dodging the police shots. This act, which can end in victory at the border or in rejection, is full of symbols. In the informal camps in the forests at the border, in the suburban neighbourhoods, in the masses of people trying to enter in front of the locked European gates, at the centre is movement, now restricted, now disruptive. The frontier occupies time, what Ilcan (2022) calls the «fronterisation of waiting», the action of decelerating migratory movements, during which border authorities can selectively identify, detain, and expel people on the move, colonising their time. The clear and frozen violence of

border agents and structures is contrasted with the slow and less obvious «violence of abandonment» (Gross-Wyrtzen, 2020): people on the move unstuck in informal camps, not allowed to leave due to lack of documents or deported to southern cities or industrial neighbourhoods. Situations where the violence is not direct but where abandonment becomes a strategic exercise of power. In which the racialised bodies of people on the move are invisibilised and experience liminality: some manage to get out and win or burn the border, some still have to wait or go back, or it is unknown. The last destination is told by the dramatic shipwrecks in the middle of the sea, the bodies carried back by the current or lost somewhere.

It is interesting to observe Morocco as a space where migratory mobilities and border politics are mutually enacting and transforming each other. It is a space where different actors and different narratives are proposed in a continuous deconstruction and recomposition of powers and meanings. In this regard, it becomes necessary, in the wake of the discourse pursued since the beginning, to widen the gaze and reposition Morocco. The concept of 'transit' here is restrictive, not reporting the stories and migration projects where Morocco is a country of origin, or destination, or return. Looking at Morocco as a transit country keeps the prism of the European border at the centre, effectively reproducing colonial narratives and evading the fact that for most African migrants, the desired destination is not Europe (Gross-Wyrtzen & Gazzotti, 2020). We want to look at Morocco as a crossroads, where frontiers relate to space as 'entanglements' (El Qadim & İşleyen, 2021), involving exchanges and interactions, historical, spatial, political and moral. Here, relationships are interdependent and multidirectional, and positions and meanings change through a process of continuous negotiation among the various actors involved. The process of borderisation takes place in Morocco in a deeply intertwined historical and geographical context of a colonial and divisive past, of strained political relations between the centre of the country and its marginalised regions and Western Sahara.

In this context, the border becomes an object of conflict and negotiation. Regarding the intrusive presence of the European Union and its member states in this process, we look at Morocco's positioning in negotiations and bargaining. Morocco's label as the 'gendarme of Europe' is challenged when looking at how the country acts autonomously and as a leading player (Ahouga & Kunz, 2017). In this relationship, irregular migration becomes a political exchange commodity (El Arabi, 2020), in which Morocco's diplomatic positions are played out to obtain more rights for its diaspora, or in agricultural or foreign fish production deals, or, again, in political pressure regarding the Western Sahara. In the face of European agreements, demands, and claims, Morocco organises its own «counter-strategies» (El Qadim, 2018), assert-

ing even the concept of dignity, a basic sentiment of anticolonial struggles. From this perspective, Morocco's reluctance to accept readmission agreements in exchange for visa facilitation is interpreted as an expression of national pride as a moral basis for supporting a better right to mobility for Moroccans (El Qadim, 2018). Morocco's cooperation with the EU and its member countries is hence «strategically intermittent» (Gross-Wyrtzen & Gazzotti, 2020). The New Migration Policy represents Morocco's policy trajectory based on an attempt to preserve both domestic interests and geopolitical needs. The post-colonial political trajectory made Morocco a hybrid regime[9]: it preserves authoritarian elements while securing a relatively liberalised image from an international perspective (Jimènez-Alvarez *et al.*, 2020). By proposing humanitarian narratives, according to the European vocabulary, the New Migration Policy guarantees an internationally appreciable image, which hides the fact that, since the text has not been converted into law, the border policies remain securitised and are continuously redirected according to Moroccan interests.

Border policy is an influential element of Morocco's position in the African region, which has strengthened since 2011 following the political turmoil of the Arab Spring and the decline of Libya's central role in managing regional migration and influence in sub-Saharan Africa. This is evidenced by Morocco's involvement in various regional agreements and actors, such as the Global Forum on Migration and Development and the African Alliance (initiated by Morocco). In 2006, the Rabat Process was launched as a regional dialogue on migration involving several African and European countries, as well as non-state actors such as the Economic Community of West African States and the EU, with the aim of «sharing the burden and responsibility» «of African migration routes and to Europe». Morocco holds the presidency. In general, the migration issue becomes an instrument of influence and negotiation with other African states, which creates more privileged relationships than others. Senegal, for example, is among the nationalities 'favoured' by Moroccan migration policies. Such relationships generate tensions; for example, the ongoing militarisation process at the historically conflictual border between Algeria and Morocco has created other spaces for conflict and negotiation, or diplomatic clashes between countries when North African nationals are victims of other neighbouring countries' migration policies, such as, for example, in 2006 and 2007, the Morocco-Libya dispute over Moroccans detained in Libyan jails for attempted irregular migration (Cassarino, 2017).

[9] According to the Freedom House Index, *Freedom in the world, Morocco Country report* (2023). See also Mouna (2018).

Introduction to solidarity studies and civil society in Morocco: dynamics and contradictions

Following the examination of the border apparatus in Morocco, we intend to open a reflection on how solidarity is constituted in this context in relation to the migratory movements part of it. Reflecting on solidarity gives space to consider different spaces, actors, and relational dynamics continuously reshaped by migration policies. Considering how increased repression produces a change in migratory movements, slowing them down, pressuring them, or blocking them, we want to observe how solidarity is constituted in relation to people on the move or settled – in counter-borderisation practices.

There is research on how people on the move organise collectively, create strategies, share information to survive, and resist in the face of the border. Immobilised at the margins, on the one hand, there are daily acts of resistance to make permanence «more tolerable» (Alioua & Arab, 2023; Alioua, 2020), and on the other hand of organising future attempts (Mouna & Kchikach, 2020). The border is perceived as a space where new kinds of agency are stimulated, what Ilcan (2022) calls the «agency-in-displacement», where new subjectivities are produced (Khosravi, 2019), able to question the border as an immobilising entity. Maâ (2023), noting how 'migrants' in Morocco manipulate the device of 'voluntary returns', recognises how security and refoulement devices can be challenged, appropriated, and transformed into a tool part of the migration project. Borders are constantly deconstructed and enter into the narrative of the trajectory of people on the move in different ways: Labayen and Gutièrrez (2022) examine videos shot by people on the move during border-crossing journeys, considering how the sharing of conditions and aspirations represent «performative interventions against the increasement of forced immobility and the techno-legal and symbolic mechanism of securitisation of migration» (Labayen & Gutiérrez, 2022, p. 24). The authors continue: «transformations in global political geography and representations of migration are created from the perspective of those who, despite the fatal policies of Fortress Europe, keep moving» (Labayen & Gutièrrez 2022, p. 34).

Borders are challenged by organised and collective movements involving people who, in their everyday struggles, resist border control (El Qadim & Işleyen, 2021). To question solidarity in this sense, we consider the elements of temporality and collectivity. The reshaping of migration projects due to border policies can create waiting, even enduring permanence: in the dilation of time, people are called upon to organise differently and 'make sense' of this new situation (Alioua, 2020). They do it collectively, organising the settlement in the space, sharing projects, and building relationships and resources. This is the origin of

what Alioua (2020) recognises as a 'collective organisation of solidarity', which spreads out at different levels. The organisation of the settlement offers support to people on the move and opportunities for inclusion to those who remain: those who are forced to stay organise their relocation, those who want to leave find the resources and information to do so in social networks, people on the move can stop to rest. In this case, the city, its networks and its organisation grant a «respite» (El Arraff, 2017) to travellers but also to those who have been rejected or deported: in the neighbourhoods of Morocco's large cities, in informal camps or ghettos, people on the move find networks of compatriots, opportunities for short jobs, information and the suspension of direct violence (Bachelet, 2019).In the long term, self-help groups (Ustubici, 2016), associations of various kinds to support migrants, and solidarity relationships emerge: solidarity can be organised on an ethnic-community basis or promote cooperation between sub-Saharan and Moroccan migrants (Alioua, 2020). In 2005, in the aftermath of the indignation over the events in Ceuta and Melilla, the Council of sub-Saharan adventurers in Morocco was born, and later other associations of sub-Saharan adventurers, such as the Collective of sub-Saharan adventurers in Morocco (in 2010) and ALEC-MA (in 2012).

Settlement leads to the creation of different kinds of relationships with local communities, both on an everyday level and along shared socio-political paths. In the latter case, networks and activists draw on Morocco's democratisation process, African identity, and the Moroccan emigration experience to form national and international alliances. Alongside racism and stigmatisation and their violent forms, relationships of mutual trust, complementarity and recognition are emerging (Alioua, 2020). The settlement initiates political mobilisation (Alioua, 2020), calling for a reflection on the right to mobility, as well as the right to stay. Life in the camps, police violence, border disappearances: on various levels, these issues become visible and are supported by Moroccan and international civil society. The demand for migrants' rights opens up spaces for reflection in which Moroccans and migrants together demand a change in public policy. In 2011, social movements showed awareness in relation to human rights issues, which reflected the freedom to move (Mouna *et al.*, 2017) – civil society's denunciations and demands against migration repression create awareness and pressure on the government, whose approach somehow changes, although relatively, with the New Migration Policy in 2013.

In order to reflect on the relationship between civil society and the issue of migration, a contextualisation is necessary: the Moroccan political structure does not provide space for political competition, socio-political claims or any sort of oppo-

sition. The February 20 Movement, born to demand a democratic transition, gave rise to a collective civic awareness but did not have the tools and space to challenge the government apparatus. Actors working in the field of migrants' rights, and human rights in general, are constantly engaged in a limiting process of negotiation with the Moroccan government. In this sense, the ability of NGOs to effectively advocate for the rights of people on the move is limited, given their non-involvement in policy-making processes. At the same time, the criminalisation of irregular movements has severely limited the ability of NGOs to target the truly vulnerable people on the move, those who are unrecognised and undocumented. The actors active in documenting and denouncing violations are very constrained by the political context: for instance, the Anti-Racist Group for the Support and Defense of Foreigners and Migrants, founded in December to defend migrants' rights, was only recognised by the state in 2013, being limited to operate.

Civil society actors were somehow involved later in projects and management roles, as we have seen, for example, in their involvement in the administration of SNIA – but not in political issues, and this, in fact, became part of the authoritarian structure. This element allows us to see how, even in the relationship between civil society actors with international organisations and the government, the process of negotiation is intense, often leading to their involvement in the border system.

This insight is one element for understanding the dynamics that inhabit the migratory landscape in Morocco – populated by different actors, European, sub-Saharan, and Moroccan, involved at different levels and in multiple relationships. These relationships present different dynamics of control and movement, border and counter-border, mutually transforming. The distinction between borderisation and counter-borderisation actors and practices is not always clear in the context of the centralisation and co-optation characteristics of Morocco. Migration management involves practices «that range from coercion to care» (Gross-Wyrtzen & Gazzotti, 2020), and humanitarian and securitarian narratives constantly intermingle, as we have seen.

Insights into routes and intensity of flows

Immigration in Morocco

West Africa is an overrepresented region in terms of statistics on migration from the south. Ivory Coast is the leading country of origin of non-Western foreigners in Morocco, with 16.7%, closely followed by Senegal (15.9%), Guinea (13.2%), the Democratic Republic of Congo (10.1%), Cameroon (8.7%), Mali (4.9%), the Central African Republic (2.3%) and other African countries (15.1%).

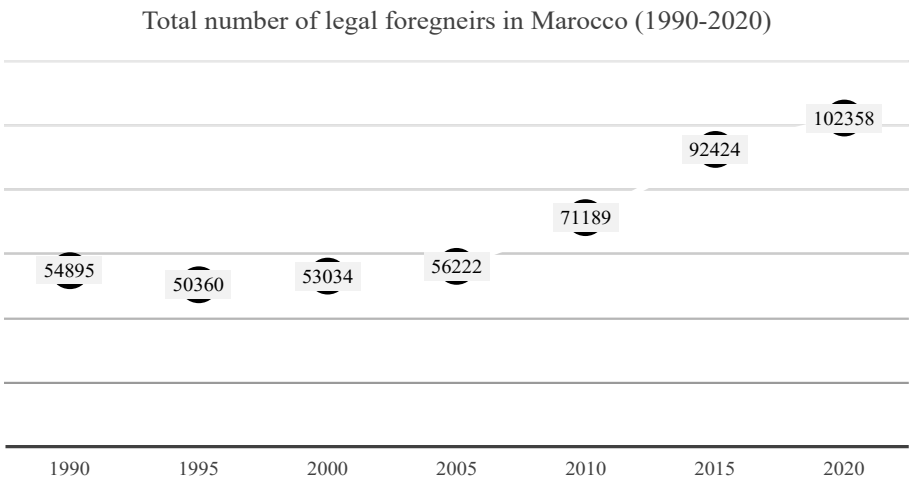

Table 5: Total number of legal foreigners in Marocco (1990-2020).
Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2020). International Migrant Stock 2020.

Pays d'origine	Sexe		
	Masculin	Féminin	Total
Côte d'Ivoire	12,8	22,1	16,7
Sénégal	15,9	16,0	15,9
Autres africains	14,8	15,5	15,1
Guinée	16,4	8,6	13,2
RDC	7,9	13,4	10,1
Cameroun	9,5	7,6	8,7
Syrie	9,1	6,1	7,9
Mali	6,0	3,5	4,9
Autres arabes	2,9	2,0	2,5
Centrafrique	3,0	1,4	2,3
Autres pays	1,3	3,7	2,3
Yémen	0,4	0,1	0,3
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0

Table 6: Country of origin of non-western foreigners in Morocco.
Source: La migration forcée au Maroc, résultats de l'enquête nationale de 2021, rapport détaillé. Haut commissariat au Plan.

	Refugees	**Asylum seekers applications**
2022	7,907	10,159
2019	6,642	5,621
2016	4,737	2,422
2014	1,470	1,203

Table 7: Number of refugees and asylum seekers in Morocco by year.
Source: Migration Data Portal, 2023.

Pays d'origine	Masculin	Féminin	Total
Syrie	55,0	53,4	54,3
Yémen	12,3	12,4	12,3
Centrafrique	9,9	10,0	9,9
Autres africains	5,2	9,2	6,7
Côte d'Ivoire	4,5	4,5	4,5
Autres arabes	5,0	3,5	4,4
RDC	2,1	2,3	2,2
Cameroun	1,9	1,9	1,9
Guinée	1,5	1,4	1,5
Sénégal	1,9	0,8	1,5
Mali	0,6	0,6	0,6
Autres pays	0,1	-	0,1
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0

Table 8: Country of origin of refugees and asylum seekers in Morocco.
Source: La migration forcée au Maroc, résultats de l'enquête nationale de 2021, rapport détaillé. Haut commissariat au Plan.

The numbers of refugees and asylum seekers studied in this survey show that Syria is the most represented country, which in 2022 amounted to 5,250. More than half of the refugees are Syrian (54.4%). Far less significant but logical in view of the security situation in the country, Yemenis come second with a share of 12.3%, followed by Central Africans with 9.9% and Ivorians with 4.5%, nationals of the DRC (2.2%), Cameroonians (1.9%), Guineans and Senegalese with 1.5% each.

More generally, although these data are supposed to be representative of the demographic characteristics of the populations on the move in Morocco, they must also be interpreted with caution. They obviously refer more to dynamics than to the precise situation of these populations. In any case, as Table 5 shows that the overall numbers between 1990 and 2020 demonstrate a strong increase in immigration in the country, even if, from a relative point of view, their part remains residual (0.3%).

Morocco as a country of origin

Out of a national population of about 33.8 million, the Moroccan diaspora has about 4 million people – considering the ones registered in the diplomatic missions or consulates. Looking back at historical movements, until the 1920s, mobilities were generally directed towards the Middle East and sub-Saharan African countries, mostly circular and with economic purposes. Under the French and

Spanish protectorates in Moroccan territory, the flows towards Europe began to emerge and intensify: Moroccan workers moved to meet the demand for labour in mining and construction and, during the world wars, the army. Initially, the movements headed for France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany, then diversified to Italy and Spain from the late 1980s and to North America. After independence, the numbers of Moroccans involved in migration processes increased and were characterised by linear movements: labour migration was followed by family reunions of workers.

The first attempts to control and regulate migratory flows can already be observed during the period of the protectorates, when, for example, France demanded a passport or minimum age requirements in order to enter the country. In contrast, unauthorised migratory flows are emerging, which, according to Drihmeur's study (2020) in 1930, accounted for more than 60% of movements. European migration policies became more and more selective over time, impacting the flows and profiles of foreigners. Indeed, regulations since the 1990s have favoured the entry of skilled workers and students and increasingly restrict the possibility of legal entry of other profiles.

Host country	**1993**	**2007**	**2017**	**2022**
France	678,917	1,131,000	1,349,309	1,327,000
Italy	91,699	379,000	420,651	420,172
Spain	65,847	582,923	363,000	879,943
Belgium	145,363	285,000	358,716	-
Netherlands	164,546	278,000	295,430	361,000

Table 9: Data on the presence of Moroccan citizens by year.
Sources: OECD (2017) on Belgium and 1993-2007 data – for the others, ISTAT, Instituto Nacional de Estatìstica, INSEE Institute, Statistics Netherlands. Data with respect to Italy, the Netherlands and Spain, collected by the National Statistical Institutes, report presence as of January 1 of the year. Italy, Spain and the Netherlands count the presence of legal residents with Moroccan citizenship – second generations are also considered, but not children of mixed couples; INSEE (France) reports data for Moroccans and Tunisians together – the calculation reports the sum of *Répartition des immigrés par groupe de pays de naissance* 1,165,000 and pàr nationalité 747,000. This table does not include data on persons present in the territory without legal residence.

In France in 2021, though, Morocco was the nationality that obtained the most ingress visas (Alioua & Arab, 2023), and since the 2000s, it has been among the first to obtain residence permits for family reasons (Drihmeur, 2020). The main authorised migrants, as mentioned, concern people involved in skilled work or

study. Parallel to this is the circular flow of seasonal workers, mainly engaged in agricultural contracts: we refer to Alioua and Arab's (2023) study of the movements of Moroccan women involved in the strawberry harvest, *dames de fraises*, which in 2022 involved around 15,000 women.

Restrictions on legal entry into European countries are changing flows and patterns of movement, leading those who have no other means of movement to attempt unauthorised entry. The routes and modalities have changed over time, as have the profiles of the people on the move: in recent years, those taking these routes have been predominantly young men, including many unaccompanied minors. According to UNHCR data, the number of people from Morocco who have left the country and applied for asylum in other countries since 2018 is around 10,000, with an increase in recent years.

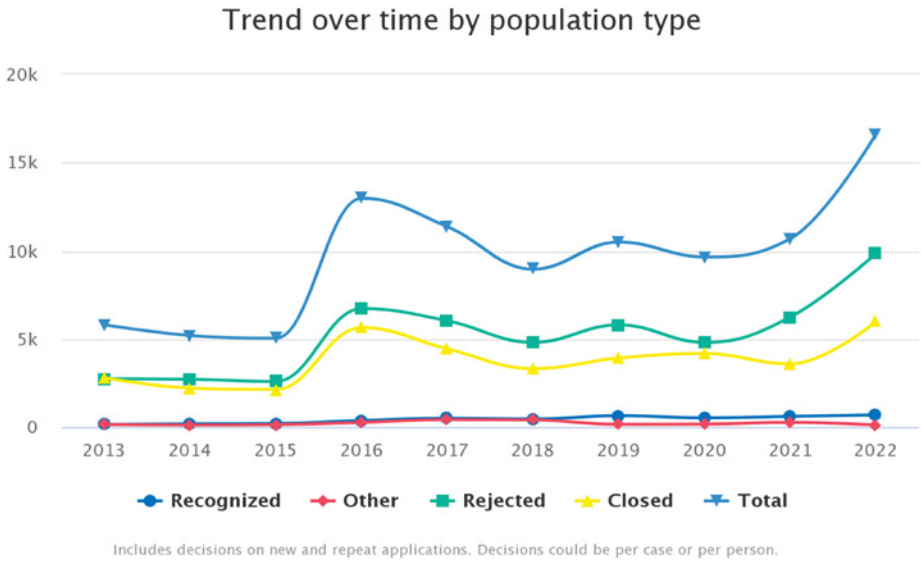

Figure 7: Asylum applications submitted by Moroccans.
Source: UNHCR, online source (last accessed August 2023).

Destination countries include France, Italy, Austria and Spain, which have adopted a restrictive policy towards this nationality – Morocco, however, is considered a safe country in Europe, as evidenced by the high rejection rate. In Italy, 81% of asylum applications from Moroccan nationals were rejected in 2022.

The data reported refer mainly to unauthorised movements. The first route to consider is the Western Mediterranean. According to Frontex data, this route has been the most used route for entry into Europe since 2018: as we can see from

the graph, the number of detections in 2018 doubled for the second year in a row to a record 56,245. Morocco is the main departure point for this route, and the presence of Moroccan migrants is significant.

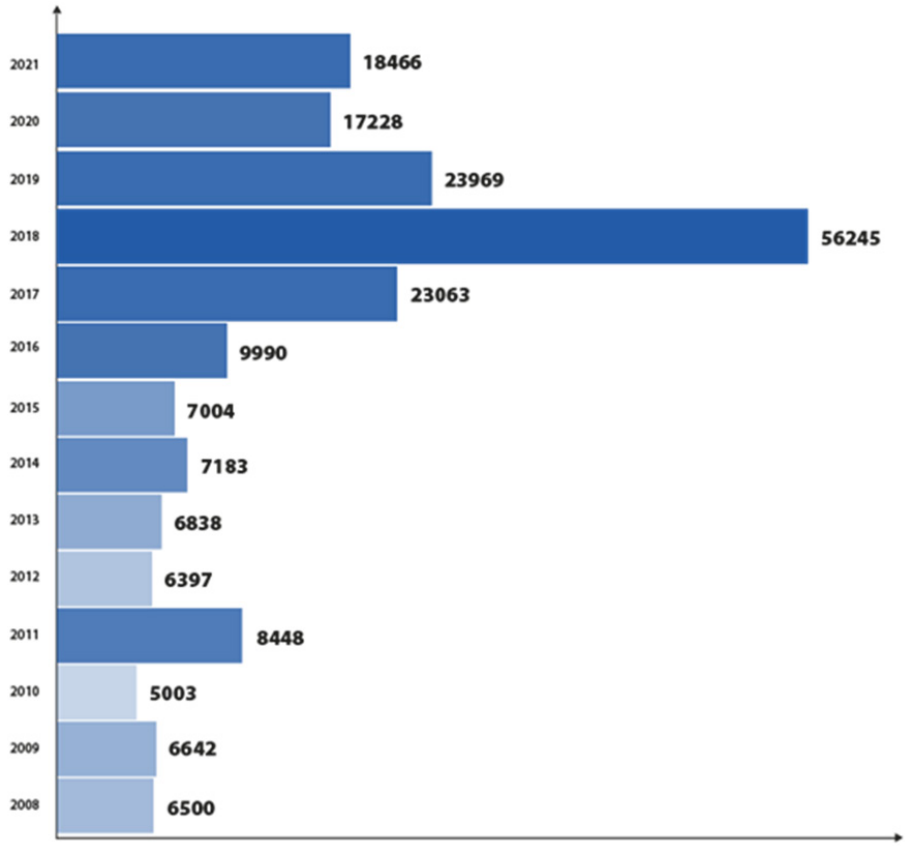

Figure 8: Unauthorised border crossings on the western Mediterranean route in numbers. Source: Frontex, 2023.

Between 2019 and 2021, arrivals on this route decreased to 17/20,000: about half of these are Algerian and Moroccan nationals, according to data reported by Frontex (2023). In parallel with the decrease in arrivals in 2019, the number of Moroccans on the Balkan route is increasing. Given the difficulty for many to reach Europe by sea due to the militarisation of borders and the resulting high costs and risk of death at sea, the Balkan route is also becoming a route for many Moroccans, who arrive by plane in Turkey and then move through the countries of the Balkan region to reach Central and Northern Europe. According to Frontex, between 2020 and 2021, Moroccans were among the top nationalities intercepted along the Bal-

kan route, after Syrians and Afghans. In 2020, Frontex counted 26,969 unauthorised border crossings; in 2021, 61,735. Looking at the Alarm Phone data (2019), after the summer of 2019, with the decrease in arrivals along the Strait of Gibraltar route, the flows to the Canary Islands and along the Balkan route intensified.

Figure 9: Arrivals via the Strait of Gibraltar.
Source: UNHCR, accessed June 2023.

Considering different migration routes together provides insight into how migration control policies affect movements and border crossings. As the militarisation of borders increases, movements shift – now by sea, now by land.

Border deaths

One indicator of border violence is the number of victims of border politics. In this context, we want to focus on the number of people who are missing because of the border. We report the data collected since 2014 by the IOM, the Missing Migrants Project, taking into account that these figures do not count the reality of the total number of deaths and missing at the border, which is much higher. Despite the presence of many realities, associations and activists that aim to monitor the deaths at the borders, there are many victims who are produced in silence and who are not counted or even noticed. One of the attempts to count border casualties is the Fortress Europe project, which monitors border deaths from 1988 to 2008; in that period only, at least 5,118 people died on the routes from Morocco, Algeria, Western Sahara, Mauritania and Senegal to Spain, heading for the Canary Islands or crossing the Strait of Gibraltar, 2,582 of whom are reported missing.

The central Mediterranean is considered the deadliest route, with more than 17,000 deaths and disappearances recorded by the MMP since 2014. The deaths recorded are caused by the conditions of the journey, such as duration, lack of food and water and the risk of shipwreck, as well as deaths due to rejection, deportation and police shootings. Of the missing, 5,719 are registered on the Sahara crossing and 3,214 on the route to the Canary Islands or North Africa. More

than 2,000 migrant deaths and disappearances have been recorded in the Western Mediterranean since 2014, most of them related to shipwrecks on the route to the Spanish mainland. Syrians accounted for the largest number of deaths on the route to Europe, followed by Moroccans and Algerians.

Conclusion and Future Orientations

This paper aims to look at Morocco, and broadly at Mauritania and Algeria, as a space where migration interplays on different levels. This area stands as a point of entanglement between historical migratory movements, geographical mobility and political balances. The first level, addressed in the first section of the paper, incorporates the historical and geographical point of view: looking at Morocco by placing it in a space that transcends national borders, we integrate it into a regional space of constant interchanges, of territorial transformation. We look at a history marked by movement and mobility, circular and linear routes, and multidirectional interactions in fluid geopolitical relations.

The second part focuses on the construction of borders in Morocco since the 1990s, hence the political aspects and the legal framework of the borderisation process in relation to the externalisation of European borders. Around the new power structures and the border devices, we want to look at the entanglements that take place between various actors and in the continuous process of negotiation between them, and what they produce in terms of movement limitations and the resulting mobilisations in the face of the establishment of borders an opposing counter-bordering movement.

From the perspective of looking at Morocco as a point of entanglement, we want to try to understand how the concept of solidarity is embedded here. In order to do that, maybe it becomes necessary to take a step back and think about solidarity by looking for it among new terms and different ways of narrating it. Hence, by looking at Morocco and at the existing counter-borderisation experiences, we wonder what 'solidarity' means here, how it is named, what meaning it have and how many shapes it can play. Morocco here represents a possibility to «decolonise the gaze on solidarity», trying to recognise the concept in terminologies and ways we are not used to. A general objective is to observe how processes and acts in support of people on the move take place in Morocco, attending to the «spaces of encounters where social boundaries (ethnicity, class, gender, generation) are contested», in turn challenging the dichotomy between 'providers' and 'beneficiaries' and deconstructing the dichotomy between the governance of border immobility and the autonomy of migration.

6. Solidarity unveiled: navigating the nexus of migration and resistance in Belgium

Livio Amigoni (University of Genoa)
Ismail Oubad (University of Genoa)

Belgium as a Node for Migration Research

The 2015 reintroduction of internal border controls profoundly transformed Europe's social landscape, which had evolved following the liberalisation of circulation under the Schengen Agreement[1]. Indeed, to stop the circulation of refugees, some states, including Germany, Austria, Slovenia, Hungary, France, Sweden, Norway, and Denmark, have undertaken permanent controls at their borders[2]. As a result, migrants arriving via West and Central Mediterranean and Balkan routes, with the need to reach different European countries, are often blocked, pushed back and forced into even more precarious conditions. The European Union's «Politics of crisis» (De Genova *et al.*, 2016) led considerable numbers of people into a daily struggle of illegal crossing attempts and the consequent development of a massive border control apparatus. The result was a slowing down of

[1] The border-free Schengen Area guarantees free movement to more than 400 million EU citizens, along with non-EU nationals living in the EU or visiting the EU as tourists, exchange students or for business purposes (anyone legally present in the EU). Free movement of persons enables every EU citizen to travel, work and live in an EU country without special formalities. Schengen underpins this freedom by enabling citizens to move around the Schengen Area without being subject to border checks. Link.

[2] Belgium closed all its borders from March to June 2020 and January to April 2021, citing the coronavirus pandemic's prevention. Link.

crossings, the increased difficulties and violence that migrants are subject to, and a multiplication of crossing routes rather than a complete block.

In this country report, we focus on the circumstances and related social and political dynamics of the influx of refugees generated in Belgium, one of the four research 'nodes' of the SOLROUTES ERC project[3], of which we are part. The first chapter aims to set Belgium in the context of the Long Summer of Migration and to highlight the challenges and struggles generated by the arrival of protection seekers. Subsequently, we will discuss the crisis of reception and the restrictive asylum policies that have been implemented, as well as the main issues faced by refugees in Belgium. In the second chapter, we focus on the (re)emergence of civil refugee support acting in solidarity with migrants and on conceptualising those actions and networks. Some authors have focused on the humanitarian versus political motives underlying the engagement of grassroots civil initiatives, others on the intersections and tactical coalitions between people on the move and their allies. To conclude, the third chapter presents the leading organisations and associations operating to assist and support migrants.

Setting Belgium into the context of the long summer of migration

In order to fully understand the recent refugee background in Belgium, we must consider the broader European context of the 'crisis' triggered by the so-called Long Summer of Migration. The movement of displaced individuals from front-line EU countries (Spain, Italy, Greece) to northern countries has triggered the (re)activation of intra-schengen border control. Although systematic border controls had been removed in the framework of the Schengen Agreement 1990, de facto 'Fortress Europe' still poses many internal and external barriers (Walters, 2002). However, the visibility of arrivals to EUrope can be traced way before

[3] SOLROUTES' core research question is: How can the turbulence, persistence, and intensity of unauthorised movements and the production of migrants' routes across 'Europe at Large' – from the externalisation of EU borders to non-EU countries – be understood? The project addresses this challenge from an innovative angle through an ethnographic exploration of the nexus between unauthorised movements and the networks of solidarity with migrants in transit, which involve actors and practices that have been overlooked in migration studies. The issues will be achieved by mapping and observing crucial nodes in migration routes within Europe (Belgium), in selected countries on its fringes (Turkey, Tunisia, Morocco) and in the Outermost Regions of the EU (French Guiana, Mayotte).

2015 and the Long Summer of Migration. In 2011, the aftermath of uprisings in North Africa challenged the Euro-Mediterranean border regime, which had been initiated through the externalisation of border control since 1995 (Hess & Kasparek, 2017). The parameters of the EU border regime shifted drastically. As some governments cooperating with Europe in its externalisation of the border control collapsed (e.g. Libya; Tunisia) and because of the ongoing conflicts in other regions (e.g. Syria), the externalised border control collapsed consequently. Maritime crossings in the Mediterranean surged, while the Balkan route has continued to be crossed by people on the move despite the 2016 EU-Turkey deal.

Belgium, bordering France, Netherlands, Germany, United Kingdom, and Luxembourg, is willy-nilly a hub of circulation for many people on the move who did not manage to secure asylum in other EU countries. Belgium also had its share as it was confronted with an important number of arrivals of protection seekers. Along with that, the dismantlement of the Calais 'jungle' settlement (the camp hosted up to 10,000 individuals at its peak) resulted in displacement towards Belgium to seek protection or to reach ports in West Flanders, alternative crossing points to the UK. Those who are pushed back from the ports in West Flanders often shift to Brussels' North – where buses and trucks depart to the UK and where support and facilitations are provided by citizens acting in solidarity with vulnerable migrants (Mescoli *et al.*, 2019; Vandevoordt, 2019a). Those seeking asylum in Belgium will find their destination in Brussels, Fedasile (Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers). The administrative intricacies related to registration for asylum applications and also the inadequacy of the existing reception structures in dealing with the number of applications have transformed a public park in the centre of the capital, located near the office in charge, into a spontaneous «refugee camp» (Lou Vertongen, 2018). Far from hosting asylum seekers only, Maximilian Park became a symbol and gathered various people on the move and solidaristic actors. The park is one of 'the places' born all around Europe where encounters and facilitations to migrants' existence are entangled and bolstered. To deal with this situation, the Belgian authorities deployed their politics of exhaustion (Ansems *et al.*, 2021) by dismantling encampments, making waiting and suspending asylum determination procedures to reduce and discourage people from staying. The aim is to channel, filtrate and sort those to be 'Dublinised[4]'. That is to filter protection seekers and determine

[4] First countries of arrival into Europe are expected to readmit asylum seekers on their territory in the application of the Dublin II Regulation: they may be migrants who just

whether their claims for protection are to be examined by Belgium or by the state of the first arrival. In fact, through biometric registrations and technologies of surveillance and datafication, EU member States aim to control secondary movement a priori, before its realisation, to exercise their sovereignty in trying to contain migrant movements. In fact, if it is possible for the state to legally deport migrants back to the first country of entry, that can be effective only a posteriori via large and complex procedures (Amigoni *et al.*, 2020).

In this vein, 'secondary movements' appear to be a prevailing issue in the Belgian context. As a matter of fact, many people on the move avoid asking for asylum as they aim to continue their journey, for instance, to the United Kingdom. In order to tackle these occurrences, *Schengen intermittences* (Garellin, 2013) have been activated to manage the circulation of illegalised people. One of its manifestations is the several joint Declarations signed between the Belgian and the British authorities to hinder the crossing through the English Channel. The areas around and leading to the English Channel are becoming an arena where repeated evictions of self-constructed camps and occupied squats, push-backs and detentions are carried out to contain 'unwanted' movements of unauthorised migrants (Annual report on migration and asylum in Belgium, 2021)

Crisis of Reception and Restrictive Asylum Policies

Navigating discussions on asylum policy history and outcomes with sensitivity and context can indeed be challenging, especially in Belgium, given the nation's intricate and significant history of immigration and refugee issues statistics from Fedasil[5], The Belgian immigration office, as reported by Myria (the Belgian federal migration centre), suggests that the arrivals of people on the move and asylum applications in 2014-2015 considerably increased and required action. Indeed, the asylum request passed from 15,849 in 2013 to 44,760 in 2015, and the reception system could not handle the sudden increase. In the following years, the

passed through these countries without applying for asylum, rejected asylum seekers, or others who did not await the outcome of the asylum procedure.

[5] Fedasil, the agency responsible for the reception of applicants for international protection and specific other categories of people, verifies if people are entitled to and interested in reception. In this case, they will allocate asylum seekers to a reception centre where they will benefit from assistance (i.e. accommodation, meals, clothing, medical, social and psychological assistance, a daily allowance – pocket money – and access to legal assistance and services such as interpreting and training).

arrivals remained consistent (18,710 in 2016, 19,688 in 2017, 23,443 in 2018), with another peak in 2019 at 27,742. There will be a slight decrease in 2020 with restrictions due to measures to prevent the spread of the pandemic, counting 16,910. The following year, the requests started to grow again, arriving at 25,971 and reaching the number of 36,872 in 2022 with the arrival of Ukraine refugees.

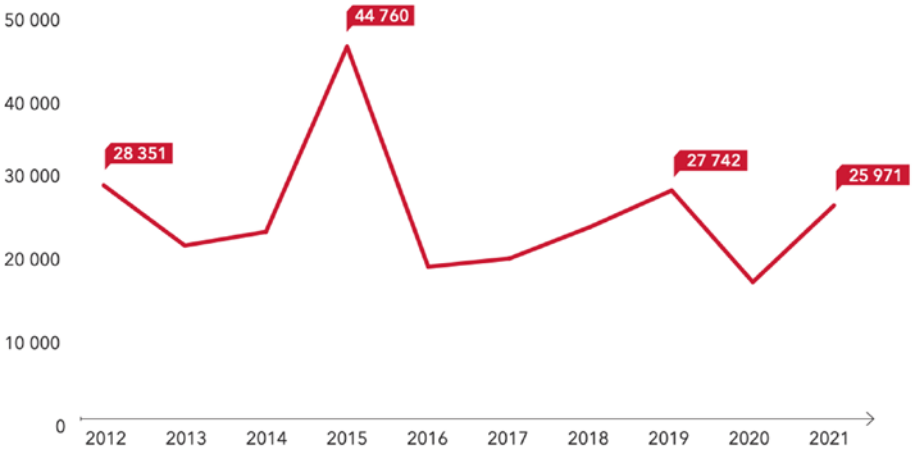

Figure 10: Number of persons who applied for international protection (asylum) in Belgium (2012-2021).
Source: CGRS / Graph asylum request.

The increased influx of asylum seekers in recent years exceeded the capacity of existing reception centres, thus generating a 'crisis of reception'. In 2015, the total number of places available was around 17,000 against more than 44.000 arrivals. In order to respond to this, the Belgian government first opened new reception centres, reaching 33,659 at the beginning of 2016. When the crisis became less acute, Fedasil decreased the reception capacity by closing 13,000 reception sites between 2016 and 2017. Subsequently, a way to 'solve the situation' in the context of continuous arrivals was to restrict access to asylum. For instance, since October 2021, access to asylum procedures has been no longer evident. Waiting in line for days before being able to make asylum applications or the constraints linked to the appointment to introduce an asylum request through digital platforms is becoming the new normal. In fact, since those waiting to apply have yet to be considered 'asylum seekers', they cannot claim rights linked to this status, such as the right to reception, legal assistance, and so forth (ECRE, 2021[6]). As

[6] ECRE (2021). Link.

a result, many migrants are sleeping rough and camping outside the registration centre, waiting to be able to submit their asylum application. This controversy was brought to the Brussels Court in the first instance, and thus, the Belgian state was ordered to ensure access to the asylum procedure in January 2022 (AIDA, 2023). An improvement was noticed up until March 2022. However, following the activation of the European Temporary Protection Directive, an increase of applicants surging from the outbreak of the war in Ukraine has resulted in the denial of access to the asylum procedure and reception conditions to many non-Ukrainian protection seekers (mainly single men).

In January 2022, the government launched a «five-point action plan» to counter the «growing issue of asylum seekers crossing into Belgium»[7]. One of the aspects targeted by this plan is prioritising «first-time applicants» who have not yet applied for or received asylum in other EU countries. Eurodac checks were deployed to sort, filtrate and manage what had been framed as 'worthy' protection and 'counterfeit' protection seekers. The narrative on 'worth' and 'counterfeit' asylum seekers stems from the assumption that only applicants coming from unsafe countries of origin are entitled to protection. If so, they have to remain in the first safe country they arrive in. Therefore, those deemed to have applied for asylum in another EU Member State were denied access to the reception network and requested to contact Fedasil to be included on a waiting list. Most of the reports claim that a large number of displaced people have been and still are in the country, including families and unaccompanied minors, with difficulties in regularising their situations and living in degrading conditions.

The duration of the asylum procedure in Belgium can vary widely based on individual circumstances, policy changes, and the number of pending cases. The process involves several stages, including registration, interview to determine the applicant's eligibility for asylum, and potential appeals if the initial decision is unfavourable. Moreover, NGOs claim a widespread lack of access to information and support when making asylum applications (RRE, 2018; AIDA, 2021). This situation is described as a reception crisis that severely affects the possibility of accessing asylum procedures and their rights. This protracted state of limbo has hurt the physical health and mental well-being of the people involved, says the *Exploring Vulnerability's Challenges and Pitfalls in Belgian Asylum System*[8] report. This is exemplified in the legislation regarding asylum and reception implement-

[7] Hamdi (2022) (in Dutch), Link.

[8] Saroléa *et al*, (2021). VULNER Research Report 1. Link.

ed in March 2018, which has lowered the Belgian asylum-related standards on several counts, reaching the absolute minimum as prescribed by EU Directives. Sometimes, the application procedure lasts for several years, and the consequence is that people feel as if they have been forgotten (RRE, 2018). Fedasil reported several times the need for personnel to shorten the procedures, manage the centres and guarantee the protection people need.

There are also alarming reports (Left In-Between, Refugee Rights Europe, 2019; AIDA, 2022) that incorrect information has been circulated that seems to be designed to deter people from claiming asylum in Belgium. Those attempts aim to dissuade asylum applicants from seeking to remain. However, the Interior Minister and the Immigration Minister have clarified their view that the state cannot take any responsibility when individuals do not claim asylum on Belgian territory. Indeed, Belgium, particularly Brussels, represents an essential migration hub where people on the move either pass, stop for a while or continue if possible. For instance, many migrants recently arrived, mainly originating from Sudan, Ethiopia and Eritrea, are not interested in applying for asylum in Belgium. However, they are staying in the territory either to find a way to continue or to get the resources to afford this. In this situation, the risk of being arrested and sent back to Italy or Greece under the Dublin III Regulation negatively affects the mental health of these people (MSF, 2019).

Moreover, they are not asylum seekers, so they are not entitled to any accommodation or forms of support. This results in people (either asylum seekers or undocumented migrants) being homeless, whilst others are living in refugee camps or occupied buildings. With the reception crisis, several small camps are now dotted around the city in places such as Namur and Liege, whilst citizens have also stepped in to house refugees in their homes, mainly through the invaluable work of the Plateforme Citoyenne de Soutien aux Réfugiés (RRE, 2018; Clarbout, 2020). Civil society organisations, however, also claim that the long-term mismanagement of the reception network has to be regarded as a leading cause of the shortage, in particular, due to the fact that centres have been systematically closed and staff dismissed in periods of lower occupation rates.

Another factor of great concern denounced by UNHCR is the arbitrary detention of several asylum seekers that happened at the borders, in the cities and even during the Dublin procedure. Belgium has six detention centres in which migrants are detained. The total capacity of the six detention centres (*124bis, Caricole, Bruges-CIB, Merksplas-CIM, Vottem and Holsbeek*) was 635

in 2022[9]. It is expected that the detention capacity in Belgium will reach 1,145 places in 2030 (see Annual Report on Migration and Âsylum in Belgium, 2021). Asylum seekers arriving without valid travel documents at the Belgian borders may be arrested (Ivi., 2021, p, 126), and the detention can go up to six months. These detentions are conducted based on Article 51/5/1 of the *Aliens Act*, which was entered into force in July 2019 to implement the articles on the detention of the Dublin III regulation for applicants who were registered in another Member State. Asylum seekers can also be detained during the asylum procedure if there are subsequent indicators that other EU countries might be responsible for handling their request. The current government, at the very least, has agreed that it can no longer detain children in closed centres as a matter of principle[10].

Belgium can be shown to have violated the international principle of non-refoulement on several occasions, and there are ongoing reports that this practice continues[11]. Removal orders can be issued to foreign nationals who are staying in the country irregularly, have been readmitted to Belgium, present false information regarding their situation to authorities or are awaiting the fulfilment of a removal order and are considered likely to impede the fulfilment of that order. In 2022, 3,300 persons were forcibly returned. It concerned 1,174 repatriations, 795 Dublin transfers, 1,329 refoulements at the border and two voluntary returns facilitated by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM).

The Moral-Humanitarian and the Political Motives and Actions in Civil Refugee Support

The discussion surrounding the 'refugee crisis' has resulted in a reconfiguration within the European border regime, as it has become a highly visible and politically contentious issue. If the EU's front-line borders are increasingly fortified to counter migrants' arrivals, some other inner countries were more concerned with intra-Schengen border-crossing of the so-called 'unauthorised' migrants. To that, we witnessed the (re)emergence of borders that had been legally and physically dismantled. Migrants arriving in front-line EU countries and aiming further north

[9] Getting the Voice Out, "What are the detention centers in Belgium?". Link.

[10] Detentiecentrum Voor Migranten, Jesuit Refugee Service Belgium. Link.

[11] Belgium: ECtHR Condemns Belgium for the Unlawful Deportation of a Sudanese National, ECRE. Link.

are often faced with Schengen intermittences (Garelli, 2013), a re-functioning of the border control attempting to block and channel their 'unwanted' movements.

Despite the expansion of migration management practices and the proliferation of borders, many people on the move have managed to arrive in northern EU countries. In this dynamic landscape, and due to its geographical location, Belgium emerges as a pivotal space for secondary movements and a hub of circulation of many people who either failed to secure asylum in other countries or chose not to pursue it. Before engaging with the existing debate on solidarity with migrants, it is relevant to bear in mind the two key moments: as mentioned above, the long summer of migration, where displaced people sought Balkan and Mediterranean routes towards Europe, and the dismantlement of the Calais settlement and growing police controls in the northern coastal areas. These events have shaped Belgium into a border zone *par excellence*, where mobilities of illegalised migrants and various forms of politics of exhaustion (Ansems *et al.*, 2021) are entangled.

The occurrences mentioned above have triggered the emergence of civil refugee support acting in solidarity with migrants. Civil solidarity concerns the actions and initiatives taken by individuals, communities, or organised collectives to support, assist and protect illegalised migrants. However, in Belgium, these forms of solidarity often clash with government politics and practices related to enforcing immigration and border control provisions. Despite the accusations directed towards solidarity actors, many have assumed their capacity to replace large humanitarian organisations famously involved in the migration industry (Fleischmann & Steinhilper, 2017; Fleischmann, 2020; Mescoli, Roblain et Griffioen, 2020; Vandervoordt, 2020). Following these forms of solidarity, many scholars have directed interest to the diverse practices implemented, focusing on the inner intentions and the political orientations of the diverse actors involved. While primarily, these forms of action were framed according to some humanitarian reasons, others are acknowledged to be grounded in encounters and cooperation among migrants and citizens. The later dynamics stimulated a conceptual shift from accounting *humanitarian actions* to *solidarity* that implies both moral-humanitarian and political motives as motivation in mobilising citizens in favour of illegalised migrants (Lafaut & Coene, 2018; De Backer, 2018; Vandevoordt, 2019; Mescoli *et al.*, 2019; Mescoli *et al.*, 2020; Ballet, 2021).

Considering that the reflection on migratory solidarity has passed through different debates and various conceptual shifts, scholarship observing the Belgian context has mainly revolved around problematising the motivations to act in solidarity with migrants (placing these on a spectrum ranging from the moral-humanitarian to the political). The practice of measuring intentions and motivations has dom-

inated this moment of reflection, leading to the production of ideal types around civil refuge support mobilisation: (1) *humanitarian* logic of formal civil society actors that keep their political stance «neutral» (Lou Vertougen, 2018), to (2) forms of aid occupying a grey zone between traditional humanitarian aid and political action (Mescoli *et al.*, 2020). However, the encounters of these assumed-to-be differentiated intentions in the fields of action produce interpersonal relations among various subjects in contexts of support and solidarity (Mescoli *et al.*, 2019), generating thus a third posture, that is of (3) *subversive humanitarianism* (Vandervoordt & Verschraegen, 2019, p.17). According to the authors, this situation refers to:

> a setting where humanitarian actions in support of refugees do not only aim to transform forced migrants into mere recipients of aid, it is a form of solidarity that allows more room for civil society actors, activities and migrants' socio-political subjectivities.

However, it is noteworthy to mention that *subversive humanitarianism* is rather an exploratory concept, useful to explore not only the dichotomy between humanitarian and political action in grassroots civil refugee initiatives but also to compare forms of solidarity in migratory contexts through underlining the key characteristics shaping these actions.

All in all, the typologies mentioned above have sought, first and foremost, the conditions that bring these pro-migrant mobilisations to place and the repertoires animating their actions. Up to this date, the various solidarity gestures observed include the provision of food, shelter, and care, which appear to be humanitarian aid. At the same time, legal, social and political support are seen to accommodate a politicising potential (Vandervoordt, 2019b). Be that as it may, if civil humanitarianism is claimed to remain neutral, citizens' acts are assumed to be contentious, ranging from social migrant support to civil disobedience.

Beyond the prefigurative politics in analysing solidarity in Belgium?

Existing reflections have looked at solidarity in Belgium, relying on the exploration of motivations and prefigurative politics (Leach, 2013) in civil support for refugees. This gaze has tended to overshadow the broader spectrum of solidarity actors engaged within Belgium's transit spaces and border zones. Within this context, prefigurative politics refers to the organisational and behavioural patterns of solidarity groups, guided by principles associated with either structural reformism or structural abolitionism of borders. However, it remains ambiguous

whether such orientations fully align with the intentions of individuals in transit or established migrants participating in these solidarity efforts. Given that contemporary solidarity dynamics in Belgium encompass not only European citizens but also migrants, it is imperative to scrutinise the manifold intentions and motivations driving solidarity actions beyond the realm of prefigurative politics.

Often, in the existing knowledge, the resources, scoops, and directions of solidarity actors are compromised to account for inner intentions and logic of action. Notwithstanding the growing recognition of the social spaces weaved when citizens and migrants are encountered in some setting of solidarity and their transformative potential (Ataç *et al.*, 2016; Hamann & Karakayali, 2016), scholarly knowledge remains, to a large extent, confined to the polarisation between the citizen and the migrants. What we see here is the primacy of the figure of the citizen with their subversive actions and the recency of the migrants (averting attention to the relevance of networks of mutual aid, information and facilitation). It is the modes of organisations and social relations attempting to implement a change in border configuration, always on behalf of the migrants, that occupy centre stage of academic attention. This gaze obscures the unsettled and often multidirectional solidarities and the potential of coalitions among people on the move (migrants, protection seekers, refugees, diaspora), as well as the forms of support and facilitation transpiring from it.

Drawing on research and fieldwork conducted in other border zones in EUrope (Amigoni & Queirolo Palmas, 2023; Oubad & Mouna, 2023) and immersive interactions with people on the move and their communities, we have noticed complex and underground forms of support, assistance and facilitation. These gestures of solidarity transgress the dominant narrative on solidarity in EUrope: a narrative assuming solidarity as essentially flowing from civil society and EU-citizens towards non-citizens − often framed as migrants − following some sort of humanitarian and/or political intentions or an entanglement of the two (Della Porta, 2018a; Vandervoordt, 2020). Our observations reveal the prevalence of ethnic and diasporic circuits wherein diverse facilitators and intermediaries offer resources, connections, and expertise to support individuals in crossing borders, establishing residency, or securing sustenance within a given place. Such circuits operate beyond the conventional narrative of solidarity, challenging simplistic dichotomies and underscoring the multifaceted dynamics underpinning migration and support mechanisms. The social capital that each migrant community has accumulated over time is made available to other migrants. Solidarity is then conceived as a complex and conflicting space of interactions revealing and generating porosity and shifting hierarchies and boundaries (Barth, 1998)

across and within social groups in transit space (Amigoni & Queirolo Palmas, 2023). A situated and multifarious set of practices and forms of alliances driven by ethical and economic motivations with blurred and contradictory traits. In this context, the 'migrant' is not the passive subject or aid receiver and the 'citizen' is the active subject providing help. We have noticed that gestures of assistance, facilitation and information to border-crossings stem from different 'knowers' and 'conductors'. Their logics of action are not rooted in prefigurative political or moral intention; instead, they refer to some situated relations 'inside the shell' of the border configuration. Here, border configurations were not contested in the words of some encountered people. They were considered as a situation that constituted ground to strengthen relations and coalitions. These solidals draw on the instrumental efficiency of their actions, privileging the immediate action and the immediate effect on the moments of solidarity. Departing from structural-reformism and structural-abolitionism paradigms, these solidarians engage in direct actions that include 'conducting' individuals in transit through alternative routes to evade stringent border controls, disseminating information regarding pivotal points of passage and available support networks located on the other side of the border, offering refuge in safe houses or squatted locations to shield individuals from law enforcement scrutiny, equipping migrants with essential tools and resources necessary for survival amidst increasingly perilous migration routes, and providing emotional and psychological support to individuals navigating through distressing and potentially violent circumstances.

Now, if we shift the focus from the account of intentions and motivations of pro-migration EUropeans to looking at the relational particularities of solidarity gestures in border zones, we will be able to encompass the material occurrences producing gestures, networks and routes of solidarity around border zones. Thus, the research team in Belgium will be concerned with the complex solidarities built around the settlement and movements of migrants in transit through and across Belgium. The complex setting of solidarity is not considered an empirical insight but an analytical starting point to go beyond the moral and the political assumed obligations and embark on the relational realms and the practical outcomes steaming from multiple nodes and poles. By redirecting the gaze from civil refugee support (where the primacy is allocated to the citizen) to the intersection and the tactical coalitions between people on the move and their allies (Queirolo Palmas & Rahola, 2021) solidarity cannot be more seen as an outcome to which we have to define the intentions, but rather a space of encounter where the complex setting, the tensions and the multidirectional form of facilitation are unpacked. In particular, close attention will be directed to the

ethnic and transnational support networks of migrants providing different contacts, expertise and valuable information necessary to settle, access legal status, and move when the politics of exhaustion (Ansems de Vries & Welander, 2021) are deemed to be unbearable.

Organisations, citizen platforms, and grassroots networks of solidarity with migrants in Belgium

This section presents a snapshot of the leading organisations, associations, and grassroots networks engaged in providing assistance, support, and solidarity to migrants in Belgium. It is noteworthy to acknowledge the evolving nature of the situation, wherein new dynamics and actors continually emerge, both formally and informally. Furthermore, it is essential to recognise that this mapping does not encompass all informal actors involved in solidarity efforts with migrants, which the SOLROUTES research team in Belgium aims to address. It is imperative to underscore the contentious nature of the field of solidarity with and among migrants. The interplay between solidarity initiatives and the enforcement of immigration laws constitutes a complex and often obscured relationship. While solidarity endeavours to furnish support and safeguard vulnerable migrants, they are occasionally met with opposition from authorities who perceive them as impeding immigration enforcement measures. This inherent tension gives rise to critical inquiries concerning the intersecting nodes where control and facilitation converge within the Belgian context.

Citizen Platform – RefugeeBXL – Brussels[12]

RefugeeBXL is a collective that transpires from the 'crisis' of refugee reception in Belgium. It deals mainly with reception and temporary housing issues in Brussels and beyond. Over the years, BXL Refugees has become a structured NGO

> providing, within its means, an unconditional welcome, a response to requests for information, training and assistance to exiles, migrants, asylum seekers, newcomers and undocumented migrants, in full respect of the individual and his or her choices.

They operate on the basis of the federation of citizens and associative energies to include vulnerable migrants in the context of the 'crises of reception' in Belgium.

[12] Link.

Association Européenne pour l'Information sur le Développement Local (AEIDL) – Etterbeek[13]
After 2015, the AEIDL engaged in promoting citizen initiatives for migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers. They operate in visibility networks and promote citizens' initiatives to deliver a counter-narrative on the hostile environment for migrants. They act to reshape the narratives around the criminalisation of migrations and reinforce compassion. Moreover, they reflect on how European, national and regional policies can facilitate the integration and empowerment of migrants and refugees.

CIRÉ (Coordination et initiatives pour réfugiés et étrangers)[14]
This organisation operates in the Brussels-Capital region and focuses on the rights of refugees and migrants. It provides legal aid, support, and advocacy.

Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM)[15]
PICUM works to uphold the rights of undocumented migrants across Europe, and it collaborates with local organisations in Belgium.

Serve the City – Leuven[16]
Serve the City is a global movement of volunteers acting on the needs of vulnerable people, including migrants. They weave partnerships with homeless shelters, refugee centres, orphanages and other associations, offering help and support. It is a coalition of volunteers that act on, among other issues, migratory challenges in the city of Leuven.

The Refugee Taskforce – Ghent[17]
The Refugee Taskforce is a cooperation between policy, administration, civil society and citizens to facilitate the reception and integration of people on the move. They draw on a pro-migrant approach. The build on weaving contact

[13] Link.
[14] Link.
[15] Link.
[16] Link.
[17] Link.

between newcomer asylum seekers and relevant organisations. Besides legal aid and information, they also involve asylum seekers in networks of volunteer work and language courses. The aim is to integrate the newcomers with the citizens and the existing organisations in Ghent and beyond.

Booms Welkom – Brussels[18]
Booms Welkom is a transnational civil refugee support initiative providing various kinds of support and advice around the legal, the social and the economic dimensions. They also provide intermediate access to suitable accommodation for asylum seekers and refugees and intermediate, as well, in assisting migrants in their bureaucratic and administrative procedures.

Caritas International Belgium[19]
Caritas is a Catholic organisation that offers support to migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. They operate on a humanitarian frame, providing basic needs to people on the move and vulnerable migrants. Their actions range from reception to social support for asylum seekers and integration of recognised refugees. They also operate on behalf of unaccompanied foreign minors. Caritas shows its involvement in visits to detention centres and intermediates for voluntary return.

Conclusion

This report examines Belgium as a destination where refugees seek settlement and transit and where diverse and nuanced forms of solidarity emerge. While Belgium is often conventionally perceived as a locus for decision-making regarding migration and asylum policies, this report highlights alternative manifestations portraying it as a borderland. In the project, the intersection between solidarity and migration will be investigated through a non-Western-centric lens, shedding light on underground forms of resistance and the emergence of new coalitions.

The first section gives a general picture of the refugees' context in Belgium and underlines the recent development of the attempt to govern people on the move under the Schengen border regime and its extensions. We have shown how the heterogeneity of the movements animating this space is reduced, to a large extent, as that becomes understandable and classifiable as 'secondary movement'

[18] Link.

[19] Link.

or 'unauthorised movements'. As we look at the occurrences transpiring from this context, we see a set of circumstances shaping the battleground to access international protection and reach desired destinations. The main issues we identify from the literature are the insufficient reception system for asylum seekers and the risk of being prevented from travelling to other European countries, either being sent back or being stuck there.

The second section delves into the construction of solidarity in Belgium as an academic research interest and the state of knowledge we have up to date. One salient element was that Belgium is seen as an inner-European border zone. Both attempts to govern and discipline migration and the aim to de-border the constraints to movement and settlement are apparent. In this configuration, academic attention has allocated an important part of its production to the pro-migrant mobilisations and forms of action in solidarity with them. The repertoires of action have been the primary elements under consideration in this reflective state. In particular, attention has been paid to assessing intentions and motivations at this moment of knowledge generation. Ranging from humanitarian logic to the political actions of civil society actors, scholars have focused on prefigurative politics shaping and animating solidarity actions by linking them to some intentions of structural reformism and structural abolitionism.

The third section is concerned with a quick mapping of existing organisations, associations, and grassroots networks working to support migrants in Belgium. The aim is to gain a sense of the actors in order to navigate the context when carrying out research under the SOLROUTES project.

In this perspective, as we examine the Belgian context, we will follow how solidarity unfolds and the particular relational and experiential aspects it triggers. To do so, we will privilege a gaze into the different forms of solidarity among diasporas linked to both movements and settlement (see nodes research plan). A general objective is to observe the ways in which gestures and acts of support for individuals on the move unfold in Belgian cities and beyond borders. This involves documenting the spaces of encounter where social boundaries, such as ethnicity, class, gender, and generation, are challenged and blur the presumed dichotomy between 'providers' and 'beneficiaries.' This aim is central to the SOLROUTES project.

7. From Greece to the Alps: solidarity flows along migrants' trajectories

Luca Daminelli (University of Genoa)
Filippo Torre (University of Genoa)

This chapter explores how transnational solidarity flows are structured and reproduced along the Balkan and the Alpine migratory routes and their dialectical relation to political, social, and economic bordering processes. During their journeys to and across the European space, migrants[1] experience structural restrictions on their (im)mobility and access to their housing rights and labour markets. In this context, grassroots solidarity practices play a central role in building and reshaping social networks, supporting migrants' agency and capacity for self-determination.

Since the 1990s, the gradual construction of the Schengen area of free movement has been based on implementing a selective visa regime for citizens from the Global South and the increasing militarisation of the European Union's (EU) external borders. The 1999 Tampere Council inaugurated the external dimension of European migration policies, based on the concept of 'externalisation' of border management through agreements with migrants' countries of origin and transit (Carrera *et al.*, 2020). Since 2015, as a result of the so-called «refugee crisis» (New Keywords Collective, 2016), also countries in the Balkan area that are not part of the EU have experienced a process of Europeanisation of their border practices and have become a kind of buffer zone in which migrant people are

[1] We adopt here Scheel and Tazzioli's perspective (2022, p. 10), when they define a migrant «as a person who, in order to move to or stay in a desired place, has to struggle against bordering practices and processes of boundary-making that are implicated by the national order of things».

blocked or kept on the move between borders as a means of containing, slowing down and filtering their entry into the EU (Stojić Mitrović *et al.*, 2020). In the meantime, several internal EU borders – such as the one between France and Italy – are also experiencing closure and militarisation processes to counter so-called 'secondary movements' within the European space, which do not respect the first-country-of-arrival principle established by the Dublin Regulation.

The progressive closure of legal channels to enter Europe and the militarisation of borders do not stop the arrival of migrants but produce material and legal obstacles that produce lengthy journeys, following increasingly dangerous, fragmented, and convoluted routes, in which itineraries by land, air, and sea are combined in creative and turbulent ways (Papastergiadis, 2000; Schapendonk, 2012). The journey can no longer be understood simply as a movement between two locations but takes on a central dimension in the lives of migrants, consisting of moments of displacement and moments of stasis, as well as multiple temporalities: delays and waiting, but also sudden and abrupt accelerations (Jacobsen *et al.*, 2021).

International migration – often intertwined with other forms of mobility – is explored as a total social fact (Mauss, 1990), a multidimensional experience for migrant subjectivities, in which it frequently gets hard to identify the start and end points of the journey. Undocumented migrants who cross an international border may find themselves «stuck in mobility» (Wyss, 2019; Fontanari, 2019). Migrants' unauthorised movements clash with control mechanisms such as push-backs and deportations that aim to disrupt their autonomous mobility and force them to undertake convoluted geographies (Tazzioli, 2020). Therefore, there is a constant conflict between migration governance and autonomy, within which the journey can turn into a marginalised way of life stretched out over time.

The State thought (Sayad, 1999) frames migratory movements along the Balkan route as a form of «transit migration» aimed at reaching the territory of the European Union and the unauthorised mobilities on the Alpine route in terms of 'secondary movements' within the Schengen area. In this chapter, we will look at the multiplicity of routes through the Balkans and the Alps through the experience of migrant subjectivities within the European space as a «battlefield» (Mezzadra & Stierl, 2019) within which mobilities are continually rearticulated in the encounter with border policies and solidarity flows.

This chapter addresses migration routes as social spaces in which tactical alliances and temporary coalitions based on different forms of solidarity are shaped around the desires and needs of travellers (Queirolo Palmas & Rahola, 2022). Solidarity should not be understood as a fixed and univocal dimension (Bonnin *et al.*, forthcoming). On the contrary, we conceive it as a set of practic-

es that circulate and inform social relations within migration routes intending to support the possibility of irregularised people exercising control over their (im)mobility (Moret, 2020). Solidarity is not given once and for all but is reproduced by the encounter of subjectivities in everyday life within the «meshes of power» (Foucault, 2007) of the European border regime. Control and solidarity are two dialectically coexisting dimensions, in constant tension with each other, reproduced by various border actors who may act in support of or in opposition to the mobility of irregularised people, giving rise to conflicts and alliances along migration routes.

A growing academic interest in migration studies focuses on forms of solidarity with migrants in transit in border areas and places of involuntary immobility (Ambrosini, 2017; Giliberti & Potot, 2021). While challenging the dichotomy between humanitarianism and political (Vandevoordt & Verschraegen, 2019), these studies focus on the role of European citizens as intermediaries, overlooking the multiple practices of migrants' solidarity based on different forms of identity and social cohesion (Bauder, 2020). During the journey, migrants can draw on a multifaceted identity repertoire, ranging from national to 'ethnic', linguistic and religious belongings. In many cases, alliances are based on a shared sense of class solidarity from being part of the same migrant condition. In particular, this chapter focuses on the solidarity flows circulating within three crucial dimensions of migrant (im)mobility: how migrants use their social capital to cross borders that limit their ability to travel, find living arrangements and work in moments of stasis during the journey.

Places of waiting and migratory crossroads are privileged places to build ethnographic relationships with people on the move. Migrants may be stuck in a place waiting to cross the border or choose to stay in a city to accumulate material and immaterial capital such as economic resources to continue the journey, information about the paths to follow, and relationships facilitating mobility. The study was situated in the transit migration hubs of Athens and the Alpine route. Positioning ourselves within associations and collectives struggling for the possibility of migrant people to self-determine and achieve their mobility desires, the research aimed to keep in contact over time with people on the move along the Balkans and through the Alps, analysing the efforts to carry out transnational mobility practices and projects across Europe's external and internal borders and the forms of solidarity needed to support these efforts.

This work is structured as follows. The first section outlines the methodology used to build ethnographic relationships and keep in touch with migrants encountered in the different fields of research. The next three sections focus on the

dimensions of travelling, dwelling, and working, respectively. Each section opens with some theoretical concepts, introducing the case studies analysed. Finally, the conclusions attempt to draw the main theoretical reflections from the chapter.

Methodology

The privilege of mobility given by our condition as white researchers with European passports has allowed us to investigate the different aspects of irregular mobility along the routes by putting into practice a multi-sited ethnography. According to George E. Marcus (1995), there are five main ways to construct it: following people, following things, following metaphors, following plots, stories and allegories, following biographies, or following conflicts. The present multi-sited research was constructed step by step, based on the trajectories observed in the field, following people's directions and journeys in a processual and dynamic manner both online through social networks and visits at a later stage of their migration paths (Schwarz, 2020). Multi-sited research reveals the processual and constructive nature of both ethnography and the lives of the informants themselves; it is not only a simple assemblage of local studies but a complex interconnection of different realities in continuous transformation (Capello *et al.*, 2014).

This chapter is based on two different PhD research projects conducted independently from each other by the researchers. The decision to write together came out later in the work when we had the opportunity to share our field experiences and discuss our findings. The construction of both studies did not immediately follow a precise direction but was characterised by a certain «messiness» (Plows, 2019), evolving fluidly according to the encounters matured in the field. In retrospect, after returning from the ethnographic field – whenever we had time to abstract ourselves from the dense relationships of the field, arranging diaries, unpacking interviews, and recovering a certain distance from the involvement with social actors—we gave the research its coherence through reflexivity and ethnographic writing.

This chapter tracks the mobility trajectories along the Balkan and the Alpine routes that cross the EU's external and internal borders, analysing the transit zones where migration containment policies are implemented as an 'extended field site'. On this basis, we adopt Ruben Andersson's (2014, p. 284) definition:

> Multi-sited ethnography still seems tied to community and locality, even in its promise of abandoning them. We have another option: the extended field site, which involves a transversal relation to locales where the field is not conceptual-

ised within narrow geographical boundaries. As "one site, many locales," it allows for the tracking, tracing, and mapping of transnational networks and systems.

The first ethnography was conducted between 2021 and 2023 in different nodes along the route from the Turkish-Greek border towards northern Europe. For the purpose of this chapter, the context of Athens is put in the foreground. In the Greek capital, the research was initiated by participating in Solidarity with Migrants, a collective composed of migrants and local and international activists struggling against national and European border policies. It aims to develop active solidarity practices both against the segregation policies of the camp system and the reproduction of borders within the urban space of Athens and against the labour exploitation of which irregularised people are frequent victims.

The second ethnographic research was carried out in the transit zones of the Alpine route in Oulx, Cesana, Claviere and Briançon between the Susa Valley (Italy) and the *Briançonnais* region (France). Fieldwork took place between 2021 and 2023 through extensive volunteering within associations and collectives to support migrants' safety and mobility. *Rifugio Fraternità Massi* in the town of Oulx and the *Terrasses Solidaires* in the city of Briançon, along with the anarchist squats sheltering migrants passing through, were used to build and develop social relations with migrants of Moroccan nationality leaving (and sometimes entering) Italy. In the same period, personal visits were organised with some privileged interlocutors on both sides of the Alps and in some of their places of origin in Morocco.

During our fieldwork, we made time to do ethnography, to take part in the everyday life of the different solidarity groups and to build trusting relationships with the people on the move. Ethnography challenges the hectic pace of contemporary academic production. In this regard, we share the perspective of Bandak and Janeja (2018) when they refer to «waiting as a method». Doing ethnography means being available for encounters, listening and observing, confronting and debating, sharing and cooperating, and co-producing critical and reflexive knowledge with the interlocutors met in the fields.

Travelling along the route

In this section, the ways irregularised people travel will be analysed in different dimensions: how they cross the border and the modalities used to get to the border. In fact, checks are applied along the borderline and can extend to all travel nodes along the route where mobility struggles occur. For instance, controlling access to public transport – a dimension that Walters (2015) frames as 'viapolitics' − a cru-

cial element defining migrants' possibility to self-manage their movements. The forms of solidarity that are forged as a reaction to control devices can be conceptualised as 'migration infrastructures' (Xiang & Lindquist, 2014) which enables the sharing of information on how to avoid being caught by the police, how to find fellow travellers, and how to use possible services that may facilitate movement.

With regard to the external borders, research along the Balkan route suggests that people often choose their itinerary and means of transport – sometimes even after long periods of immobility imposed by the border regime – based on information received from friends and acquaintances who have already followed the same route. This is what, for example, appears in the story of Abdulrahim, a 21-year-old Somali boy who met in Athens in November 2022. A few months before, he had set off from the island of Lesvos, where he had landed a year earlier, despite the so-called Greek border procedures imposing asylum seekers prolonged confinement on the island (Article 41 of Greek Law 4375/2016):

> Abdulrahim arrived in Athens at the end of July 2022 [...]. He had been waiting on Lesvos for seven months for an answer to his asylum claim; after the first denial, he appealed, receiving two negative answers within a month. At that point, he decided to leave. He says he managed to take a ferry using an ID card with the photo of a person who looked like him. [...] He will leave in a few days and wants to pass through Albania to reach Serbia. His friend is already on his journey and has shared the coordinates of where he should reach him. Abdulrahim does not know the route to get there, but he has received the contact of someone who can guide him. Serbia is the first stop, and then he will rest there and plan the next steps. [...] He described the 'kit' needed to face the journey: energy drink, dates, power bank, carrots (which he says contain vitamins beneficial to the eyes), comfortable shoes, and few but warm clothes (fieldnotes, Athens, 3 November 2022).

Given the increasing militarisation and pervasive control along the Balkan route, people sometimes find themselves compelled to rely on smugglers to navigate the most challenging segments of their journey. It is worth noting that smuggling entails a multifaceted dimension (Achilli, 2018; Amigoni *et al.*, 2021; Keshavarz & Khosravi, 2022). It is not merely about transnational networks exploiting the denial of mobility rights but also migrants or groups of migrants who, leveraging their acquired knowledge during their journey, assume roles as facilitators of crossings in exchange for payment. This occurs sometimes in line with solidarity flows – especially on a national or linguistic basis – in opposition to the border regime.

Even when people choose to rely on smugglers, sharing information within migrant social networks is crucial to identifying the facilitator to whom they will pay for services. Decisions in this regard are often made based on feedback mechanisms about their reliability and the expertise received from other people who have already made the journey. This transpires from the words of Navid, a 28-year-old Iranian who met in Greece and made his way along the Balkan route after waiting in vain for four years for his asylum application.

> From Bosnia to Croatia, there was a river. Smugglers took us to the location, then we passed by ferry [...] That's why we paid 500 euros per person. The good point was that a few friends and a few families left Mitilini before me, and I followed their exact way. Their location, with their guide, was easy [...], and then I shared the information with other people. You know, from refugee to refugee, sharing is from human to human, not from the government side (online interview with Navid, 27 April 2023).

Abdulrahim and Navid's stories shed light on the role of social networks built and reconfigured during the journey, which have changing and dynamic features. Within them, knowledge is shared to produce a practical and theoretical toolkit necessary to cross multiple borders along the itinerary from Greece throughout the Balkans.

Regarding the internal border between France and Italy, the Alpine route establishes a dialectical relationship by reintroducing French police controls along the crossing points between the Susa Valley and the *Briançonnais* region since the winter of 2016/2017. Unlike Ventimiglia, where there is a well-established collaboration with the French police in implementing control mechanisms (Daminelli, 2022) in the Susa Valley, Italian police tend to adopt *laissez-passer* logic, in most cases, limiting themselves to *managing* refoulements. Additionally, the network of alpine trails linking both sides of the border impedes the capillarity of controls, enabling migrants to reach France independently, on their own legs, with intermediation only of supportive associations (Torre, 2023).

On the Alpine route, migrants follow a ritualised form of passage[2], boarding trains from Turin and disembarking at the Oulx railway station, where *Rifugio Fraternità Massi* is situated, managed by a network of local operators and volun-

[2] In this regard, a short ethnographic film was made on the dynamics and phases of border crossing at the Alpine border entitled *The Ritual of Passage*. Link.

teers. After 'readmission procedures', Italian police transport rejected people both from the Montgenèvre Pass and the Frejus Tunnel to this shelter. Subsequently, migrants take buses to the village of Claviere – the last stop before the border checkpoint – and trek for hours along mountain trails to evade Gendarmerie checks. Utilising trailing points shared via Maps.me[3], they walk through the forest to the town of Briançon, where some French associations have set up another 'shelter', *Terrasses Solidaires*, for incoming migrants (Torre *et al.*, 2023). Apart from those shelters, a network of temporary squats operates on both sides of the border beyond legal zones, aiming for a more radical challenge to the border regime. Within this interrelated and mutually dependent shelter network, temporary alliances and tactical coalitions are formed to gather trail information and recruit fellow travellers.

From the vantage point of the Alpine route, it is possible to discern how cultural identities and social belongings can be reinforced, softened, diversified or altered during the migratory journey. Along the routes, temporary groups and coalitions often coalesce around a shared sense of national belonging. Being Moroccan, for instance, assumes a central role in defining people in exile, gaining greater clarity and significance. Whether forming groups to cross the border, seek a loan or ask for a passport to receive an economic transfer, the common recourse is often to fellow compatriots.

However, transient communities formed for border crossing also stem from other forms of solidarity transcending national, 'ethnic' and linguistic boundaries. An illustrative example of this sort of cooperation was observed during the time spent with a group comprising Maghrebi and West African men who arrived at the border by bus. It began with an invitation to Yassine – a Moroccan migrant who arrived at the Oulx refuge – to spend the afternoon in Claviere at a house sheltered from the snow, an invitation he extended to his fellow travellers. This coalition, forged at the shelter, was characterised from the outset by strong cohesion, fostered through mutual banter and jests about the respective countries' pronunciation, cuisine or cultural customs.

Yassine found himself at the shelter after being pushed back on the train at the entrance to the Frejus tunnel due to his expired passport. He has been engaging in an illegalised form of commuting between Italy and France for years. He must return to Barletta, in Southern Italy, every month to fulfil obligations related to a work contract in a pizzeria, which is necessary for renewing his residence permit.

[3] Maps.me is the most used app along the Alpine route because it works offline. Link.

Concurrently, he works as an undocumented bricklayer in the suburbs of Paris, where his right to work in another European country is denied. Like many who are pushed back at Fréjus, Yassine, holding a valid residence permit (*permesso di soggiorno*), is expected to have the right to cross the border legally. However, during selective document checks based on racial profiling (Schwarz, 2016), his lack of a passport led to his rejection and transfer to the Oulx shelter. Faced with this rejection, he is left with the choice of returning or attempting to cross the border on foot.

To cope with his irregularised mobility, new forms of transversal solidarity are activated, enabling Yassine to overcome physical and legal obstacles in his journey from Italy to France, relying on temporary alliances with others facing similar mobility restrictions. After approximately 4-5 hours of walking from Claviere to Briançon, the group reaches the French reception shelter without being found by the Gendarmerie. However, the shared also exposes tension, stereotypical views and even racist attitudes: «I don't like Afghans, they smell terrible, why don't they wash? We are all in the same condition; there is water to wash, so why don't they?» Yassine complains at the *Terrasses Solidaires*. Far from portraying a romanticised vision, among those experiencing irregularised routes, not only does solidarity emerge, but social divisions and new boundaries can also be perpetuated, limiting possibilities and modes of travelling.

Homing along the route

As mentioned above, the journey is made up of periods of mobility and moments of stop-over of varying length. Migrants may have to stay put with the aim of crossing a border, be held in place by European asylum policies, or choose to stop to collect the necessary resources to continue their journey. Sometimes, these three dimensions intersect and overlap, blurring the boundary between practices of self-determination and policies of control, revealing a relationship of constant conflict and negotiation between them.

Housing needs during periods of immobility manifest differently across various stages and locations along migration routes. This section will delve into the dimension of dwelling and establishing a sense of home in diverse contexts throughout the migratory journey, focusing specifically on the urban environment of the Athens metropolis and the French-Italian alpine border. By challenging the dichotomy between migration and dwelling, the emerging field of home studies examines the varied experiences of 'homing' migrants encounter on their journeys (Boccagni, 2017; Fravega, 2022; Amigoni *et al.*, 2023). This section explores the practices of precarious dwelling as a means of spatial appropriation,

fulfilment of material needs, and facilitation of encounters, all of which contribute to the enhancement of individual agency.

Cecile is a Congolese woman who has been in Greece for years, but her goal remains to go to France. As a single mother of three children, however, she does not feel up to the illegal journey through the Balkans; she hopes to receive her documents in Greece and then be able to travel regularly by plane. Her story unfolds amidst the confinement and waiting practices of Greek institutions towards asylum seekers:

> Since 2019, I have been here in Greece. I spent a year on the island of Leros, and then for the rest of the time, I lived here in Athens. [...]. Since I arrived in Athens, I have been living in the ESTIA project house in the Patissia neighbourhood. [...] I am tired, and I can't take it anymore. I have been waiting for a long time, and then the answer has always been... Negative, negative... I can't take it anymore; I would like to leave. I think Greece doesn't know the history of other countries... It's as if they take what happens elsewhere lightly (interview with Cecile, Athens, 24 February 2023).

In Greece, both on the islands and on the mainland, thousands of individuals reside in camps comprised of tents and containers as they await the outcome of their applications for international protection. While an urban housing programme known as ESTIA was in place until 2022, primarily intended for asylum seekers deemed vulnerable, the Mitsotakis government opted to terminate the project as of 31 December of that year. Consequently, all beneficiaries were relocated to camps, typically situated outside urban areas and subject to escalating levels of militarisation and surveillance over residents.

Confronted with this decision, Cecile opted against leaving her flat and chose not to relocate to the Ritsona camp. Her decision stemmed from a desire to maintain her existing social network within the neighbourhood and to afford her children the opportunity to continue attending public school.

> I visited the flat where Cecile and her three children live. It is an accommodation of the ESTIA project, run by the NGO Nostos. The project was permanently closed by the Greek government on 31 December, but Cecile was only informed of the closure through oral communications from the operators, with no written communication. She told me that the Nostos workers phone daily to pressure them to leave, threatening that if they do not, she will be reported to the Ministry of Immigration and summoned to court. [...] The children [...] attend the neigh-

> bourhood school, right in front of the building where they live. [...] The house is quite crumbly and consists of two rooms with bunk beds, a kitchen, a bathroom, and a small living room. They have no money and no alternative: having received the second denial and not yet started the new asylum procedure, Cecile has not received any money from the Greek government for about a year. She looks depressed, and the constant pressure from the operators puts her under severe stress. Other asylum seekers were also living in the building, but since November, they have received papers inviting them to accept transfer to the camps, which they signed and were moved (fieldnotes, Athens, 8 January 2022).

Despite her disadvantaged and precarious position *vis-à-vis* Greek institutions, Cecile found determination with the help of the Solidarity with Migrants collective and a network of support within her neighbourhood. Despite the looming threat of eviction, she summoned the courage and strength to reject the relocation:

> Yesterday, the Nostos workers returned to visit Cecile, and they 'proposed' to her that she go and live in Ritsona. [...] She has no intention of going to live in the camp; she knows that the living conditions are very bad and does not want her children to quit school. All the documents they asked her to sign were in Greek, and no translation was available except for the one made orally by the NGO mediator. Cecile refused to sign, and the workers told her that they would come the next day to collect the keys to the house. [...] This morning, a solidarity rally was organised in front of the building's front door, attended by around 30 people, including the teachers of her children's school, who alternated between giving support during their free working hours. [...] Eventually, the Nostos workers gave up, and Carine was still at home. [...] With the help of solidarity workers and legal support, she is gaining time, postponing the date of her eviction and avoiding forced relocation to Ritsona (fieldnotes, Athens, 24 January 2023).

Over the following weeks, a community came together to support Cecile and her children. Teachers organised collections at school, while the Solidarity with Migrants initiated a crowdfunding campaign to raise additional funds. Concurrently, practical solutions were sought to help the family remain in their home, sparing them from eviction:

> Nostos turned up again today at Cecile's home: they gave her a letter from the Ministry communicating the suspension of all support because of her refusal to move to the camp. Cecile was able to start her new asylum application, but the

> law has changed, and only people living in camps are now entitled to financial support from the authorities. However, the positive news is that the lawyer who is voluntarily pursuing Cecile's case has spoken to the owner of the house, who has agreed to give her a proper lease, replacing the previous one in the NGO's name. In the meantime, a Spanish organisation has been found that is willing to contribute to the expenses of the house for six months, and within three days, activists and teachers have organised an initiative in the square in support of Cecile and generally to raise the housing problem in the neighbourhood (fieldnotes, Athens 23 February 2023).

Cecile and her three children's story exemplifies the significance of engagement in grassroots solidarity circuits and the determination to remain entrenched within them. This steadfast commitment serves as a vital form of resistance against the various manifestations of marginalisation and segregation perpetuated by the border regime.

Although situated on the geographical margins of France and Italy, the network of refuges transcends mere transit spaces, evolving into active living environments where numerous Moroccan citizens orbit, stop or return. This living dimension finds expression notably within a network of occupied spaces, such as the squat named *Yallah!*, located in the village of Cesana along the road from Oulx to Claviere. The primary goal of these squats is to furnish practical and logistical support for border crossing, acting as a form of protest against the European border regime.

The aim is to foster an equal relationship where the distinction between European citizens and non-citizens, though not erased, does not impede the establishment of spaces for migrants' self-management practices. This sentiment is echoed in an Arabic flyer, coinciding with the inception of *Yallah!*:

> *As-salam haleikum, ya musafir!* Welcome to these mountains! There's a self-managed occupied house in Cesana near the French border. It's open all the time, every day. Here, in this place, you can rest, cook, change clothes, study with friends, and ask all kinds of questions and doubts. There's no pressure on your departure date here. The only things that are not accepted are violence and discrimination (racism and gender discrimination) and business (traffickers and drug dealers).

The space left for self-management is gradually filled by Maghrebi migrants, predominantly of Moroccan nationality, who choose to stop because of the opportunity to take a 'breath' from continuous mobility and carry out a per-

sonal appropriation of the space, to cook and rest independently, to establish social relations with other travellers and activists, to await the right moment to restart their journey, and ultimately, to contribute towards facilitating border crossings.

While European activists choose to spend time in Cesana out of ideological commitment, numerous Moroccan migrants end up residing in the house out of necessity, driven by the absence of alternative solutions to meet their housing needs. However, despite various initial motivations for choosing to settle in the squat, many migrants eventually become emotionally, politically, and materially engaged in the project of creating a temporary home for people in transit, akin to the European militants.

In this context, Larbi's profile stands out as emblematic. He is a 26-year-old undocumented Moroccan migrant on the move to France who decides to settle in Cesana to manage and inhabit the squat for several months until his European comrades opt to depart. Consequently, he decides to follow them, seeking to remain part of the supportive network he built and secure the support necessary to resist a condition of radical juridical, economic and social marginality. Larbi finds a new home in another squat located on the outskirts of Turin. He joins forces with some of the French, Italian, and Moroccan activists he befriended in Cesana, sharing a sense of political proximity with them. In his words:

> I'm not sure if I would call myself an anarchist; I'm half an anarchist. But I like what they do: helping others, immigrants, the undocumented. What do you think? For me, they are right, one hundred per cent, to fight against the state, against borders. Fortunately, I have built up this network over the years: now they are the only ones who help me. They know me, they know that I've never stolen in Cesana, I've never caused problems, they know that I'm shy... I liked them right away; they're the only ones who help immigrants, and it's nice to be with them. They are good... I am now a militant anarchist (interview with Larbi, Turin, 23 October 2023).

Working Along the Route

The Balkan route serves as a viable option for numerous migrants, offering the possibility of spreading out costs over time and working in various economic sectors and conditions in the stepwise journey. This option is not limited to individuals from Asia; many African migrants also see it as a preferable alternative to sea travel, where expenses typically require immediate and full payment in advance. It is important to highlight that access to certain employment sectors is heavily

influenced by the border regime and the mechanisms of illegalisation it generates. Frequently, the irregular or precarious legal status of migrants places them in vulnerable positions, subjecting them to exploitative and underpaid working conditions, frequently in agriculture and construction. As Nicholas De Genova pointed out (2013, p. 1181):

> The scene (where border enforcement performatively activates the reification of migrant 'illegality' in an emphatic and grandiose gesture of exclusion) is nevertheless always accompanied by its shadowy, publicly unacknowledged or disavowed, obscene supplement: the large-scale recruitment of illegalised migrants as legally vulnerable, precarious, and thus tractable labour.

Many of the people encountered in the Greek context recount that they had previously worked in Turkey, albeit under conditions of severe exploitation, to accumulate the money necessary to finance their journey. Indeed, the requirement to cover the cost of the journey gives rise to a mobile workforce willing to accept employment under low wages and irregular conditions, as attested by these two interviews with Afghan individuals met in Greece:

> I was working in a factory. A tailoring factory. A lot of people are working in that sector because Turkey is well known for their clothes… Because it's cheap also! They export clothes to Europe, but when you work there, you earn, let's say, 5 or 7 euros per day! But maybe you make a hundred clothes per day by yourself… So, I don't know, it's a lot of money! (interview with Nahid, 20 April 2023).

> After I arrived in Turkey, I started to work there, but the conditions were very bad; maybe I worked for twelve hours, sometimes even fifteen hours, and after that, they didn't give me money. [...] We were scared of the police because they could push us back to our country, and so we couldn't go to the police to ask for our money […]. My first job was to collect trash from the street. I was working for a small company. I don't remember the name, but of course, I was working illegally. Then, I found a tailor shop, and I worked there for two months (interview with Sayed, 29 April 2022).

The same economic needs then reappear once migrants arrive in Greece and wish to continue their journey northwards:

> Abdulrahim worked in Athens for three months to collect the money he needed to continue his journey. For two months, he picked tomatoes in a place out of Athens and was paid 40 euros a day − which he considers to be good money. Then, in a hangar near Athens, where he filled containers with other people, receiving 10 euros for each one filled. He also worked for a few days in the cleaning sector; one person would come to the camp in the morning to pick up the residents and take them to clean offices, but he did not pay them (fieldnotes, Athens, 3 November 2022).

Stories like Abdulrahim's are not unusual. Asylum seekers find themselves trapped in bureaucratic webs for years, waiting for the result of their applications and enduring a legal limbo that breeds extreme precarity. Throughout this period, they receive minimal support from the Greek state − economic assistance amounts to 75 euros per month. Consequently, many asylum seekers seek employment to improve their living conditions and save up the necessary funds to leave Greece and continue their journey to northern Europe.

As previously mentioned, recent decisions by the Greek government have further isolated asylum seekers from the social networks and relationships that can be cultivated within the urban spaces of Athens, relegating them to increasingly distant and inaccessible facilities. The strategic placement of these facilities underscores their ties to specific production sectors. The Schisto camp lies not far from the port area of Piraeus, while across the hill, Perama houses shipyards. The road from Schisto connects the hinterland to Skaramakas and Aspropyrgos, one of Greece's primary industrial hubs, hosting the country's largest refinery, as well as metallurgical, food, construction, plastic, and chemical industries, waste disposal firms, and expansive modern logistics warehouses. Conversely, the Malakasa camp, 40 km from Athens, is situated amidst the warehouses of major corporations and logistics firms, while the Ritsona facility occupies an isolated location, 70 km away from the capital, in the heart of an agricultural plain, alongside a few small food industries.

> The Ritsona camp is literally in the middle of nowhere; around it, there are only agricultural fields, factories and warehouses. The only means of getting to Athens are illegal taxis: 30 euros each for a round trip. If you come on any given day, it is a constant bustle of trucks and vans picking people up outside the gates to take them to work in the agricultural fields and bringing them back when the sun goes down (fieldnotes, 16 January 2023).

The working conditions in the fields are so described by Pierre, a Congolese asylum seeker living in the camp:

> People wake up at 4 or 5 in the morning to go to work in the fields. Sometimes, they are not even paid; the bosses take advantage of them. In some cases, they are paid 25 euros for 12 hours of work. That's nothing, it's peanuts! You get up at 4 am and come back at 6 pm; when do you have time to eat or rest? When do you have time to do anything other than work? This is not life (interview with Pierre, Athens, 10 February 2023).

As demonstrated by these interviews, the camps consequently turn into a pool of labour highly susceptible to exploitation due to the precarious legal status of residents. These forms of exploitation do not merely produce passive subjects. In February 2023, prompted by a few individuals residing in Schisto and Ritsona, with the support of Solidarity with Migrants, the group self-defined as International Workers of Athens was born. Comprised of migrants and local and international activists, this collective gathered and exchanged experiences regarding the working conditions of migrant labourers in and around Athens. They conducted mapping exercises to identify exploitation locations, aiming to understand how migration and asylum policies intersect with mechanisms of labour exploitation. In the spirit of co-research (Alquati, 1993), the goal was not solely to collect and disseminate information but to instigate a collective and autonomous process wherein knowledge production serves as a catalyst for raising awareness, fostering self-determination, and claiming rights. On the one hand, as Pierre and Alphonsine, a refugee woman from Congo, highlight in the following excerpts, migrants contributed their first-hand experiences of exploited and underpaid labour, often carried out under precarious conditions.

> Usually, there are middlemen; sometimes, they are other migrants, often Pakistani or Albanian. They pick us up by car or van, take us to work and then keep part of the pay. They are the ones who make arrangements with the employers. When I managed to work by making agreements directly with the Greek employers, I earned more, but still, you work a lot. And working loses its meaning if you cannot do anything else with your life. I haven't come to the assembly for a long time precisely because I have worked so much in the last period (interview with Pierre, Athens, 10 February 2023).

> We gather between 5 and 6 a.m. at the Plateia bus stop in Aspropyrgos. From there, we are divided into different trucks and vans and taken to different workplaces.

> Some are taken to do cleaning work, others to clean fish or to work in warehouses or filling containers. We almost always do not know who the employers are because it is the middlemen who make the arrangements with the bosses. Sometimes, we do not even know the exact place where we are taken to work because from inside the trucks, you cannot see the road, and sometimes they take our phones away, so we cannot even check with Maps where we are. Most of the people there in the morning live in Athens or in the Schisto camp... They also take us to work for a company that prints brochures and newspapers for the airport. The work is very hard; you have to be fast, you work standing up, and you cannot stop the machines. The pay is just over 3 euros per hour. We do not know if the employers pay a full wage, but certainly, the brokers keep some of the money. For example, if they agree on a wage of 35 euros per day, then we only get 28 euros. Usually, the wages are 28 euros for eight hours of work, from 6 a.m. to 2 p.m., and 36 euros for ten hours of work, from 6 a.m. to 4 p.m. I don't even know what the minimum wage is in Greece... (interview with Alphonsine, Athens, 22 February 2023).

On the other hand, solidarity activists have been instrumental in establishing a mutual aid network, which includes lawyers specialising in labour and immigration law. This initiative resulted in the production of knowledge concerning the mechanisms of recruitment and exploitation of migrant labour. Additionally, it facilitated the initiation of individual legal proceedings against specific employers and collective mobilisations aimed at advocating for higher wages and improved working conditions:

> A few days ago, late at night on January 23 and at dawn on January 24, a group of 40-50 workers from different countries living in the Ritsona refugee Camp went on strike after their boss repeatedly avoided paying their salaries. They managed to force the boss to pay some of their money by blocking the bus which brought them from the camp to the workplace from the camp to the workplace, which is located in the Aspropyrgos industrial zone. Despite the boss threatening to abandon them in the middle of the night in the industrial area where they work outside Athens, they also managed to force the company to provide a bus to go back to the camp. The struggle never stops. Work exploitation and racism can only be fought through struggle and solidarity! (post on Solidarity with Migrants Facebook page, 26 January 2024).

Even upon reaching Western European countries, the lives of irregularised migrants remain fluid and mobile. The challenges of establishing legal, economic, and social stability prompt them to utilise movement within the integrated Eu-

ropean space tactically. This tactical approach capitalises on structural differences in national labour markets, contributing to what has been termed as «fitful circulations» (Anderlini, 2022) among migrants undergoing irregularisation processes. Trapped in a social condition akin to sub-proletarians, they are compelled to offer their labour across Europe, traversing a vast transnational perimeter in pursuit of job opportunities in sectors such as the agri-food industry, construction, the gig economy, or the informal sector. Mobility thus becomes indispensable for survival in a European labour market characterised by its preference for flexible, temporary, and low-cost labour.

Many Moroccan migrants encountered along the Alpine route often were leaving Italy after engaging in seasonal agricultural work for a period. Agricultural harvesting, known for its demanding nature and typically precarious, low-paying conditions, is viewed by many interlocutors as a potential source of informal employment, particularly within the Italian context. This perspective is echoed by Hamou, a traveller from Agadir, who finds himself stranded at the *Terrasses* of Briançon while awaiting the means to continue his journey:

> Compared to Italy, there are many more opportunities for undeclared work in France. In your country, undocumented people can only work in agriculture, in France also by the bakers, in shops...
> In 2020, I took a plane from Casablanca to Istanbul; in Turkey, I worked for a year to pay for my trip. I left in October 2021 and arrived in Italy in March 2022, passing through Serbia, Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Austria. After being in prison in the Czech Republic, a friend told me to join him in Campolongo, near Battipaglia, to pick fruit and vegetables. There was so much work and so little money. Some days, they didn't even pay me. I was living with ten other people in an occupied house, like the one in Cesana.
> I don't know where to go; I will stay here until I hear about some job offer. Now I am completely broke; I have no one left in Morocco, my mother died, my father remarried, and I haven't spoken to my brother since I left the country. I have no one who can send me money, so let's see... (interview with Hamou, Briançon, 16 October 2022).

Intra-European mobility is driven not only by so-called 'asylum-shopping' but also by international labour migrants who navigate irregular routes to move between various European countries, often as a final resource for survival in pursuit of job opportunities in the informal economy. The network of refuges along the Alpine route provides them with opportunities to connect and gather information regarding potential employment prospects.

Conclusions

From the collected testimonies and the observed dynamics in the different research fields, solidarity emerges as a multifaceted flow, taking on different characteristics based on the needs, desires, and demands of migrants in different territories and the diverse ways in which border policies and practices are articulated.

Employing a deeply ethnographic approach, the article has uncovered migrant subjectivities to offer a unique perspective on the disciplining practices of the border regime and, more significantly, on tactics of migrant resistance. Life stories shared in the text reveal that migrant subjectivities, far from being passive subjects, continuously strive for forms of self-determination within the meshes of control. As De Genova (2021) pointed out, border policies produce subjectivities not only insofar as they seek to subjugate them but «for no other reason than that the human persons subjected to them stubbornly persist in seeking ways to prevail in spite of them».

If the border is not merely a physical demarcation but a pervasive mechanism within space and society, solidarity practices aimed at debordering confront not only illegalised border crossings but also challenge the array of exclusionary practices or differential inclusion (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013) experienced by migrants at various stages of their journey or settlement in a place. From this perspective, solidarity practices represent genuine efforts to deborder the multitude of borders – physical, legal, bureaucratic – that migrants encounter in Europe.

As evidenced by the ethnographic material in sections 2 and 3, solidarity not only facilitates the possibility of movement across borders but also enables the possibility of settling in a place, fosters social networks of mutual support, and empowers people to participate in the life of local communities, responding to housing, educational, working and social needs. It can, therefore, be said that solidarity along migration routes not only supports the right to mobility but also the right to stay, fostering collective resistance against marginalisation and segregation.

In section 4, the intimate connection between work and mobility becomes apparent. Working under various conditions and hierarchies influenced by class, race, gender, and nationality may serve as a means to gather resources for the journey. Simultaneously, mobility is influenced by the available work options migrants seek to access. The dialectical relationship between labour and migration underscores how border policies shape access to labour markets, yet migration's relationship with capitalism extends beyond mere labour exploitation. It encompasses the conflict between efforts to control movement for productive

purposes and the inherent autonomy and turbulence of migration, highlighting its complexity and resistance against purely economic factors (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013; Casas-Cortes *et al.*, 2015; Peano & Sacchi, 2023).

In summary, the dimensions of travel, settlement and work are deeply interwoven, with solidarity practices emerging at their intersection. Living in a self-managed alpine refuge, for instance, transcends mere evasion of controls; it serves as a means of building a sense of home and community, offering mutual support across various needs. Similarly, resistance against living in segregated conditions within camps enables migrants to remain part of a supportive community, addressing social, educational and working needs while accumulating resources for the journey. To conclude, solidarity is not a static concept but a fluid process structured by various proximity logics – be it language, ethnicity, nationality or political affinity. It circulates underground, emerging at key points in the conflicts between control and autonomy of migration.

8. Designing, reshaping, inventing biographies and paths: anthropopoietic metamorphoses[1]

Piero Gorza (OnBorders)
Amin Pasha Zamani (OnBorders)

A few methodological considerations for navigating our ethnographic and conceptual field

We focused our attention on several types of emic networks:

1. the self-representations of people on the move;
2. the networks that construct people's movements and their subjectivities.

Our considerations below are primarily based on the latter.

We conducted comparative studies of online networks in three distinct contexts: the Persian-speaking Southwest Asian area, the Arabic-speaking Maghreb area, and the sub-Saharan, predominantly French-speaking area. During these studies, we paid close attention to the various forms of communication that guide people in their migratory movements and in constructing their identities before and during migration.

In addition, we have grounded our research path by collecting personal stories, life memories and indications in Oulx, at the Northwest Alpine border, whilst also weaving constructive and dialogic relationships with Tunisian sub-Sa-

[1] This text was presented in Genoa on 27 September 2023, during the workshop held by the SOLROUTES project.

haran and Maghrebi associations that support people before they embark on their journey to Italy. Observation and listening have guided each operational step. This is an ethnographic journey of research 'with' and 'between,' and, we would say, starting 'from' the perspective of people on the move. It is situated within the OnBorders project *Conoscere e Operare tra Frontiere* (Knowing and Operating Across Borders) and is conceived as a perspective that engages in dialogue with academic debates seeking to combine theoretical reflection with political engagement[2]. Although this piece is signed by two people, the research is the result of a multi-authorial collective effort.

This piece deliberately omits to name our interlocutors and the emic sources upon which it is based, as the publication of names and sources could potentially harm people on the move. This is a commitment founded on relationships of trust, which we must protect, even when dealing with long-distance and mostly virtual communications. While the omission may affect the scientific rigour of what is set forth, our choice is to bet on a method that emphasises a return to the human subject and hermeneutic categories based on circumstantial procedures. It may be relevant to situate this perspective within ethnographic research that has seen a multi-year field presence (see, for instance, Onborders 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023 at www.onborders.altervista.org and, in particular, Moschella *et al.*, 2021). Observation in the Northwestern Italian frontier has been focused on methodological indicators and perspective angles that we try to exemplify below.

1. The first point concerns the horizontality and longitudinally of the analysis. It is impossible to understand a border without reading and considering it about previous ones. Similarly, one cannot comprehend the individuals arriving at the Northwest Alpine border without understanding their experiential backgrounds and horizons of hope (cf. Gorza & Moschella, 2022; Gorza *et al.*, 2022). We often study and operate in isolated junctures or through sector-specific expertise, whereas people on the move navigate by routes informed by lived experiences. Reflection on dual absence (Sayad, 2002) and multi-sited research (Clifford & Marcus, 1986) tend to overlook the temporal aspects and formative characteristics of the journey. Both the emphasis on absence and the emphasis on steps or stop-over anal-

[2] Federico Rahola and Luca Queirolo Palmas (2020) have addressed the question of the 'underground railway', and this essay notices some of its themes but focuses on how emic networks build and support migratory mobility in concrete ways.

yses hardly capture the complexities of a journey. A journey, like memory, dream, or nostalgia, is something more than the sum of their elements, and it presupposes moments of invention and intention.

2. Atiq Rahimi (2018), in *Grammar of an Exile*, asserts that «absent is the verb», a statement that, we believe, indicates a tendency to focus on subsequent frames of settlement, leaving movement aside. Conversely, it is the *verb* that breathes life into inanimate objects, connecting the past with the future and one space with another. To paraphrase Reinhart Koselleck and Hans-Georg Gadamer (1990), it links traditional spaces with horizons of hope and the personal 'we' with the collective 'us' that interacts with it. Our focus on subjectivity and mobility has led us to explore the theme of 'inhabiting the path', where habit, settlement, and mobility articulate a dynamic existential temporality.
3. The temporality of itinerancy highlights the anthropopoietic[3] nature of the movement, examining how specific natural, experiential, and emotional geographies mould the subjective character of those experiencing them.
4. The 'return to the subject' is the perspective on which all the above points depend[4]. This perspective is discussed last as it evolves dynamically through field research, which presupposes the localised negotiation of viewpoints, allowing for subsequent deconstruction and reversal. The premise involves the methodological challenge of adopting a foreign perspective.

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[3] The concept of anthropopoiesis, as elaborated by Italian anthropologist Francesco Remotti (2002; 2020), refers to the dynamics of manufacturing the self and subjectification.

[4] The perspective of returning to the subject draws from a dialogical field as its theoretical reference – a heterogeneous space of voices in tension. This space connects Arendt's «being among others» from *Vita Active* (1991) to Wittgenstein's idea of play and extends from perspectivist reflections on figure and ground to the feminist debate on the autonomy of migration. Notably, it also ties into the concept of 'agency' as formulated by Judith Butler (2017) and Joan Scott (1988). See also the interesting article *The Intimate Body of Agency* by Roberto Beneduce and Simona Taliani (2021) and Ugo Fabietti's preface to *Agency and Language*, a volume edited by Aurora Donzelli and Alessandra Fasulo (2007). However, while the return to the subject draws inspiration from extensive scholarly literature, it has been concretised through long-term fieldwork in border environments and has matured through dialogue with people on the move. Conversely, it was precisely our prolonged presence at the frontier over several years that has exposed the self-referential nature of much humanitarian associationism. Beyond grand statements and declarations, this approach often reduces its beneficiaries to mere objects of its benevolent intentions and plans.

Walking backwards toward the subject

In contrast to a perspective of returning to the subject, which is constructed within the erratic experience and in a supranational context, we often consider migrants' presence about the prominence it assumes in the geographical, political, and social spheres of the 'us'. In the eyes of the person on the move, we look at our eyes, not theirs. Similarly, their voice is often used merely to confirm our analyses or to justify our positions, as well as our agency, whether in support or opposition to their presence. In this context, the voice of the person on the move in this sense is silenced and rendered mute; their perspective is secondary. Likewise, humanitarianism often presumes to know *a priori* what the Other needs, projecting the benevolence of our perspective. A colonial perspective resurfaces whereby the Other exists only through our observation. There is civility, knowledge, and decorum in our gaze. A gaze that claims to embody civility, knowledge, and decorum.

There is a tendency, a categorisation of the gaze that extends a Eurocentric paradigm and that of the Cartesian cogito, captured by the notion 'I think, therefore the world is'. After all, even Immanuel Kant believed that his library in Königsberg was sufficient to know the world. Roy Wagner (2019), in a dense essay entitled *Facts Force You to Believe in Them; Perspectives Encourage You to Believe out of Them,* ends his paper with an assertion that we believe he would not mind being considered equivocal:

> Bartender: «More drinks, René?» Descartes: «I think not» (disappears).

On the one hand, there is a fading effect; on the other hand, there is an implicit, and in this case intertextual, reference to the importance of intentionality. This power to subtract presence not only produces invisibility but also defines on the skin of the Others what is or is not considered life and experience − that is, to determine the conditions of possibility of what we call real. Even within the confines of territorial commissions that grant humanitarian protection, the lives of asylum seekers are subject to fading based on the criteria of truth established by the adjudicator.

> Before the attestation of existence in the discursive realm of asylum and hearing, there was no life as a subject; it was only a teeming of more or less transparent attempts. [...] Asylum seekers - at the precise moment of assessing their legitimacy and identity as "refugees" - are not yet subjects, not even of the state (i.e., subjects of law). From here stems the possibility and the capability of the latter, in its

> venues, to "deny" them, "annihilate" them, "scatter" the possible meaning of their stories to declare them unreal, their contents "non-existent." This endured exclusion can result in symbolic violence that occurs on what, after all, never existed, "on nothing" (our translation, Becatti, 2022).

Yet, this theme becomes disorienting as Hannah Arendt, in *Vita Activa* (2017), reinterprets a passage from the French philosopher:

> I have been thought, and therefore, I am.

This opens up a vast new area for reflection concerning the subject on the move and, above all, compels us to reconsider subjectivity and background. Here, we consistently define ourselves concerning a background and based on the interactions that connect us to others, linking individual agency to context. In this discourse in which our perspectives shift the emphasis among the different actors, without, however, leaving aside the complexity of the dynamics of their interactions, a question remains: what scenarios, among many, does the return to the subject reveal? We consider it useful to borrow a concept found in the secondary literature and elaborated by Gian Andrea Franchi (2022) − an author and friend who integrates fieldwork and theoretical reflection: the 'elsewhere'. Its semantic ambiguity refers to a plurality of focal points: an 'other where,' suggesting diverse and multiplied geographies (the same space reconfigures itself depending on who inhabits it), as a place where one encounters others, becoming more exposed and compelled to invent forms and channels of dialogue. However, what most captures attention is that the 'elsewhere' is inherent to the space-time in which one becomes 'Other' relative to what was before. This projection beyond the horizon is fascinating and, we believe, also involves processes of self-metamorphosis. We also think this aspect holds broader significance and pertains to the non-actuality of anthropology, namely, the exploration of other modes of life and thought. These modes, albeit marginal and sometimes unsuccessful, can nonetheless illuminate alternative paths and narratives distinct from a myopic and predatory present (Remotti, 2014). Herein lies the importance of hearing the voice of the other and reading their gaze. The significance is the return to a subject − the migrant − experiencing metamorphosis, which, moreover, necessitates a redefining of the modalities of our comprehension (from the Latin etymology 'taking together'), even in situations inevitably marked by asymmetry and inequality. From this perspective, it then becomes crucial to understand the steps of this formative journey.

Rites of passage and anthropopoetic metamorphosis: walking, growing, redefining lives

During the fieldwork and subsequent collection of testimonies, we frequently encountered teenagers, usually aged 13 to 15 years old, who, due to their proficiency in languages and information technology, had led their families through 'jungles' and unknown territories that could only be navigated with the use of mobiles and maps. Miriam, only 13 years old, took pride in studying the routes each day, enabling her household to navigate through the Balkan trails. Similarly, 15-year-old Leyla, drawing on this expertise, publicly reprimanded the adults because she had guided the family and ensured its safety[5]. In these cases, the crossing of the woods, inherently fraught with the risk of getting lost and where paths must be constantly found, rises to a true practice that is pedagogical in one respect and thus assumes the form of a ritual toward adulthood. Walking and growing up become interdependent elements. As we have noted in previous texts, cruel 18th century fairy tales served a similar pedagogical function, where growing up involved unravelling the wickedness and deceptions of the adult world. This path, if bravely navigated, could save not only the child protagonist but also their family (see *Migranti e Frontiera Nord Ovest*[6]). For other older youth, overcoming arduous trials without resorting to smugglers restored their pride and self-esteem. We recall the case of Kutaiba, an Iraqi who, upon his arrival in Germany, sent us a video highlighting his journey. Each sequence exuded the pride of having overcome difficulties through his strength and of having survived conditions of inhumanity and violence. It was only the ending that restored meaning and history to a biography marked by exile and suffering. Edda Fabbri, who spent 13 years in a *calabozo*, Uruguayan maximum-security prison, begins her book, *Oblivion*, by asserting that to write the memoirs of degrading and unspeakable years, she had to begin with the ending (Fabbri, 2012).

Conversely, when considering the impacts of the migratory journey on different generations, we often observed the despondency and frustration of fathers who felt they had failed to protect their families adequately. For women, particularly mothers with children, the recurring theme is the physical and psychic fatigue from moving intermittently between confinements, pushbacks, and crossings. They bear the burden of managing daily life consistently lived on the mar-

[5] Interviews were collected daily by the Onborders Working Group (2020-2023).

[6] Link.

gins, where the *game* has taken on the form of compensating for the miserable conditions their families endure. Nonetheless, the journey profoundly affects individuals' self-presentation and being. Often, it is the body that illustrates how desires and aesthetics are constructed, oscillating between preservation and transformation. Haircuts and dyes, for instance, can signal the incubation of change beneath the protective cloak of a veil. The margin becomes a place of experimentation, and the body a canvas for inscribing potential futures[7]. There is another distinctly female aspect of person-building that demands reflection. Childbearing is, by definition, an anthropopoietic act and, in some instances, represents a stake beyond the horizon. Considering those travelling the Balkan route from Iran, Afghanistan, and Kurdish areas, the birth of children en route − often as they approach their destination − signifies a deep-seated commitment to the nearly realised hope of a dignified life extended through progeny. However, different geographical routes might alter the meaning of this act. For many sub-Saharan women, the child they carry symbolises a journey marked by prolonged exposure of the body to violence[8]. Even in these circumstances, we can think of childbirth as an anthropopoietic practice[9] and the body as a site of memory (see Belting, 2023).

Emic words: *Khod Andaz, Tempt Run*

Everyone who studies the Balkan route knows that the term '*Game*' is used to denote the act of clandestinely crossing borders. What intrigues us most about this term is that it draws parallels to virtual games, emphasising the importance of learning, crossing, taking risks, passing trials, and advancing to the next stage. Moreover, each step foreshadows the next, with the outcome depending on one's ability to navigate cautiously through a space filled with dangers and traps. Arnold Van Gennep would suggest that we are witnessing classic rites of passage, tripartite in nature, involving abandonment, a liminal moment, and emergence at a new level. However, this sequence is fraught with risk, as the possibility of death or being pushed back to the previous point along the route is ever-present and real. Vulnerability and the perpetual risk towards horizons of hope define the

[7] See, for instance, Agier (2008); Crenshaw (1991).

[8] On regimes of pain visibility, see Pinelli (2019).

[9] One thinks of the anthropopoietic role not only in terms of the positive construction of humanity but in the broader sense of shaping that life, contexts and policies operate on the person, even when it comes to dramatic events (Remotti, 2020).

parameters within which both individual and collective actions of migrants operate. It is also noteworthy how the cyclical process of losing and gaining various aspects of life manifests repeatedly in this *game*. This game dramatically enacts procedures of self-construction and deconstruction; each instance imbued with existential significance that transcends the immediate circumstances. Nevertheless, the impact of this practice on people varies by age, gender, and the extent of suffering endured. In Persian, the expression '*Khod-Andaz*,' used almost exclusively in migration discourses, refers to an autonomous mode of undertaking the journey. Meaning 'to throw oneself', it embodies, for those on the journey, a Heideggerian sense of agency akin to 'being thrown'.

Once again, figure and ground highlight dynamic and interdependent relationships. In another context, with different nuances, the term '*Harraga*,' popular in Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco, translates as 'those who burn' and refers pragmatically to *sans papiers*. It encapsulates the semantic variations of 'burning papers' and 'burning oneself'. In these dichotomous meanings of burning − both documents and oneself − lies the epic and dramatic nature of experiences played out around the liminal space of the border. Losing and realising, abandoning, and finding are facets of the same migration gamble. The notion of 'burning frontiers' holds equal, if not greater, interest. We find resonance even when we change latitude and route. In Côte d'Ivoire, the crossing of borders is described with the term '*Tempt run*', which, as we were literally told, evokes the condition of 'zombies' and their role as transgressive actors on the thin line dividing life from death. On the one hand, there is the spectral presence of death; on the other, the repeated transgression and piercing of this boundary. Khader, a young man from Ghana, confirmed that this expression evokes the emotional and existential conditions of a person in transit who experiences discouragement, self-reliance, and, ultimately, «resurrection». It is interesting how the latter term was used to emphasise the luminous character of returning to life after one has travelled by boat in a deadly scenario where the «cry of the waves of a black sea» dominates and overpowers. He also reported that those who overcome the game shout with a liberating sense, «*Boza free!*» meaning 'Warrior, you are free!'. On the web, you can find a chat titled *Vive le soldat Boza Free. Inshallah*, which celebrates the successes of those who managed to arrive in Lampedusa and, sadly, also mentions the missing and drowned. In one case, the message closes with the motto, «Bonne chance que Dieu nous accompagne partout dans le monde. L'aventure continue». Following the tragedy, there are parting phrases such as «...Que leur âme repose». The chat not only informs about successes, failures, and rejections but also offers technical information about sea weather conditions. There are also hints about acts of pi-

racy by fishermen, including theft of money, mobile phones, and boat engines[10]. In July, a drawing featuring the Japanese cartoon character Goku, who has three lives, along with the just-mentioned victory cry and the added phrase «soldier for life», was independently hung on the wall of the Fraternità Massi Refuge in Oulx.

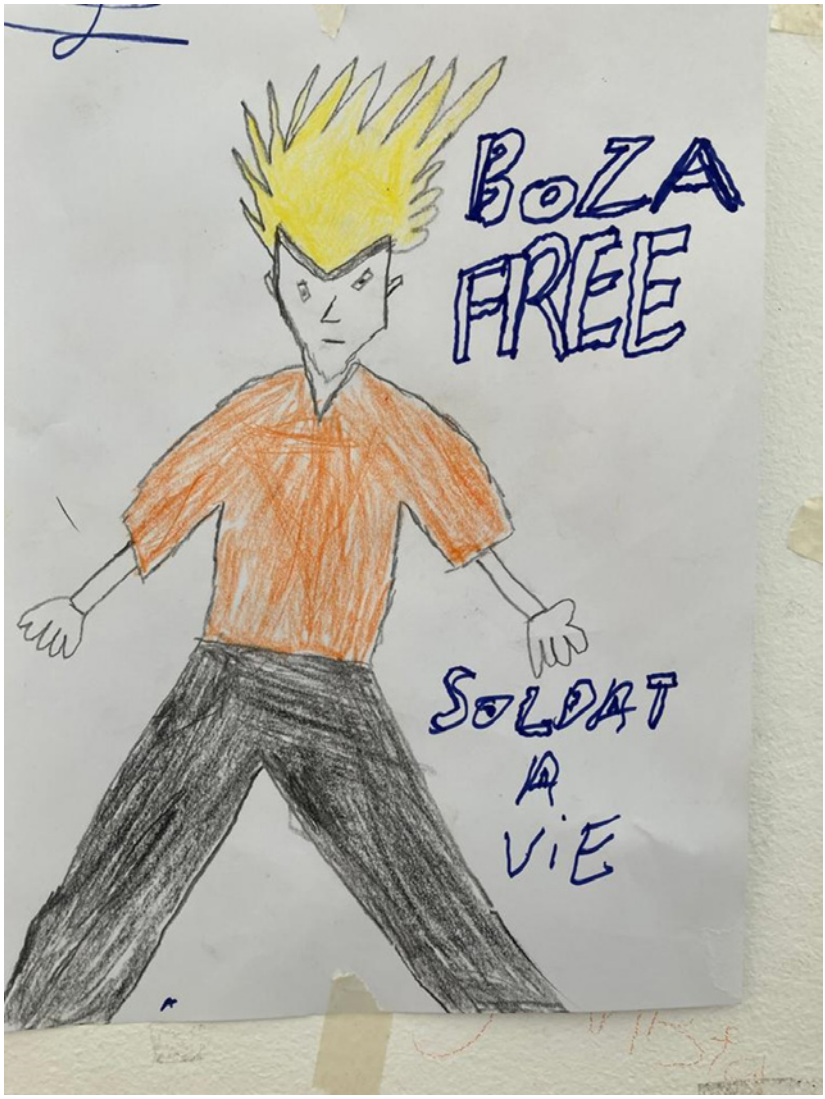

Figure 11: Drawing hung in the wall of Fraternity Massi's entrance hall.

[10] For a deeper exploration of predatory practices and to better understand the context surrounding accusations of piracy, see Ramello (2023). This source helps avoid generalizations that could lead to misunderstandings and improper interpretations.

All these expressions emphasise how the journey, at its critical moments, embodies existential conditions: being thrown into new circumstances, growing, gambling beyond the horizon, exhibiting warrior-like agency, and embracing the possibilities of dying and being reborn, of appearing and disappearing. The reference to the soldier tragically reflects the condition of war waged in every land against those on the move, alongside the necessity to equip oneself against this hostility – a precondition for survival. The drawing subtly refers to youth, both as a demographic and experiential reality and as a symbol for those who gamble on the future and venture beyond the horizon.

Be Your Guide, and Then Seek Guides.

In Iranian social media, the expression '*Rah-Balad*' is used to mean 'Be your guide', which translates to 'He who knows the truth'. This echoes the inscription that a doubting pilgrim thirsting for truth might encounter at the entrance to Delphi. It is accompanied by the advice not to rely solely on guides, as ultimately, it is one's own feet and will that guarantee the desired outcome. The metaphor of traffic lights is employed to depict the challenges that will dictate the pace of stops, waits, and departures. For this reason, the first piece of advice is psychological, urging a purposeful attitude that involves leaving behind one's homeland and the political and ideological reasons for departure. One must cut ties with the past to equip oneself and build a new life. One will need to walk, work, and struggle, maintaining self-confidence, but most importantly, embracing the challenge to change oneself. This last aspect of agency played out between figure and person, holds a significant allure for young people.

The internet hosts numerous sites that guide and educate individuals preparing for their journey. It offers a diverse range of content, including the economic requirements of the journey, market-driven support forms – such as support behind monetary compensation (smuggling) – disinterested accompaniment, and pragmatic advice necessary for the journey[11]. These resources serve both before depar-

[11] The study of multiple emic networks compels us to reflect on the role of so-called traffickers and the channels they utilise. To understand these complex articulations, it is necessary to consider the words of a Gambian friend who, when discussing smugglers, asserted that we should stop referring to them as traffickers. «For us, they are guides and, at times, saints who have enabled us to continue our journey, which your laws and various police forces try to obstruct. Without them, I would not be here». (interview with Modou, 2023). As early as 2007, Zhang in the United States had collected testimonies

ture and during the journey, featuring interactive moments such as chats in which hundreds of people participate. It is important to differentiate between platforms orchestrated directly by smugglers and those that are self-produced by people on the move. Both types are effective: the former provides solutions to immediate needs along with paid services, while the latter offers insights and guidance from those who have previously navigated the route. The multitude of offerings presents itself as a *jungle*, where trust must be approached with caution and credibility is established through cross-validations. On one side lies the rhetoric of the sellers; on the other, the lived experience of those who have made the crossings. We would not hesitate to assert that this multi-layered communication system emphasises prevention over the acceptance of fraudulent and unreliable proposals.

However, this cross-validation procedure operates alongside other mechanisms that can ensure greater compliance with agreements and facilitate negotiations between cohesive groups and mobility agencies. Parental or even neighbourly solidarity networks, which are widespread in Iran and Afghanistan and function similarly to private mutual aid societies, invest in the migration enterprise on behalf of their minor children or entire households. These networks are capable of exerting significant bargaining power with traffickers, employing pressures that adhere to market rules. Direct knowledge of someone within the network who facilitates the move – especially when that individual is part of the parental group – builds trusting relationships and serves as a motivating factor for departure. Sami's account is particularly eloquent in illustrating this dynamic:

> We left Iran, and the journey to Türkiye was quick; then, we embarked near Bursa in the direction of Italy. The sailing ship broke down, and we had to dock on the coast of Crete since we could no longer continue. We had spent 10,000 euros per person and asked for our money back and were told it was not possible. We contacted our families, who contacted those who had organised the trip, and eventually, they reimbursed us for the missing part of the journey (Interview with Sami, March 2023[12]).

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that likened the image of these 'facilitators' to philanthropists (2007). While the smuggler is juxtaposed with the unscrupulous trafficker, the merchant of death, on the other hand, taking into consideration the voice of the people on the move, much more nuanced descriptions and assessments emerge. Changing the perspective opens up other moral landscapes, which find documentation and confirmation in interesting secondary literature (see Doomernik & Kyle, 2004; Bilger et al., 2006; Koser, 2008; Spener, 2009).

[12] Choosing the right smuggler can be fortuitous, and migrants are certainly at the mercy of smugglers during their journey to Europe. However, smuggled people are not just

Even in the underground and illegal economy, market rules may persist, meaning that noncompliance with agreements may ultimately cost the organisers more in the future than if they partially reimburse the amounts received.

Numerous networks facilitate 'itinerant coexistence,' or what might be termed virtual landscapes, where the content and modes of communication vary. Some networks function as platforms for self-representation, reflecting on the homeland left behind, family connections, and interactions with fellow travellers. In some cases, these networks highlight achievements and goals attained, often boasting – sometimes untruthfully – about the new status acquired. Consequently, we find photos in front of luxurious cars or European monuments, emphasising the positive, sometimes heroic aspects of the migration journey while typically omitting the failures and sufferings endured. In certain instances, however, these hardships are recounted but framed about the accomplishments. This can be seen as forming an experiential literature of wandering, where mendacity and truth engage in a dialectical interplay between mobility in space and the reshaping of personal identity.

Emic networks. Building paths and constructing the self

We can also begin to differentiate between the chats that support and accompany people on their journeys, distinguishing those that are more structured and often pre-subsidised with professional administrators from those that are self-produced by the travellers themselves. The former type is sophisticated and structured on multiple levels: the first level serves a tutorial function, open to all with opportunities for interaction; the second level, concerning the buying and selling of services and economic transactions, is more confidential and operates underground. It is important to note immediately that changing the geographical-linguistic area of reference significantly alters the content, form, language, and channels of communication.

The most elaborate chats among those studied are undoubtedly from Asia, particularly involving individuals from Iran, Afghanistan, and Kurdish regions, conducted in Farsi. In one such chat – whose sources, though open and public,

victims of smugglers; smugglers also depend in part on migrants to find potential 'clients'. Migrants who survive the journey can act as a promotional factor, enticing relatives and friends to embark on a similar journey (see Achilli, 2015; 2016a; 2016b. See also Pastore, 2016; Pastore et al., 2006).

must remain confidential – it is explained that the journey itself accounts for only 20% of the overall strategy. The real gamble lies in the effort to secure humanitarian protection and the possibility of residing in the desired nation. As such, it is advisable for migrants to meticulously plan their journey, aligning it with the personal narrative they intend to present to commissions evaluating their applications for asylum or humanitarian protection. Migrants are advised to construct their identity as refugees according to the categories established by European regulations. Perhaps the most instructive aspect involves guidance on documenting chosen narratives of victimisation, pinpointing crucial moments of persecution. The emphasis is on the precision of existential details and the contextual background – institutional, social, and familial – of each event. The advice suggests focusing on a single type of persecution to avoid complications and inaccuracies. It is also recommended to highlight repeated failed attempts to resolve the situation locally, underscoring the relentless persecution that compelled the departure. This narrative strategy reinforces the message that no one leaves their country unless absolutely necessary. Moreover, travel plans must be meticulously crafted, taking into account the temporality and the necessary economic investment. The rationale for seeking protection must remain compelling throughout; the choice of destination country should not seem pre-planned or motivated by desires to reunite with family or friends. This ensures the asylum request appears driven solely by the need for safety, not personal preference.

Travel plans and itineraries are often presented as individual choices and are thoroughly detailed in discussions about routes, orientation technologies, costs, transportation modes, stopping points, clothing, food, and medicine. Chats also offer tutorial support for physical preparation and the formation of functional groups for individual 'games'. Based on these parameters, administrators provide support with rates that vary according to needs and urgencies. To ensure the effectiveness of their offerings, potential travellers are encouraged to contact those who have successfully completed their journeys and are willing to share their experiences. These tutorial channels can attract tens of thousands of subscribers, with hundreds actively participating in nightly chats. These discussions can extend over several nights, characterised by their animated and frank nature. Participants, both men and women, freely ask questions covering psychological, legal, and operational aspects of mobility. Despite the sensitive nature of the topics discussed, participants typically use nicknames paired with photos, creating an atmosphere of confidentiality that enhances the reliability of the site.

If we shift the focus from East Asia to the Maghreb, we find other modes of communication[13]. A key observation is that web channels in the Maghreb are more focused on 'burning borders' rather than on strategies for obtaining humanitarian protections in destination countries. The term '*harraga*' – meaning 'burning documents' – is indicative of this approach, suggesting that the strategy is not only about mobility but also about enduring a condition with which one must live. This has a transnational dimension as individuals navigate the margins necessary for survival. Furthermore, the communication styles in the Maghreb presuppose diverse types of relational networks. In the channels examined, personal experience and exposure are fundamental to establishing trust. Communication does not occur between a platform and a myriad of users but rather between an individual actor and multiple users who derive information from those who have personally experienced the journey. Unlike the comprehensive, professionally authoritative tutorial encyclopaedias found elsewhere, the approach here involves the use of the web with more artisanal techniques. Starting from an individual's emotional and technical agency, these communications propose subjective experiences as guides to mostly operational strategies. In the 'jungle' of survival, it is the individual who becomes the expert in marginal paths. Yet, we see that guidance shared via social media serves as an indicator of the migrant's condition relative to a backdrop where short-term regularisation of one's status seems unlikely. Becoming accustomed to the margins, repeated border crossings, and a transient existence between nations resembles the backdrop against which these communications occur. Death and the exposure of the corpse also carry symbolic weight, representing not only the potential disintegration of a life project and defeat but also the resilience required to overcome and advance beyond personal losses, which are both psychic and biological. The images found on the web and in various chats do more than denounce a forced and dramatic condition of life or the injustices that accompany the steps of people on the move; they also subjectively affirm the difficulty of avoiding self-destruction on a path where borders are metaphorically and literally burned. The corpse acts as a simulacrum of the self, an alter ego of a precarious existence. The guiding voice becomes both a testimony and a subjective outcry, providing context and agency and thus offering personalised and pragmatic directions for navigating viable paths.

[13] We thank Amin Roudane and Luca Ramello for their contribution to research on emic networks, which, by the way, has found operational reasons in Tunisia.

The scenario shifts dramatically when discussing the sources and flows of information that guide sub-Saharan migrants. One compelling account highlights how corruption serves as an initial step for disconnecting from the land of origin. The search for a local facilitator embedded in the clientelist hierarchies of local power is pivotal. This facilitator, who is an expert in trafficking, not only provides contacts but also determines the pathway for travel as a favour granted hierarchically from above. According to our interlocutor, the facilitator «appears as quickly as he disappears» from the trafficking stage. More critically, due to his ties to the place of origin, he remains a threatening shadow capable of retaliation if those who leave fail to comply with prearranged agreements. This facilitating friend can rapidly transform into a dangerous enemy, threatening not only the traveller but also the family left behind. The responsibility for any failure of the trip or deception, along with the resultant suffering, often falls on the victim. Echoing Milena Belloni's findings, many departures occur by breaking away or at least not sharing plans with one's family (Belloni, 2014). This does not imply that departure erases solidarity networks; rather, new ones are often formed predominantly among peers or among individuals who share the gamble of detachment. Throughout the journey, whether crossing the desert or residing in a Maghreb country, the migrant remains vulnerable to all institutional and social actors encountered. The only resources at the migrant's disposal are fellow travellers and, if fortunate, any savings not yet extorted or stolen. The networks they can rely on are minimal, and communication often occurs via *la bouche à l'oreille* 'word of mouth'. Any exposure or known information can have dire consequences. Even a telephone can become a liability; if it falls into the wrong hands, all information can be used detrimentally, and if stolen, it can dramatically disrupt the network of relationships. To prevent the loss or manipulation of information, the only option may be social channels that facilitate private, individual, and stable online communication, although this, too, is hampered by poor connectivity.

Unlike the earlier cases where there is a bet on transparency and the public dissemination of content, in this scenario, it is the shroud of darkness that facilitates the flow of information. There is a prevailing disenchantment with what is public and visible, which is often fraught with deception. A Gambian friend explained, «When we leave, we are acutely aware of the dangers of the desert or staying in the Maghreb, but for us, the undocumented, only dangerous places allow us to find hidden paths.» Thus, danger and the ability to find one's way become inseparable elements, manifesting on multiple levels. Navigating the wilderness of the desert independently is not feasible; reliance on guides or third parties becomes indispensable. In this landscape of uncertainty and risk, the so-called

trafficker is sometimes seen as a figure deserving of gratitude. Many interlocutors suggest that even online, a war rages between actors who propagate conflicting messages. These messages are considered credible in their eyes only when validated by the secrecy of a personal voice. Furthermore, this flow of information is prioritised based on two criteria: truthfulness, which can only be empirically verified by walking and checking each step, and proximity in the realm of available information. Often, the urgency of avoiding death, securing food and water, and meeting existential needs overshadows the focus on distant destinations. The numerous uncertainties and variables encountered along the way make it difficult to concentrate on extensive planning.

Being in the Maghreb, and possibly even earlier in the desert, raises a host of profound questions. The first pertains to the liminality between life and death that characterises these transit zones. The concept of 'Tempt run' aptly describes living in a condition where death lurks in the crevices of life, and life itself springs forth from the clutches of death, much like the metaphor of a zombie. When a young Sudanese man was asked about the cost of his journey, he responded by highlighting the absurdity of the question, stating, «When life is at stake, it always costs everything you have». This underscores the delicacy of the situation and reaffirms the relevance of a deep, often submerged hermeneutic that necessitates scrutinising how deception and lethal risks might be concealed behind every uttered word.

Between truth and lies: 'As if.'

The precarious nature of migrants' situations, caught between the inability to turn back and the compulsion to move forward, often necessitates the use of mercenary aid. This predicament re-engages the need for financial resources and the reactivation of networks, especially familial networks in the countries of origin and, for the fortunate, those involving relatives already in the EU. Additionally, a significant issue is the number of people who have left their homeland amid disagreements, severing ties with their families. Often, they break away independently and cease communication. This rupture or silence becomes critically significant, as the bonds of trust and affection with kinship units can be crucial resources when navigating extremely dangerous conditions. In the desert and in countries like Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya, it is all too common for migrants to be imprisoned, subjected to torture, and forced to extort money from their families to secure their release. This situation creates a tragic and lethal dilemma: the victim, coerced into seeking help under conditions akin to kidnapping, and the

family, forced to make life-or-death decisions about their relative's fate. Whilst this scenario represents an extreme but common case, it exemplifies a pattern that contributes to the construction of a paradigm and perpetuates communicative misunderstandings.

Only the recognition of the migrant as a victim opens up avenues for hope and, in Europe, avenues for recognition. The restoration of communication with parents is not simply a gracious act but rather a duty and obligation that persists even after the migrants reach their destination[14]. This expectation of restitution remains for those still in the homeland and endures over time. This indebted condition gives rise to a dual facade that fluctuates between the expectations of those left behind in Africa and the often-precarious living conditions faced by migrants:

> If I say that Europe is a land of fulfilment, I am saying something that is mostly untrue. Yet, if I express that it involves exclusion and marginality, they do not believe me. They suspect that I want to keep all the benefits of having succeeded in the migration gamble to myself and that I am unwilling to repay the debt (Gambian informant's testimony: September 2023).

The double lie (Sayad, 1995) or the attempts to construct a self, which can only be social, evades the dichotomous and exclusionary logics of true and false and introduces the question of fiction as a shaping intention and, thus the Kantian memory category of 'as if it were'.[15] There is a constant tension between how others stigmatise us, the war of information we face, and the need to navigate a veritable 'jungle' where no one is completely truthful, yet there remains a vital need to carve out spaces for realisation. It is important to remember that the term "equivocation" refers not only to misleading similarities but also to voices

[14] For information on formal and informal networks, see Koser's work (1997). For analyses of the migration industry, see Ambrosini (2021), Castles (2004), Montagna (2018), and Stierl (2018). On a related note, Maria Perino's study (2020) provides an interesting perspective on the ineffectiveness of institutional policies for the inclusion of migrants in work contexts, highlighting the systematic underestimation of migration chains.

[15] It is interesting how Immanuel Kant, in *The Critique of Judgment* (2017), poses the problem of 'as if it were'. Some narratives belong to the realm of fiction, yet their significance and ability to influence life's games and social dynamics cannot be measured simply by the standards of true or false.

proceeding together[16]. This concept not only builds networks and legitimises the unspoken but also shapes behaviour[17]. Truth, lies, opportunistic mimicry, and strategic planning are all manoeuvres within the same game, rationalised by the rules of the chessboard.

This opens another remarkably interesting field of research, but that discussion is deferred to other writings.

[16] On the topic of reading traces and the relationships between true, false, and fake, see Ginzburg (1986; 2006). The challenge lies in applying a rigorous critique of sources and embracing a circumstantial method that navigates the ambiguous intricacies of dissimulation, allowing for the reassembly of disparate elements into a coherent whole. Specifically on the subject of migration, see Gorza (2022).

[17] The equivocality is systemic and affects not only people on the move but also those who support them. There is no clear demarcation, no Acheron, that neatly separates truth from lies, fiction from the construction of identity, desire from presence, repression from solidarity, or money from philanthropy. See Agier (2008); Fassin (2005).

9. *The Jacket*. Mixing ethnography and art-based methods, drawing with Fanon the French-Italian border[1]

Roberto Beneduce (University of Turin)
Luca Giliberti (University of Parma)
Stefano Greco (Centro Benedetto Acquarone)
Luca Queirolo Palmas (University of Genoa)
Gianluca Seimandi (ASL 4 di Chiavari)
Simone Spensieri (ASL 4 di Chiavari)

This contribution presents and discusses the graphic novel *The Jacket*, proposing an interpretative analysis of three of its panels based on a long-term ethnographic research project (2020-ongoing) which involved a heterogeneous group of researchers spanning different disciplinary and artistic backgrounds (Beneduce *et al.*, 2023). In our collective experience of research on this borderland – which has included multiple periods of immersion and participant observation on both sides of the Alpine route between France and Italy, in the specific context of Susa Valley and Briançon – the places of grassroots and solidarity reception where migrants pass by are punctuated by their travel narratives that often prefer the language of drawing to that of words.

Such traces of *a poor and minor art* of the migrants' passage – from murals on the walls to drawings on sheets of paper that are often kept in the shelters

[1] The article results from a joint dialogue between the illustrator and the researchers. The panels are by Stefano Greco; the text by the other authors. For academic purposes, introduction, paragraph 1, and conclusions can be attributed to Luca Giliberti and Luca Queirolo Palmas; paragraphs 2 to Gianluca Seimandi and Simone Spensieri; paragraph 3 to Roberto Beneduce. The authors thank to Nina Bacchini (Anthropologist, Asl-4 Chiavari) for the discussion and the translation into English of paragraph 2.

where they were produced – are a valuable archive of ethnographic materials, as well as a useful springboard for the elaboration of new artefacts and cultural products[2] that testify to the possibility of creative effervescence even in an oppressive context, such as the border (Queirolo Palmas, 2020a; Amigoni & Aru, 2023). From this perspective, the research has also adopted drawing as a useful device to tune in with the languages diffused in different locations of travel and among people on the move. If in previous experiences we used photography and filmic products[3], here the attempt has been to explore the potential of graphic novels in the imagination and development, as well as dissemination, of ethnographic research.

The graphic novel, like filmic products or photography, are not only tools of dissemination but can become constituent elements of a participatory process in which researchers cooperate with different types of social actors: the people on the journey but also the inhabitants of the different borderlands crossed, who in some cases choose to be the facilitators of that mobility denied by the border regime. The drawings and the present text speak to us then of illegalised migrant routes and processes of racialization in a post-colonial context marked by violence and oppression, as well as by hybrid and rhizomatic acts of resistance and grassroots solidarity (Anderlini *et al.*, 2022; Giliberti & Queirolo Palmas, 2024).

In this scenario, a jacket, which allows (or not) people on the move to walk the 18 km alpine path separating Italy from France, is the protagonist of the narrative. *The Jacket* – inspired by Frantz Fanon's work *Black Skin, White Masks*, the voice-over of the drawings, and by Pistoletto's *Venus of the Rags* – explores the opportunities opened up by the encounter between social sciences and graphic storytelling and aims to suggest an avenue for innovative research methods and writing languages in academia, and beyond. Furthermore, we attempt to conceptually expand the graphic dimension: the three panels presented and analysed here evoke concepts such as solidarity and opacity, as well as mimesis, authority and desire, recognition and citizenship, further delving into the folds of the contemporary migrant condition.

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[2] See the public-art project *Eufemia*, by Milotta-Donchev, produced by Laboratorio di Sociologia Visuale, University of Genoa. Link.

[3] See the different filmic and photographic products by Laboratorio di Sociologia Visuale, University of Genoa. Link.

Panel 1 – Un/dressing. Drawing on solidarity and opacity

Dressing up and dressing down are tactics to continue the journey, a journey that is often inhabited, that completely absorbs the life of the travellers, and that unfolds over long periods of time, unpredictable waits, obligatory stops and border crossings. This panel recounts one of them. And it does so through converging gazes and perspectives: of those who cross, of the clothes that accompany them, of those who retrieve them. At the end of the route, which eventually leads to France, the *Terrasses Solidaires* – an old tourist hostel bought collectively by solidarity networks – temporarily hosts and shelters travellers (Torre *et al.*, 2023; Beneduce *et al.*, 2023). The *Terrasses* is a meeting place, a point of condensation where the individual melts into the collective and becomes part of an anonymous mass on the move, of a humanity in balance with which it often shares a direction and a condition: that of the negro, of the irregular migrant trying to escape the constant traps of the route (Anderlini *et al.*, 2022). Then, at the beginning and end of the panel, other subjects appear in their difficult and contested attempt to heal a territory increasingly racialised by the necropolitics of the border (Mbembe, 2019) and turned into a weapon against the right to mobility (Del Biaggio, 2020). The mountains, enjoyed by tourists and skiers during the day, are instead suffered by migrants trying to cross the Alps at night and become a weapon, like the desert for those trying to reach the United States from Mexico (De León, 2015) or the sea for many crossing the Mediterranean.

Ramassage des vêtements is the term used by French solidarity activists to describe the collective action that periodically accompanies the *maraudes*; if the latter is a practice of rescuing and accompanying people who cross the forest and the border, usually at night, the *ramassage* aims to collect clothes abandoned in the forest on the outskirts of Briançon. Caring for people at risk and caring for an area at risk, for example, from the snow industry and over-tourism, are practices and feelings shared by those involved in solidarity networks. What is mountain ethics? Why do environmental awareness, care for the land, practical support and denunciation of the necropolitics of migration go hand in hand? (Giliberti, 2020) «We take care of our mountains so that they remain beautiful, clean and preserved, so that the clothes left in the woods by migrants must be recovered... and the clothes in good condition we put back into circulation for new arrivals, returning them to the Italian volunteers», says Marianne[4], an activist from Briançon. Taking care of one's own mountains also means taking care of those who pass through these places. «These are our mountains, this is our home, and whoever passes through our home must feel at ease, must feel welcome, must feel at home», says Elisa, a No Tav activist working in solidarity in Susa Valley.

[4] The interviewees' names are fictitious.

The gestures of solidarity that punctuate each stage and passage of the journey in different ways counter the border regime and the racialisation of mobility and territories (Fravega & Anderlini, 2023); operating between light and shadow, they become a potentially constitutive moment of the routes, giving life to an 'underground railway' (Queirolo Palmas & Rahola, 2020) that is by definition invisible. But these gestures in the shadows of all those who collect clothes contribute to the circulation, from one side of the border to the other, of the objects of solidarity: the jacket and, with it, all the other clothes that allow the passage of people on the journey. The migrant agency finds in solidarity an encounter, a glimmer, and a limit that must be explored and questioned. Thus, migrant agency consists also in abandoning these clothes in the middle of the forest.

Dressing and undressing are not only part of the ritual of passage[5], but also of a struggle within this battleground (Ambrosini, 2018). Thanks to the practices of local solidarity, the traveller's body is equipped for the mountains (Giliberti & Filippi, 2021); paradoxically, however, it is the scraps of the same clothes that are used by tourists in the snow and hiking industry. Clothing is like a drawing on the body of the migrant: the rags of tourism protect against the weather and the risks of hostile territory, but they also reveal an inappropriate condition. It is often the wrong shoes, the wrong colours, unfashionable models, clothes ruined by prolonged use, and sizes that are too tight or too loose that reveal a glaring difference to the good, white, touristy mobility. Here, however, the rags worn by already racialised people contribute to their racialisation. This is why, as soon as they catch a glimpse of the city walls and lights, travellers abandon solidarity clothes without much regard for the landscape and the donors. Instead, they enter the city in civilian clothes, displaying those uniforms and brands, fake or not, that mark how the sons of the global metropolis inhabit public space, regardless of their skin colour. Undressing the solidarity cloths thus becomes a practice of resistance based on camouflage, on evading the gaze that constructs the migrant as a permanently different subject, always culturally and visually inferior. Throwing off the rags is also an attempt to guarantee another position from which to construct and from which to try to be perceived, a dimension that Delgado (2007) has called the «right to indifference», Glissant (2007) the «right to opacity», Goffman (1963) the «civil inattention». The subjective claim is that, as Fanon (1996) puts it in *The Jacket*, «to be no longer seen».

[5] See the film by Anto Milotta, *The ritual of passage*, 2022, located in Oulx-Briançon and produced by Laboratorio di Sociologia Visuale, University of Genoa.

But how do people on the move draw? The smartphone is clearly a writing and sharing device, a resource for agency. Through it, maps are written and drawn, with points to follow to cross the border, and vital information is circulated, generating practices of solidarity between unknowns. It is a «mobile commons» (Papadopoulos & Tsianos, 2013), an underground migrant knowledge that is dangerous because it is constantly replicated and updated; there is no travel without smartphones, without the hundreds of digital groups on the move that provides real-time status, the weather report, the route, possibly even the toll to be paid, thus guaranteeing all travellers valuable clues with which to construct their routes. It is no coincidence that the smartphone is one of the main trophies of any border police: to destroy it, as is often the case, is to undermine the conditions of freedom and movement.

> Between Bosnia and Croatia, I tried the game 31 times, and almost every time we were turned back, the police stole our phones as well as our jackets. The last time, before I finally got through, I also got a lot of beatings... the Croatian police beat the shit out of me. Anyway, the mobile phones they stole from us, we had to buy them back each time, and it cost 100 euros each time...

Fawad tells us in the Susa Valley, after having crossed many borders since leaving Afghanistan five years ago. The smartphone, a precious and indispensable tool, becomes an object of contention; when it is taken from its rightful owner, spirals of conflict and violence open up among the travellers themselves.

The power of this experiment in ethnographic drawing, compared to a photograph or a text, also lies in its ability to keep the space of interpretation open to a greater extent, creating short circuits with other temporal levels, with other stories − those of war and those of the colony − that are brought into the main narrative line, which is based on the practice of collective research, but also on improvisation. This graphic novel carries within it several layers, traces open to the possibility of reverberation, resonance and dissonance, the exegesis of which is open and left to the reader; in this perspective, the technique adopted here is similar to that of film editing.

The man who, after crossing the forest ice and then the border, enters the old town of Briançon while the tourists sleep, dreaming of the next ski slopes, is also a man hunted by history, by his own history. Perhaps, thanks to the strength he has gained from the new experience of a successful crossing, he will be able to give oxygen to other uprisings. While illustration inevitably brings to light the contours of a phenomenon, it is also part of this tension to de-racialize the dis-

course and representation of migration, thus contributing to the affirmation of an opacity, thanks to the thousands of lines of subjective appropriation that open up to the reader's eyes. In fact, the standard ethnographic product, which gives back the results of the research, presents the risk of remaining stuck in the narrative forms and discursiveness of the underlying knowledge project. Conversely, the possibility opened up by the graphic ethnography that we practice here is that of deviation towards new meanings, guaranteed precisely by the incompleteness of the relationship between drawing/text/narrated object, an incompleteness configured as an allusive space, a device of oxygenation and dislocation, countering the hegemony of the gaze constructed on the colour line.

Panel 2 – Mimesis, authority and desire

Michael Taussig (2023), in the following words, offers us a perfect summary of the power of the narratively constructed image:

> "Images were projected from the outside through floor-to-ceiling windows. Language became something else in this theatrical piece that insisted on ritual. And why ritual? There had to be a feeling that the mastery of non-mastery had an affinity with the falling snow, through translucent images, like a masked dancer twirling through the audience no matter what". (Taussig, 2023, p. 35).

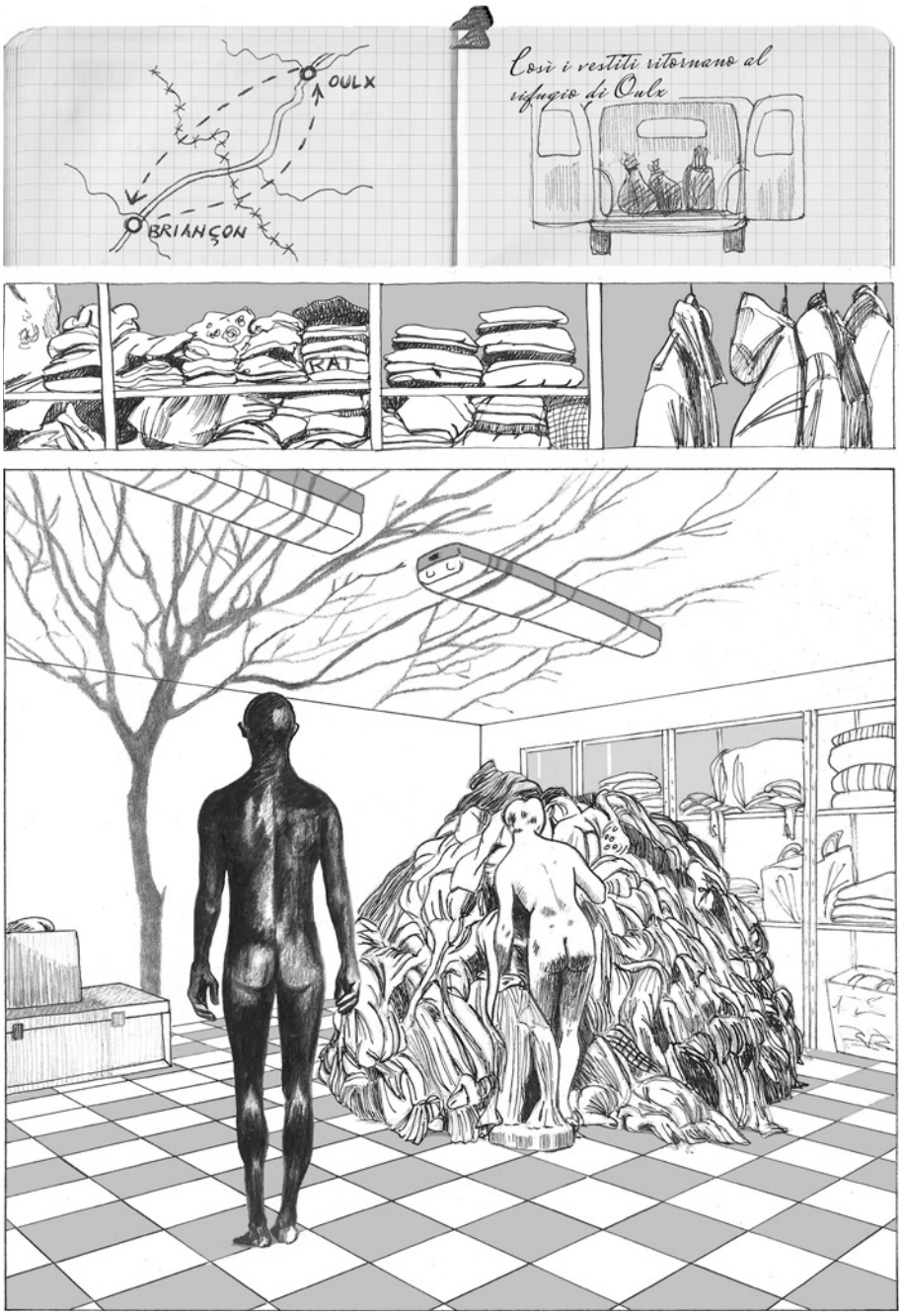
The concept of montage that this idea proposes is a source of inspiration for exploring the expressive potential that emerges from the hybridisation of materials that are layered in the experience of re-creation in the research and in the panels by Stefano Greco.

The upper part of the panel narrates the ritualised, endless journey of the jacket, Oulx-Briançon-Briançon-Oulx, Oulx-Briançon; the border has been crossed, the migrant who wore it has arrived at Les Terrasses Solidaires, but the jacket continues its recycling: from Briançon it is brought back by van to the Massi Refuge in Oulx and there, placed in the warehouse, ready to be used again.

This jacket is a mimetic object. Then, the table opens onto a powerful, complex, highly evocative scene. It could live a life of its own. The field of vision opens, and the body of a white woman emerges from the mountain of clothes. The image is iconic and recalls Pistoletto's *Venus of the Rags*.

Mimesis is the Greek term that defines the origin and essence of art in its many expressions. Socrates had identified in the process of assembly a way to achieve a high degree of mimesis: by taking the most beautiful elements

from the various objects and bringing them together in an ideal, intellectually created object, which thus possessed, both externally and ethically, a high degree of humanity.



This panel is silent: Frantz Fanon's words that accompany the graphic novel here disappear, yet his text from which we drew the narrator's voice, «Black Skin and White Masks», is more evident than ever. In the foreground, another body, this time black, waiting motionlessly, has a gaze that goes beyond the room and already foreshadows the forest that, like the night, begins to take possession of the place. Black and white are the only colours on the table. The bond that defines the couple is very close, with no way out.

The jacket, as we said, is the main object of the graphic novel, and it works for the black body both to protect it from the cold if the border is attacked at night and also to camouflage it among the tourists who flock to those mountains during the day. A practical function aimed at breaking down the precariousness of the body and a mimetic function aimed at disrupting the boundary between being the welcome foreigner and being the unacceptable one. The drawing itself is the product of a mimetic action: «There seems to be a deep connection between the children and the stars, the way it was constructed by adults: encouraging children to doodle and draw with coloured crayons until reality comes to settle.» (Taussig, 2023, p. 91) Drawing, then, becomes a technique capable of articulating several narrative levels at once so that the complexity of our reality can be summoned into a single frame. In this sense, the constant dialogue between the reader and the author enters into a productive process of meanings and multiple realities, giving rise to debate and transformation. It is, therefore, not our intention to codify and crystallise in the comic the experience of the thousands of subjects who cross the border in that game but rather to explore our emotions starting from the field experience we conducted in those places. On our way back from fieldwork in those mountains, we needed to breathe. The nature that precedes the cities, the forts, the villages and the people who pass through them and inhabit them has disappeared. The air was no longer healthy. We needed to process those feelings collectively, and so, the process that led to the creation of the graphic novel began. Perhaps our body has also tried to recompose itself by drawing in an imaginary space that, while denouncing the violence of reality, would help us to detach ourselves from its suffocating protrusion.

The mimetic action of this work, too, has a multiplicity of purposes, and one of these certainly has to do with the struggle for freedom. Frantz Fanon reproached the Algerian colonised for wasting time and energy in the «dreamlike storm» (Fanon, 2000) experienced in the night, at the end of terrible days of work, seeing them leave towards the *forêt* to stage their rites.

> The dance circle is a permissive circle. It protects and empowers. At fixed hours, at fixed dates, men and women meet in a given place... Everything is allowed inside the circle... On the outward journey, the men and women were impatient, pawing, and nervous. On the way back, it is the calm that returns to the village, peace, stillness". (Fanon, 2000, p. 21)

Fanon, in that context of extreme violence, underestimated the profound meaning of rituals, reducing those practices to moments of muscular orgy in «the course of which the most acute aggressiveness, the most immediate violence, are channelled, transformed, erased» (Fanon, 2000, p. 21). The time was not yet ready for an armed uprising. The ritual was also the moment of solidarity of the group that, in that representation, was organised into roles and functions, giving itself times and positions also to take back the power of the colonists, by whom they had been put out of the game. Oddly enough, the border crossing is referred to as a game. What is at stake? The two bodies, that of Venus and that of the Black are one behind the other, without any attempt to ambush, stationary like statues on a black and white chessboard.

Who are the players? Who regulates that relationship? Who still is feeding it within the regime of coloniality that pervades our societies? «Mimesis is a form of deception as well as magic» (Taussig, 2023, p. 27) and deception, as we know, is part of the game, just as magic is part of the payoff: the reappearance in the city of the whites, there beyond the *forêt* that invades the room and, perhaps, the memory of the black body:

> "Supernatural, magical forces turn out to be extraordinarily egotistical forces... The hill where we climbed to be closer to the moon, the bank where we let ourselves slide as if to manifest the equivalence of dance and ablution, of washing, of purification, are sacred places". (Fanon, 2000, p. 19)

Meanwhile, the woman's white body continues to search among the rags that, in Pistoletto's work, represented the surplus of goods, evoking the depiction that today marks the bodies of migrants always in excess, whether they are bodies lost at sea or bodies that land on our shores. With indifference, one looks for the rag. But in that refuge, as we know, the focus is different, and the dressing becomes research; one day, we dress them, choosing the most suitable clothes for the heat, but with them, we also decide the colours to match; the kids especially care a lot about being fashionable. Fashion, which was denounced by Pistoletto as a consumer machine that produces rags while renewing itself, now, in a dramatic

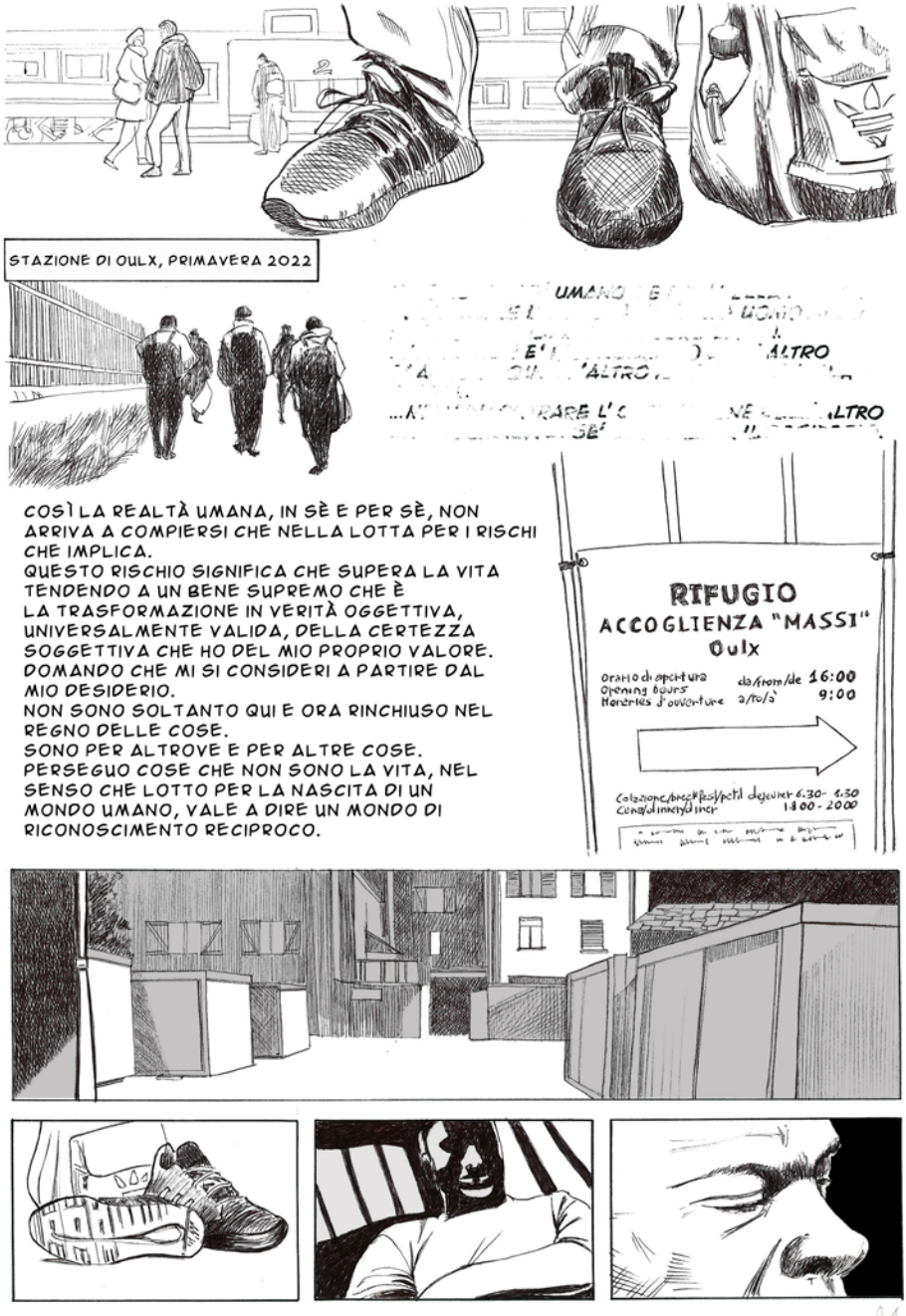
moment like this, perhaps, for those young migrants is already becoming hopeful that one day they will be able to enter the city of white people. Pistoletto's Venus, bringing the memory of beauty to art, regenerated those rags, transforming them into colour, warmth, and emotion, triggering the dimension of desire in the reader's gaze. Does another plan enter the scene? Under the neon lights that are already fading, we can feel the beginning of a new extraordinary vibration; the desire of the white woman, in a pose as sinuous as it is mischievous, makes its way. The black body remains motionless; the gaze perhaps now falls on the shapes of the statue. Where does our gaze run? We wonder if a woman looks the same way. In the representation of migration today, we speak of young men and mothers with children; they are the epigones of this mass of ragged people. Are they the most qualified? Where is the sexuality? Too little is said about sexual violence on borders. Greed was only read in the eye of blacks; Fanon denounced: «The gaze that the colonised casts on the settler's city is a look of lust, a look of greed. Dreams of possession» (Fanon, 2000, p. 6).

In Stefano Greco's panel, on the other hand, it is the body of Venus that comes to life; the matter melts between the clothes, becoming languid, seeking satisfaction to its own craving, all feminine, even before the encounter with the black body, «It was before the act that I orgasmed. I thought, I imagined everything they could do to me, and that was amazing.» (Fanon, 2000). But all that desire remains harnessed between the trees of Nature that trap the scene; the branches of the trees become gloomy, and the migrants are paralysed, but they are ready in the face of an out-of-control Nature.

> This fits beautifully with the mimetic design... I refer to the dual character of mimesis: first as visual imitation, as in the case of a vision or photograph, and second as bodily involvement, as in the case of using one's lover's hair or underwear to magically approach him or her (Taussig, 2023, p. 44).

The graphic operation understood as an interconnected corpus between drawing and literature, shows the potential of assembling and editing by introducing the historical dimension of the mimetic faculty and the estrangement from the logical rational faculty of the logos; «mimesis, metamorphosis and film editing – as well as the practice of drawing – are part of the same cognitive modality aimed at allowing the bodily unconscious to surface» (Bonifacio & Pisapia, in Taussig 2023, p. 20). From the great colonial enterprises to the accomplished forms of capitalism, understood as «a system that is no longer governed by any Transcendental Law» but that, on the contrary, «dismantles all transcendent codes and then

re-establishes them according to its own criteria» (Deleuze & Guattari, in Fisher, 2021, p. 31), we seek forms of encounter and narration with those wretched of the earth who, with their bodies, try to speak to us, from the past and the present.



Panel 3 – Pathologies of recognition and citizenship

The last chapter of *Black Skin, White Masks*[6] cuts the problem of recognition in two after turning it inside out at every turn, after reminding Jung how wrong his notion of the collective unconscious was in confusing 'instinct' and 'habit'. After recalling what the encounter with White meant for the Martinican: «Cultural imposition is easily at work in Martinique. The ethical shift encounters no obstacle. But *the real white man is waiting for me*. He will tell me on the very first occasion that is not enough for the intention to be white» (Fanon, 2008, p. 168; italics by the authors).

Is there any other way in which these truths can be told? What does a graphic novel, an image, add to such a text? What makes a drawing, the outline of a face, flash in the reader's mind? Why can we retain different impressions from Stefano Greco's illustrations?

Let's focus on this panel from the graphic novel "The Jacket": a station bordering France and Italy. A refuge where new shoes can be found. The encounter with other destinies of different colours is all marked by hope, pain, and fear. A time to remember who you are and what you want. The sensation of the cold besieging the body and biting it reminds us that we are alone and almost suggests that we are, after all, just bodies. Greco collects these objects, places and bodies and shows them to us in their historicity. His illustrations help us to make the experience of an immigrant our own, to feel his feelings, the weariness of his members and the echo of his fragmented memories. Perhaps just one among many, but now flesh and blood whose eyes we see, whose breathing we hear.

In today's experimentation with an image-mediated approach, we find something of the effort to approach, as far as possible, the art of the narrator in the terms in which Walter Benjamin thought of it. Capable of giving his words the power of the epic, the energy of catharsis, the mysteries of the struggle for existence, the art of living, briefly, the short story for Benjamin was different from what took its place: the novel.

We think graphic novels (not all of them, of course) try to reproduce the mystery of the narrator. To do so by the words of Fanon, someone who was able to imbue his reflections with the character of a craftsman of images, the rhythm and depth of the portrait (a photographic style, in short) allows one to enter into the experience. According to Benjamin, the storyteller's art is to absorb the expe-

[6] Chapter 7: *The Black and recognition. A. The Black and Adler. B. The Black and Hegel*.

rience and transform it into an experience for the reader. This is achieved with the help of 'corporeal words', or visual utterances. We asked ourselves if this narrative strategy, used by celebrated authors like Frantz Fanon, Georges Navel, Ernesto de Martino, or André Martin, could shed light on theory-laden notions from a new perspective while looking at Greco's images and trying to imagine how one could depict a concept like 'recognition', an experience like the desire (and the need) to be recognised[7].

It is sometimes strange that the same term accommodates opposite meanings, which had already attracted the interest of Freud and other 19th century scholars. We are interested in exploring how the different meanings embedded in a word's nuances reflect social anxieties and historical contexts marked by misunderstanding, denial, or violence. This is certainly the case with the word 'recognition,' which also in French indicates at least two different meanings: the first, that of being recognised in the common sense of the term, and at the same time, that which we have learned to read in Hegel's pages, first in those of the Jena writings, relating to the relationship between individuals and the family, then in those of the *Phenomenology*, in which Hegel takes for granted that the struggle for recognition arises only in the state of nature, not in civil society and within the modern state, because here «what constitutes the result of that struggle-that is, recognition-is already present».

But the term 'recognition', in the French language ('reconnaissance'), also has another meaning: that of 'gratitude, acknowledgement', the supposed absence of which in colonised societies anthropologists and psychoanalysts (Lévy-Bruhl, Mannoni) strove to interpret as a cultural character or, inherent, respectively, in the lack of symmetrical power relations.

Whatever the nuance assigned to this term, it would become, with Fanon, a knife rammed down the throat of colonialism and racism, of Western societies' anxieties[8], and the lever to question Hegel. Today, however, in the West and Eu-

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[7] «Experience which is passed on from mouth to mouth is the source from which all storytellers have drawn. And among those who have written down the tales, it is the great ones whose written version differs least from the speech of the many nameless storytellers. Incidentally, among the last named there are two groups which, to be sure, overlap in many ways. And the figure of the storyteller gets its full corporeality only for the one who can picture them both» (Benjamin, 1968, p. 84)

[8] According to Oliver and Trigo (2003), the birth of the film 'noir' after World War II expressed both specific anxieties of White men about race, maternity, sex and power, as well as existential concerns in front of the experience coming from the end of the world's nihilistic experience.

rope of immigrants, militarized borders and the securitarian paradigm, the term 'recognition' also takes on the meaning of very high stakes, often a matter of life and death for those whose right to international humanitarian protection is not recognized. Recognition more and more often becomes, for asylum seekers, a dream, a desire, a civil right, an obsession.

Even the meaning of the attribute usually used to refer to the condition of those whose asylum claim is not granted, 'rejected', knows singular iridescences: in one case (the English), it seems to evoke what happens to organ grafts and transplants when rejected by the host organism; in the other (the French) the term *refoulé* is the same to name the unconscious process by which content, an emotion, a reminiscence is expelled from the field of consciousness because it is intolerable.

Both terms, recognition and rejection, thus seem to conceal just another expression of that 'rotten truth' recalled by Bianca Carrera in reference to the risk of death that immigrants increasingly face when attempting to cross borders (the one in Oulx Briançon in this case). National borders, of course, but also roads, cities, trains, or supermarkets are now increasingly turning into 'racial borders', and discrimination is no longer just that used by US police against black and Chicano minorities in Los Angeles or Ferguson, but the principle that by «force of law» (Derrida, 1992) governs our present, our experience. What is left of Fanon's recognition when in this word we hear only the echo of racial profiling?

Let us return to Fanon, to the questions he pours out on the pages of Adler and Hegel. For the former, neurosis comes from comparison. However, Fanon reminds him that the Black, the Martinican, *is* comparison:

> The Antillean comparison is crowned by a third term: its dominant fiction is not personal but social. The Martinican is a crucified man (…). The Martinicans are *hungry for reassurance.* They want their wishful thinking to be recognised" (Fanon, 2008, p. 190; italics by the authors).

Even against Hegel, Fanon's critique brings out the distinctiveness of the black condition and the need to think of recognition not as a gift, an act of paternalistic generosity: genuine and mutual recognition can only arise from the struggle («But man is also a negation. No to man's contempt. No to the indignity of man. To the exploitation of man. To the massacre of what is most human in man: freedom;» ivi, p. 211[9]).

[9] The contributions presented in Kistney and van Haute offer a critical analysis of the

This struggle besieges the mind and body of the servant, the black, the dominated, and today, of the undocumented immigrant, the asylum seeker waiting to see his claim granted. Over the course of days and months, this waiting can fuel resentments and become a nightmare, a symptom. Waiting to be 'recognised' by the white man, by the master, by the State, waiting for months or years for a document that accredits the status of the claimant, however, means *turning oneself into an object*, or running the risk of falling victim to unprecedented forms of suffering[10].

As with blacks and the colonised, for asylum seekers who today are humiliated, forgotten, and rendered invisible, Hegel's 'recognition' remains a controversial and empty concept.

The words to recount the tragedy of the old and current policies of exclusion, the blade we need to cure the abscess of racism, cannot be those of *ordinary* social sciences, of flat collections of numbers and statistics. They must be words that, like Fanon's, generate images of pain and struggle, of resistance and redemption. They must be 'bullet words'. But these words are often not easy to find. That is why graphic novels can help to imagine what our exhausted categories seem incapable of conveying and thus tell in a different way the struggles, desires, anxieties, hopes and griefs of immigrants, asylum seekers, and minorities.

We often think of the magnificent work of Valentine Cuny-Le Callet (2022), who, since 2016, has begun to build a dialogue with Renaldo McGirth, a condemned man in American prisons who, as the author recalls, although co-authored text and drawings, could not co-sign the text because an American law prevents a sentenced to death man from reaping benefits (economic or otherwise) from the telling of his crime. In one of the e-mails to Valentine, Renaldo writes:

> "I feel like life is passing me by... Everyone is getting married, getting ahead, realising their dreams. And I get stuck in the same place over and over again, not only by the State, not only by the law, not only by appeals *but also by my own desires*..." (italics are ours).

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concept of recognition between Hegel and Fanon and stress the role of translation in multiplying some misunderstandings (such as for the concepts of *Herr* and *Knecht* in 'maître' and 'esclave' in French, 'master' and 'slave' in English), so forging the «dominant interpretation of dialectic in decolonial theorizing» (Kistney & van Haute, 2020, p.XX).

[10] On 'pathologies of citizenship', see Beneduce and Taliani (2023).

Renaldo's words echo Fanon's. As with Blacks in Europe, with the 'wretched of the earth' in the colonies, now something similar happens to the illegal immigrant, the asylum seeker, the African Americans murdered in the streets of US cities or ended up in prisons for up to five times as often as the white population. A suffocating atmosphere of death continues to dominate our time. The daily uncertainty, the endless waiting, and the racism of institutions are the chapters of a political phenomenology of oppression against which the demand for recognition continues to rise. Once again, a cry of mourning, of struggle.

From this graphic novel, from its lines and shadows drawn along a border, we see the moment in which women and men meet, making solidarity a political act, and in which clothes, shoes, blankets, and beds are transformed into the vocabulary of hope. These images, this vocabulary, help us to discover other aspects of recognition, of its controversial nature, which, according to Kelly Oliver (2001), beyond its ordinary meaning, its obvious ethical and legal meaning, can paradoxically fuel the «pathology of oppression» and «economies of lying» (Beneduce, 2015).

The internalisation of stereotypes of inferiority and superiority leaves the oppressed with the sense that they are lacking something that only their superior dominators have or can give them. In other words, oppression not only creates a need for justice but also a need for the oppressed to be recognised by their oppressors. Oliver suggests that demanding recognition from the dominant culture or master can become a symptom, an obsession, or a delusion.

The very notion of 'recognition' as it is deployed in various contemporary theoretical contexts is, then, more controversial and more complex: a symptom of the pathology of oppression itself. Implied in this diagnosis is the conclusion that «struggles for recognition and theories that embrace those struggles may indeed presuppose and thereby perpetuate the very hierarchies, domination, and injustice that they attempt to overcome» (Oliver, 2001, p. 9).

The shoes on Stefano Greco's table walk, wait for and fill with bodies, wills, and projects. A gaze questions us with a grin, along a border, from inside a prison: who and what do we want to see? Are we willing to meet his/her desire? To support his/her rights? Can these images make their tales of dust and abjection more powerful? Increase the strength of their gestures of resistance and revolt?

Conclusions

In these pages, we have tried to make some of the panels of *The Jacket* speak. The theoretical work carried out was not illustrative/descriptive concerning the

drawing but expansive. The theoretical reflection around the themes of solidarity, opacity, mimesis, authority, desire, recognition and citizenship was, so to speak, enabled and extracted from the panels, thus generating a new conceptual textuality, as if the drawing could be an elicitation device for the researchers themselves. It is, therefore, the dialogical, circular and continuous dimension between research - drawing - imagination - theory that seems interesting and peculiar in the graphic ethnography operation we have described here.

Firstly, it must be remembered that it is fieldwork, ethnographic immersion, that has sedimented a rough narrative of an experience through the classical form of writing and field notes. But this type of text, subsequently, was not mechanically declined in terms of translation, adaptation, or conversion into another language, namely that of drawing. The operation, on the opposite, was one of filtering, selection, contamination, and assembly: extracting together from the initial text, and adopting it as inspiration, another script. What we bet on was the potentiality of a transdisciplinary and transtemporal remaking based on connections and, dialogue, resonance (Rosa, 2019) within a heterogeneous working group, crossed by medical, artistic, sociological, anthropological, and poetic knowledge. And in now recounting this project through the language of academic writing, it is once again a dimension of surplus, in this case concerning drawing, that takes over, enhancing the theoretical production that is, so to speak, elicited by the chosen panels.

In this perspective, that of trespassing and debordering, it seems reductive to imagine that it is only communication or dissemination, popularisation, and the role that comics and graphic novels can play across social sciences (Barberis & Gruning, 2021). If this were the case, it would be an operation of simplification of something, science, which is thought of as complex in comparison to popular culture; instead, the graphic element, as it is practised and assembled here, wants to bring further complexity, further connections of knowledge and interpretation. This is why we like to think of the use of graphic novels and drawing in ethnography as a possible device for research and knowledge production, precisely because the drawing object is an artistic and social practice and art is the production of new knowledge, as the one generated by social sciences in their use of other methods and languages. The productivity of the relationship between comics and ethnography is in part similar to that between cinema and ethnography, which, as the Laboratory of Visual Sociology, we have explored over the past few years (Queirolo Palmas, 2018; Milotta & Torre, 2022).

We believe that introducing drawing into ethnography and ethnography into drawing can provide an open-ended ground for dialogue and co-production, able

not only to broaden the audiences of science but also to generate, as Jean Rouch suggested, a third gaze on the real and its fabrication. We have already pointed out the similarity between the *ethno-graphic* operation, such as the one described in these pages, and the cinematographic practices of editing; on the other hand, cinema echoes in comics ever since their definition in terms of *sequential art* (Sassatelli, 2021). Yet in the case of comics, image and text remain visible, vignette after vignette, captured in a fixed time, which conversely fades into the overlapping concatenation of filmic images. And by leaving comics visible, the operation of editing – the single still-frames of the narration – the conjunction between graphic sign and textuality, between images and concepts, between word and drawing opens up an additional possibility of reflexivity, of interpretation, of expansion, of depositing a theoretical thought on the social world. If the cinema is seen and the book is read, a graphic novel is leafed through; that is, it is read and seen together, and in doing so, a specific temporality and economy is established in the fruition of this cultural object that can open up new modes of elicitation to experiment in the field of social sciences.

Finally, it is also the process of producing a graphic novel that can help us to push social research and fieldwork into the terrain of collaborative ethnography and, at the same time, to question the verticality/extractivist dimension of mainstream social sciences. *The Jacket* focuses on the construction of a dialogical space between various disciplines and perspectives, in which the cartoonist and his craft operate as facilitating agents in the forging of connections between practices and archives of knowledge that are thought to be distant. In this vein, we can then be inspired by other initiatives that aim to generate co-authorship and third gazes between *the ones who research* and *the ones who are researched*. After all, the starting point for this text and this graphic novel was also the awareness of the recurrence of a visual landscape across the borders: all the everyday spaces of the undocumented movement are furnished and populated, not by books or films, but by drawings and graffiti produced by the travelling people themselves. What other shifts in meaning, orientations, and attitudes will *The Jacket* generate when, as an artistic, cultural, and ethnographic object, it is deposited in the multiple places where migrant routes are inhabited and reproduced?

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