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ABSTRACT

Although there has been a wide range of political responses to migration in Europe, scholarly analyses have shown that state and humanitarian responses have regardless done little to foster the integration of mobile people into host societies, resulting instead in a politics of exclusion. Resistance to such policies has taken the form of independent camps and solidary spaces. Although most analyses of informal camps agree on their emancipatory potential, the same studies have revealed that these realities can also reproduce existing relations of power. Are solidary spaces conducive to participatory politics? If so, how do activists and migrants construct their own identities in the struggle, and how do they translate them into practice? What power dynamics are re-inscribed in their action? My research will attempt to answer these questions through a case study of Ventimiglia, a town at the Franco-Italian border, and the waves of solidarity activism that have taken place there from 2015 to the present.

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Acknowledgments

1   Writing this thesis was quite an eventful journey and by no means a solitary one.

2   I want to thank my supervisor, Professor Elisabeth Prügl, for her invaluable support and her patience, even when I ran the risk of overstaying my welcome in her office.

3   I also want to thank all those who accepted to be interviewed and who welcomed me in their lives and their political projects, some briefly and some for a longer period of time. Your contribution to this research was fundamental and I can only hope that I did justice to you and your tireless and bright spirit of solidarity.

4   Many thanks also to my friends and colleagues who listened to me ramble about my project and offered help, advice, thought-provoking questions and most importantly food and coffee.

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Introduction

Ventimiglia, Italy: Analysing the workings of the borderland

1   Ventimiglia is a border town in north-west Italy, less than 10 kilometres from the French border. A town with a long history of migratory flows, it is not surprising that ever since the beginning of the most recent 'migration crisis' it has gained and held a place of particular importance, as a vantage point from which all the different features of this phenomenon can be truly witnessed. Tales of Ventimiglia starkly highlight the violence and insecurity that permeates the whole Italian borderland. A sense of uncertainty and precariousness accompanies a general frustration and sheer disbelief in the dynamics of discrimination, intersectional inequalities and forced mobility that are evident in those spaces. The border is neither closed nor open, but takes on different shapes depending on who is facing it, crystallizing their privilege or lack thereof. Appearances mark an individual's belonging to an imagined white, wealthy Europe, on behalf of which outsiders are effectively stopped, checked, and subsequently let go, either across the border or back to their own side of the barricade.

2   Colour and class, as a purely perceptible difference in terms of appearances, determine whether or not the border is permeable. They determine the very existence of the border itself, since it has not existed for decades, as far as European citizens are concerned. However, the openly discriminatory and racialised border controls are not the only issues that have led sympathetic observers to define the situation in the Franco-Italian borderland as 'absurd', 'ridiculous', 'unbelievable'. The border checkpoints at the *frontiera alta* and *frontiera bassa* (high and low, respectively), two major crossing points, are but one instrument of control of mobility put in place by the authorities. Due to regulations that allow the French authorities to return any migrant without French papers to Italy if found at less than 20 kilometres from the border, the French and Italian police effectively engage in a game of human ping-pong. The Italian authorities have no interest in certifying the presence of migrants in Italy because they would then need to allow those migrants to request asylum, while the French authorities have a great interest in patrolling the territory comprising a radius of 20

km from the border in search of migrants, to detain them and send them back to Italy with any pretext.[1]

3   This process had and still has migrants running in circles, ceaselessly attempting and often succeeding in crossing the border, only to be brought back to the starting point. Similarly, humanitarian camps and compounds have been created as a further instrument of control. Rather than providing neutral, safe enclaves for migrants, they are inhospitable, temporary shelters whose purpose is to firstly keep migrants away from the public eye and secondly to provide another space for the policing and control of migration flows. The Roya camp, built in the summer of 2016 near Ventimiglia, served to fulfil those very functions, tying together the provision of aid, shelter and food with not only necessary identification procedures but also constraints on mobility and other freedoms.

4   There is an increasing consensus in the literature revolving around encampment about the shortcomings of such a system of humanitarian assistance and control. Far from promoting the integration of migrants and refugees in host societies, it creates the conditions for their perennial exclusion (Agier 2014). The practices that underpin humanitarian protection have long been shown to foster the proliferation of a racialised, abject figuration of mobile people as helpless victims (Turner 2016). At the same time, the process of securitization of migration has generated a representation of mobility as endemic, dangerous and necessitating authoritative action on the parts of states. It is no surprise that in Ventimiglia, like elsewhere, the management of migration flows has been carried out through strict and often violent policing practices on the one hand, and on the other, the offer of humanitarian protection at the cost of one's status as a fully political subject (Walters 2010; Huysmans et al. 2009).

5   In Ventimiglia, resistance was born in parallel with the exercise of control. In the summer of 2015, many migrants and sympathetic activists had already mobilized to struggle against not only the securitization of the border and its closure but also against the role that humanitarian action played as a further form of control. In 2019, regardless of the many waves of repression, mobilization is still ongoing. Resistance coalesced around the creation of spatial enclaves, which I will call *solidary spaces*, aimed at re-shaping the unequal dynamics pervading the borderland. On the one hand, activists attempted to create safe spaces for migrants, which could become a stable landmark in the mobile geography of the borderland and foster social ties. On the other, they attempted to mediate and level the differences and inequalities that would otherwise put activists in a relative position of power vis-à-vis migrants, fostering instead horizontal practices of communal living and decision-making, re-articulating their subjectivities and the meaning of solidarity through notions of reciprocity and mutual vulnerability.

6   Such forms of resistance to the current migration regime in Europe is not by any means limited to Ventimiglia or to Italy in general. Wherever policies have built walls and restricted mobility in Europe, there has been an insurgence of solidary initiatives attempting to resist those very processes of exclusion and marginalization, through the provision of direct aid and political mobilization (della Porta 2018). Despite this fact, such initiatives have engendered scarce scholarly attention, with few if notable exceptions. Out of these contributions, there arises a sense of the potential that solidary spaces and initiatives have for restructuring the politics of mobility, by substituting inequality and abject victimhood with mutual care and vulnerability

(Squire 2018), by fostering new familial and communal ties among strangers, built on a shared experience of liminality (Sandri 2018) and new understandings of citizenship (Rygiel 2012). However, similar studies have also shown that these initiatives and informal camp-like spaces can also become vehicles of other forms of violent power dynamics, based on interlocking systems of race, gender and difference more generally (English 2017; Pascucci 2017).

7   Until now, no contribution has systematically analysed the ways in which these forms of solidarity activism resist and re-articulate the unequal power dynamics found in the European borderlands, while also re-inscribing inside their own boundaries different sorts of hierarchies and relations, which can be conducive to other forms of violence, to varying degrees. The focus of my research stems from a conscious effort to move the debate on migration away from understandings of encampment as bare life (Mountz 2011; Agamben 1995; Edkins and Pin-Fat 2005), as well as from an understanding of the subjects/objects of humanitarian aid as perfect victims, whose figuration props up a paternalistic, liberal self who engages in care-taking (Barnett 2011; Turner 2016. The emphasis on activist rather than humanitarian forms of encampment opens up the possibility to reach farther into conceptions of solidarity, that reshape relationships of caretaking, from unequal exchanges to situations of mutual vulnerability (Vaittinen 2015; Sandri 2018). Furthermore, this paper openly stands to intervene on mundane discourses on migration, security and humanitarianism. It seeks to become an 'enactment' of the realities it stands to portray, by representing opposing practices, discourses and identities as potential nodes of resistance (Aradau and Huysmans 2014).

8   My contribution seeks to show how resistance in Ventimiglia, from 2015 to the present day, has been articulated in the form of 'adversarial spatial practices' (Feigenbaum et al. 2013) and 'interstitial politics' (Pignarre and Stengers 2011), where the effort to bracket off social spaces, away from the power relations of the borderland, have enabled activists and migrants to re-articulate their relationship with the borderland and with one another. Their action, motivated by an ethics of solidarity that is built on a sense of common humanity and the experience of suffering, has reshaped the forms of aid available in Ventimiglia and their political significance, recovering the political agency present in vulnerability. Their ideal commitment to solidarity, translated into practices of communal living, has informed the creation of horizontal ties of care and belonging. However, if solidarity as a practice has succeeded in levelling relations of privilege and has disallowed certain forms of violence, to a certain extent, gendered dynamics in the provision of care and emotional labour, gender-based and sexual violence as well as racial tensions have remained structuring forces in these spaces, complicating their potential to spark the creation of political alternatives.

FOOTNOTES

1. This has been the case since the start of the 'crisis' in 2015. However, at the time of writing the situation seems to be changing. Most migrants attempting to cross into France do have some sort of identification papers or asylum seeker status in one or several European countries. Many

of them also work or have worked in Italy and are seeking to move to another country because of the worsening working and living conditions in Italy, especially given the rise in hostility towards migrants and the more stringent asylum regulations approved by Parliament in late 2018.

1. A Look at the Relevant Literature

1.1 Migration, Security and Order

1 How to contextualise the study of resistance, through the concept and practice of solidarity, and in the larger scope of migration studies? Firstly, it is necessary to review how migration has become a crucial security issue in recent decades, justifying draconian measures to keep mobile people outside national borders or at least to keep them in place. In this larger process of securitisation, humanitarian initiatives and interventions can be understood less as a politically neutral response to migration 'crises' and more as simply another tool for the perpetuation of forms of inequality and control over mobility. The camp form thus becomes a space where humanitarian actors exercise particular forms of biopolitical control over mobile subjects, who in turn are represented and reproduced as powerless victims, deserving of pity and aid, or alternatively as threatening insurgent subjects whose excessive agency needs to be contained. These logics not only shape formal or professional humanitarian responses to migration, but also grassroots initiatives that are enmeshed in and perpetuate these discourses.

2 It is in this specific context that the relationship between care and political agency becomes crucial to understanding how camps can function as tools of confinement and dispossession, by establishing a trade-off between the freedom or the right to act politically and the entitlement to receive care. This speaks to a wider understanding that constructs vulnerable subjectivities as entirely and only powerless, and caring subjectivities as fully agentic, without any acknowledgement of a wider spectrum that might exist in between. Resistance to current migration regimes and solidarity initiatives for and with mobile people seize exactly on these fault lines, mobilising the concept of solidarity, as an alternative to the management of migration through dispossession. Studies concerned with these initiatives however, while succeeding in representing them as an interesting site for the experimentation of alternatives, have fallen short in articulating how solidarity is mobilised in practice, both in terms of its conceptual dimension and its performance. The following chapter will explore the wider context of studies of migration, with special emphasis on the ways in which security, humanitarianism and care all contribute to shaping the de-evaluation of

mobile people's agency, and on how solidarity initiatives might constitute a viable alternative requiring further study and attention.

1.2 Soft Insides, Hard Boundaries, Unruly Outside

3 Scholarly studies pointing to the relevance of migration and displacement for the field of International Relations seem to collectively espouse a view of any mobility outside of the correct population-territory-state matrix to be a stop-gap solution to other issues (for example, armed conflicts or environmental degradation), or as a threat to statutory orders everywhere (Betts and Loesher 2011; Turner 2016). Betts and Loesher (2011), for instance, highlight how scholars of IR should pay attention to migration, as it stands to have serious consequences for understandings of state sovereignty, the success of conflict-resolution and peacekeeping efforts, as well as the War on Terror. Refugees and migrants are considered externalities of the state system and as such represent a problem to be solved through governance and international burden-sharing. The management of migration as a crucial linchpin of international order takes on an even more pernicious veneer if the issue is rephrased in terms of security and protection.

4 Migration and security have become two closely interconnected terms. This coupling, often termed the 'migration-security nexus' (Huysmans and Squire 2009; Walters 2010), highlights how migration has been understood and acted upon as a fundamental security issue. The implications that migration has for (in)security are twofold. On the one hand, fear of infiltration by terrorist groups has motivated states to strengthen their checks on mobility in order to protect the population from physical attacks (Walters 2010). On the other, identitarian paranoia has accompanied the stigmatisation and securitisation of mobility (Weber 2016). The cultural other, alien to the imagined community of the nation, is set apart by their backwardness, sexual promiscuity and incapacity to totally integrate, and sparks fear of invasion and the loss of cultural unity and purity (Hage 2016).

5 As such, migration takes on the trappings of a crucial security question, requiring an adequate response from authorities. Whether the act of securitization itself is performed by international organizations such as the UNHCR (Hammerstad 2011) or by a Bourdieusian field of security practitioners, both private and public (Bigo 2014), it effectively produces pervasive devices aimed at controlling the mobility of these undesirables, while also enabling the unencumbered mobility of goods, capital and privileged subjects (Hage 2016; Hyndman 2000). The production of such society-wide devices of control, aptly named by Bigo (2014) the *ban-opticon,* results from the contest between different organizations to define the terms of the debate on migration in ways that privilege their own quest for legitimacy and capacities. At the same time, the ban-opticon works through the identification of undesirable people and their confinement to marginal spaces where suspension (Mountz 2011) takes the place of any sort of mobility. The creation of these spaces of waiting, on the margins, physical or otherwise, of the social scene (Agier 2014) can be both purposeful – as with the creation of humanitarian camps, detention centres or deportation facilities – or be the result of a politics of abandonment (Squire 2018), where distancing is an effect of the dispossession rather than the containment of mobile people.

6   Humanitarian action in this case, rather than representing an opposition to the securitization of migration, as some authors have claimed (Hammerstad 2011; Barnett 2011), enacts and perpetrates the same unequal politics of privilege and exclusion put in place by state authorities (Squire 2015; Reid-Henry 2014). Analysis of humanitarian camps and humanitarian intervention is not by any means new to migration studies. A wealth of anthropologists, geographers, scholars of international relations and other social scientists have concerned themselves with analysing life inside these camps and the ways in which relations of power are reproduced in these apparently neutral spaces (Agier 2014; Hyndman 2000; Betts and Loescher 2011; Moulin and Nyers 2007). Moving from a rather uncritical view that reinforces the connection between humanitarianism and neutrality or strangeness, to political questions of control, inequality and power (Hyndman 2000), scholars have started to focus more and more on the dark underbelly of humanitarian action, highlighting the ambiguous connections between protection, control and obedience (Huysmans et al. 2009).

7   A viable politics of protection requires the definition and production of a vulnerable subject, and of a threat from which it needs protection. This double boundary, which demarcates both the interior and exterior of a political community, has been identified as the root of sovereign power (Peterson 2018; Ashley 1989; Agamben 1995). This line of distinction, which Ashley (1989) calls the 'Cartesian divide', runs through processes of construction, both of the self as an individual and of the state. It demarcates a free, unencumbered and unitary interior in opposition with a messy, unruly and possibly dangerous exterior. When this logic of inclusion and exclusion is applied to examples of encampment and humanitarian action (Agamben 1995; Hyndman 2000), an extremely complex picture comes to light, as multiple boundaries are constantly drawn and redrawn around the figure of the 'migrant'.

8   Furthermore, acts of distinction understood in this sense also resonate with feminist perspectives on the gendered construction of the self (Chodorow 1997), as well as gendered constructions of nationhood and statehood (Peterson 2018; Brown 1992). These latter practices thrive on intersecting plays on inclusion and exclusion of subjects from the proper space of politics, on account of productive, gendered hierarchies. The drawing of exclusionary boundaries and fault-lines seems to be a constant feature of the construction of subjects, whether singular or collective, often lending a gendered connotation to both sides of the opposition. The inside – the vulnerable feminine space of private life or of the nation – needs protection from a barbaric, unruly outside, whether represented by war, anarchy, or in this case the consequences of global transformations. The dividing boundary – a hard one – promises protection and separation, while also requiring obedience and compliance on the part of the inside (Huysmans et al. 2009). The figure of the migrant is ambivalently both a threat and vulnerable victim, depending on how they are *read* by the authorities in the receiving polity.

9   The identification of vulnerability in shifting, often questionable terms, leads the migrant to be equated with the humanitarian victim, in need of protection through the mechanisms of humanitarian action. The lack of formal identification as such, conversely, leads to a politics of abandonment (Squire 2018), where resistance is similarly disqualified and equated to a threat to the constituted order. In both cases, the positionality of the migrant, as an outsider who cannot partake in the political life

of the more or less temporary receiving country, has complex implications for the ways in which political agency and subjectivity are understood, articulated and studied.

10   In the case of humanitarian camps, migrants and refugees are effectively excluded from the political community in which they seek to be integrated. Entry and exit are under strict control, and the camp populace is not entitled to seek integration into the receiving country through employment or education, except for in very specific cases, which often depend on the relative wealth of material or social capital that the migrating subject has to begin with (Hyndman 2000). According to scholarly analyses of the subject, migrants as such become objects of the sovereign's power of distinction, living in a suspended space-time continuum that reduces them to bare-life subjects, devoid of political rights and agency (Agamben 1995; Mountz 2011; Edkins and Pin-Fat 2005). As bare life, migrants are subjects that cannot participate in politics, reduced to mere *bios,* to the simple existence of their vulnerable bodies. Much thought has been given to the possibility of transcending this condition (Edkins and Pin-Fat 2005; Vaittinen 2015), with mixed results.

11   The logics of governance inside the camps are based on an understanding of displacement as an affliction (Hyndman, 2000), as a temporary problem awaiting a solution (Turner 2016) that will naturally occur when the perverse mobility of the subject, whatever their legal standing, will be reconciled with the proper territory-nation-state matrix (Hyndman 2000; Betts and Loescher 2011). In the meantime, their undesirable mobility must be contained in the space of the camp. However, far from being spaces devoid of or insulated from politics, refugee and migrant camps not only present their own politics but they are also closely connected to the political dynamics just outside their walls (Hyndman 2000; Agier 2014). At best, camps are spaces of 'banal cosmopolitanism' (Agier 2014, 10, author's translation), and community rebuilding (Fresia and Von Känel 2016). At worst, they are spaces where layers of intersectional inequalities are reproduced (English, 2017), and where detainees occupy a firmly subaltern status, immersed as they are in a 'brutal discourse of race' (Agier 2014, 25, author's translation).

12   It then becomes less surprising to consider that humanitarian camps represent a site for the enactment of practices of discipline and control of 'suspicious' and 'unruly' migrant populations, following the patterns of other spaces of biopolitical control – whether such control is exercised through headcounts, fingerprint-scanning, curfews or bodily checks (Fassin 2007; Hyndman 2000). However, humanitarianism is also a particular 'politics of life' (Fassin 2007) insofar as it enshrines privilege and inequality in the determination of which lives need/can be risked and which need/can be saved. This drives a wedge between the lives of the humanitarian personnel, whose security needs to be guaranteed by their sending organization, and those humanitarian subjects who can, in extreme cases, be sacrificed. Jennifer Hyndman (2000) highlights this form of inequality in humanitarian action by emphatically underlining the fact that the relative capacity to come and go from a camp is determined by one's belonging to a cosmopolitan élite (either of the NGOs, IO personnel, or the nation-state hosting the camp), while migrants and refugees alike have no claims to mobility.

13   Furthermore, Fassin (2007) also shows that, while humanitarianism perpetrates a distinction between the lives of the personnel and those of the vulnerable objects of humanitarian action, it also promotes a distinction between the politics of exception (afforded by states, which designate the vulnerable populations that may die), and the

politics of life (which humanitarian action itself represents in its aims to protect the vulnerable). The very justification for humanitarian protection, then, is intimately tied to the concept of victimhood. However, that same victimhood is also often detrimental to recognising political agency for the protected, who are infantilized (Squire 2018). Turner (2016, 143) emphatically states that 'To be worthy of humanitarian assistance, the receiver must be purely human – that is someone without a past, without political will, without agency.' Thus, subjects of humanitarian protection – and control – trade in their political agency for the fulfilment of basic needs, such as food, shelter and medical attention.

14 The intrinsic inequality at the basis of the provision of aid and care in humanitarian settings has led scholars to question whether these analyses have really discovered anything new about the logics of humanitarian action, or if they have simply finally seized on an underlying logic of control that has always been present (Barnett 2011). Equating humanitarianism with a paternalistic relationship between caregivers and recipients of care, Michael Barnett (2011) claims that, although humanitarianism is not an ideal tool, it nevertheless allows organisations or governments to mobilise compassion and care on behalf of 'distant strangers'. This point of view, also discussed in Fassin (2007), privileges the action of the care-taker, as necessary or heroic, while diminishing the importance of the care receiver, who is but a passive recipient of aid that he or she cannot reciprocate.

1.3 Camp, Community, Resistance

15 The logics described above are not only present in sanctioned, official humanitarian camp spaces. Similar dynamics can also be identified in urban forms of informal encampment (Lafaut and Coene 2018), where mobile bodies are identified either as vulnerable, fragile, in need of care, or as threatening. As Agier (2014) extensively develops, the camp-form is recognizable by its different degrees of extraterritoriality, exception and exclusion, and has no privileged geographical or spatial setting, if not that of constant marginality, and a fleeting temporal dimension. It represents an ambiguous, contradictory form of institutionalized, settled transiency, an in-between space that leaves migrants 'suspended in migration' (Agier 2014, 25, author's translation). However these places might be defined, the empirical reality of life in camps frustrates attempts to view subjects of humanitarian aid as powerless and lacking agency, and camps as a-political spaces. Turner (2016, 145) effectively terms camps as spaces of 'hyper-politicization', where not only social hierarchies and power dynamics are re-negotiated and reproduced, but where the very attempt to depoliticize life makes the come-back of politics on the scene all the more fervent and sometimes violent.

16 Although empirical analysis has fruitfully shown that, regardless of their specific form, camps remain highly political spaces (see Agier 2014; Hyndman 2000; English 2017 for some examples), the theoretical lenses applied to the study of encampment have sometimes driven scholars to excessively dire or excessively hopeful conclusions (McNevin 2013). Some scholars insist on seeing camp life as a form of bare life, and the figure of the migrant or the refugee as the modern *homo sacer* (Mountz 2011; Edkins and Pin-Fat 2005; Owens 2011), thus seemingly unable to exit the deadlock of exception. Other scholars, however, see in the migrant a form of transgressive subjectivity

standing as a challenge to modern logics of government (Rygiel 2011; Ataç 2016). From this perspective, the figure of the migrant becomes transformative because it enacts citizenship in the absence of formal civil rights, and challenges the politics of belonging underpinning the concept of nationality. This is both less and more than the actual politics of the encampment seems to be. As Puggioni (2017) states, migrants might be in a position of rightlessness in their host countries, but they remain citizens of their home countries and as such have been socialized to have a political voice. No matter how narrowly or broadly one chooses to define what counts as a political subject, it seems increasingly difficult to discount completely or to over-emphasise the reach of the political claims aired by seemingly dispossessed subjects.

17   The political opportunities offered by the analysis of the political agency of migrants is not the only point of contrast between scholars interested in migration and especially encampment. The very notion of community, and the ever-present question of whether camps should be rightfully considered communities in some form, is one of the crucial questions recurring in academic works. Hyndman (2000), while affirming the importance of both local and international political dynamics in refugee camps run by the UNHCR, discounts the idea of the camp itself being a community, due to its lack of self-identification as such, its limited temporal horizon and the hard boundaries regulating access to the outside. Other scholars have argued that, on the contrary, camps do represent a form of community. Bulley (2014, 67) claims for instance that the camp is a community in the sense given to the term by Jean Luc Nancy, one of 'unavoidable coexistence'. As such, the camp represents a site for politics, both as management and as resistance. Squire (2018) goes even further, claiming that informal camps or squats can become communities insofar as they represent communities of sentiment, where shared notions and experiences of vulnerability and transiency provide the necessary foundations for forming communal ties.

18   Informal camps and forms of volunteer humanitarianism (Sandri 2018, 66) have provided the background for more recent scholarly analysis of encampment and migration. Starting with famous examples, such as the Jungle in Calais or the Idomeni camp in Greece, scholars have focused their attention on camps run by grassroots organizations in concert with the migrants themselves, as a site for theorizing a way out of the deadlock of bare life and the recurring inequalities of humanitarian action. Sandri (2018), who coined the term 'volunteer humanitarianism', investigates the dynamics and the motivations that brought British citizens to volunteer in Calais. She highlights how, rather than a logic of liberal morality aimed at helping the vulnerable, the action of providing aid in such a fraught social space created situations of mutual vulnerability and neediness, which led volunteers and migrants to form strong bonds and consider each other as 'extended family' (Sandri 2018, 76). A similar accent on the closeness that is engendered by these encounters can be found in English (2017), Squire (2018) and Rygiel (2011).

19   As a space promising to break down the barriers generally upheld by formal humanitarian action – more specifically by either long-standing NGOs, IOs or states – informal camps seem to have implications for the ways in which activists and migrants understand citizenship (Rygiel 2011), as well as the relationship between humanitarianism and politics. The relative borderlines between proper political action and neutral humanitarianism have always been contested. Although many scholars (Fassin 2007; Reid-Henry 2014) have successfully argued that humanitarianism is often

politics through other means, in the field there remains much discussion about whether providing aid to people on the move is a form of political activism or a form of charity. Activists themselves often do not have one shared view on how to cast their actions. Some are extremely sceptical of the political value of aid (della Porta 2018), while others tend to steer clear of any political claims so as not to invalidate their standing as neutral practitioners (Lafaut and Coene 2018).

20 Regardless of the unstable standing of these initiatives vis-à-vis the political realm, the process of becoming engaged in informal camps has led activists to become more and more involved in openly political actions such as lobbying and advocacy initiatives, even for those who primarily define themselves as humanitarian actors (Sandri 2018; Ataç 2016). This is compatible with other analyses of activism that take into account the specificities of camps as a form of political contestation, highlighting these spaces' capacity to form new political subjectivities and educate participants to action (Brown et al. 2017). However, just like humanitarian camps, informal encampments are enmeshed in and re-produce different sorts of politics. In some cases, varying degrees of contextual vulnerability and intersectional dynamics effectively create inequalities and perpetrate different forms of violence, making (in)security one of the main contentious issues in the camps (English 2017).

21 Inequalities and differences in power go hand in hand with a seemingly transformative approach to care in these spaces. Squire (2018) effectively argues that in such spaces, where each individual contributes according to their own abilities, and complex governance and rule-enforcing mechanisms are employed, the experience of mutual vulnerability breaks away from the classic dualism of caretaker/victim underpinning humanitarian action. This experience of transiency, born out of living together in various forms of dispossession and precariousness for both activists and migrants, becomes a mutually transformative and dialogical process of identity construction that ultimately leads to a community of sentiment.

22 The focus on relationality and mutuality stands in clear contrast with views of humanitarianism that compare aid to gift-giving (Turner 2016; Fassin 2007). The provision of aid in humanitarian contexts often hinges on viewing the recipient of aid as someone who, by their very status as a victim, cannot reciprocate the gift in the form of a *counter-gift.* This figuration justifies humanitarian intervention on the grounds that victims cannot save themselves. Furthermore, as humanitarian assistance is often provided in situations of mortal danger, the very gift of life is the condition of inequality that underpins and produces both the powerless identity of the victim and that of their morally just saviour. As already discussed in the above sections, this condition of inequality is not only discursive but also entrenched in the daily lived experience of the camps (Hyndman 2000; Agier 2014), through management practices, control devices and enforced differentiated security and mobility regimes.

23 In the context of informal camps, it is the very exposure of volunteers and migrants to the same dangers and sources of (in)security, without the widely different guarantees that set humanitarian personnel apart in the field, that creates the possibility for mutual exchange and fruitful political engagement. A similar condition of abandonment by the state at large (Squire 2018) fosters a shared experience of liminality, creating the closeness necessary for the basis of an embryonic community. At the same time, it is unclear which dynamics are at play when scholars point out the violence, inequality and injustice that are produced in these spaces. Although most

analyses of informal refugee camps (Brown et al. 2017; Feigenbaum et al. 2013) are in agreement about the emancipatory potential of these spaces, the same studies have also revealed how, in certain cases, these realities ultimately reproduce existing relations of power as well as gendered and racialised hierarchies (English 2017; Pascucci 2017). Far from being utopian sites of egalitarian and progressive politics, these spaces can also transform into sites of oppression and discrimination. The ambivalence found in the literature, as well as in activist testimonies, calls for a careful analysis of the political dynamics defining these spaces.

24 Are informal camps, squats and locii of volunteer humanitarianism really spaces for participatory politics and egalitarian relations between migrants and volunteers/activists? If so, how do activists as well as migrants construct their own identities vis-à-vis one another, bridging the gaps created by difference and inequality? What is the role of solidarity in this process, as both an interpretive lens and a practice? Finally, what power dynamics or inequalities are re-inscribed in these spaces, fraught with intersectional dimensions of difference? In order to shed some light on the contested and sometimes contradictory accounts put forward by scholars and activists alike (Pascucci 2017; English 2017; Sandri 2018; Squire 2018; Rygiel 2011), I propose to carry out an empirical analysis of such spaces in the border town of Ventimiglia, Italy. There, forms of encampment and solidarity activism first appeared in 2015, and have since then attempted to resist the policy of exclusion, abandonment and securitization put forward by the Italian and French authorities.

2. Theoretical Framework and Research Design

2.1 Solidarity through Vulnerability

1   Against the pervasive and capillary forms of marginalization that intersect in regimes of mobility control, resistance has increasingly coalesced around the concept of solidarity, redrawing communal boundaries based on a shared conception of humanity (Squire 2018; Rygiel 2012; Sandri 2018). Activist discourses have long included solidarity as a rallying cry to action. The use of such a term in the context of the activism on behalf of and together with migrants, refugees and *sans-papiers* has become so crucial to the self-understanding of such mobilizations that it has prompted activists to adopt the name 'solidarians' (della Porta 2018). However, some questions remain unanswered. What meanings are attached to solidarity in this context? How is it translated into political practice? What role does it play in the formation of resistant alternatives? To answer these questions, it is necessary to have an overview of what solidarity can entail more generally, and how it can be translated into action.

2   The concept of solidarity has a long and varied history, and its usage in everyday language has generated new and wider shades of meaning (Sholz 2015). One tenet at the very core of the concept is its mediating power between the individual and the community. While solidarity might mean different things at different points in time and in different contexts, there remains a relational dimension to the concept that usually calls individuals to action on the basis of common moral commitments, or as Sholz (2015, 725) puts it 'the obligations of a moral relation'. Similarly, Wilde (2013, 1), while providing what he calls a normative definition of solidarity, claims that it entails a 'feeling of sympathy shared by subjects within and between groups, impelling supportive action and pursuing social inclusion'.

3   This twofold definition breaks solidarity down into two moments. The first revolves around the recognition of a common feeling, which might entail empathy, compassion or even pity. The second instead entails a call to action to address the wrongs that have been identified in society. Understood as such, solidarity assumes both the recognition of a pre-existing sense of fellowship with strangers, or the creation of such a sense of

commonality, and the definition of a political project to which one might aspire as a form of 'supportive action'. Many a definition of commonality is built on claims to a common humanity, however poorly or thinly defined, and this can sometimes run the risk of creating an essentialist, universalist, equally exclusive fiction (Wilde 2013). Moreover, the 'recognition' of humanity is as much the invention and production of a *certain definition of humanity*, which is contextual and contingent, usually highlighting certain characteristics as those that truly make one human.

4   Recognizing the danger of defining solidarity solely on the basis on a predetermined human essence, Rorty (1989) argues that it is not the recognition of a pre-existing similarity that prompts people to act on their feeling of solidarity, as if similarity and difference were two opposing poles with no intermediate ground. Rather, it is the recognition of certain contextual similarities, and the downplaying of differences – which seem in the historical moment less salient – that triggers the acting out of solidarity. The contextual, salient similarities to which he refers are to be found in humans' vulnerability to pain and suffering (Rorty 1989, 192), providing the necessary grounds for the process of identification, and lying at the basis of the concept of human solidarity.

5   Putting vulnerability at the centre of any conception of humanity has serious implications for the ways in which we think about agency and political subjectivity. In particular, by recovering the agency of the suffering body and the status of the victim figure as the site where any relationship of care is first established (Vaittinen 2015), it is possible to restructure completely, not only the terms of humanitarian protection and the figuration of its subjects/objects, but also the possibility of lending full political agency to their claims. Rather than viewing the suffering body as a new *homo sacer*, heedlessly sacrificed (Agamben 1995; Edkins and Pin-Fat 2005), this conception of humanity leads us to re-evaluate the value of suffering as a trigger for meaningful political action.

6   Vaittinen (2015) effectively argues for moving the starting point of the politics of care away from the act of caretaking and back to its origin, the suffering body. However, Vaittinen (2015) recognizes that the suffering body is powerful only when considered legitimate in the sense of being mournable (Butler, 2004 cited in Squire 2018) and thus being discursively legible as non-expendable. Being grieved becomes another condition for the recognition of shared humanity (Butler 2003), which sits beside the recognition of a mutual vulnerability to suffering. No action is possible without the reading of violence as illegitimate, and that in turn is not possible without the affirmation that the victims of suffering are not expendable lives, as they often are determined to be in the processes of humanitarian protection (Fassin 2007).

7   Once certain lives are seen as non-expendable, the ontological reality of the suffering body becomes necessary to even speak of care, and as such, it renders vulnerability the more politically meaningful and powerful ground for discussion (Vaittinen 2015). Furthermore, a focus on relatedness and on degrees of neediness, which belong as much to those commonly identified as vulnerable as to everyone else, makes it possible to rewrite the identities and roles of the care recipient and caregiver. By putting care and neglect on a continuum that takes into account the vulnerability of the care recipient and the finiteness of the capabilities and resources available to the caregiver – both emotional and material – Vaittinen (2015) opens up a path to mediating the inequality present in the exchange, and to evening out the field of analysis.

2.2 Practicing Alternatives

8   Solidarity anchored in suffering and mourning, as fundamental facets of humanity, can constitute the precondition for meaningful political action. However, this is not sufficient for the realization of any resistant political alternative. The shifting identities of care-giver and care-recipient, of guest and host, of migrant and solidarian are not merely abstract notions but are performed through the practices of aid and resistance, just as they are produced in the contextual spaces and relations in the borderland. The role of space and the re-construction of space through the action of solidary initiatives is just as important as the re-articulation of social and political dynamics *inside* the safe spaces[1] created by activists. To be more precise, the restructuring of space and the renegotiating of power dynamics go hand in hand, thanks to what authors have called 'adversarial spatial practices' (Feigenbaum et al. 2013, 171). By representing a material opposition between the camp and the outside, adversarial spatial practices, understood as the very existence of camp boundaries and its spatial presence, condense the internal governance dynamics of the camp in opposition to its outside. In this way, they mediate both the internal organization of the camp and its attempt to propose political and social alternatives.

9   This insight, emerging from studies of protest camps – especially as a repertoire for action for new social movements – effectively links the creation of a basic form of community with the re-articulation of political processes through the practicing of grounded, contingent alternatives. Community in this sense is understood as a basic form of sociality and *communitas*, informed by the dissolution of difference. The latter is fostered by a shared experience of liminality and organic horizontality, which consists in the creation of an internal organization based on trust and on a modality of 'power with', as well as the role of a common opposition. The importance of a common opposition, namely those power structures to which the camp seeks to provide alternatives and to which it resists, is crucial in determining the boundaries of the camp, which are both material and discursive, including 'physical barriers, legal strategies, visual and soundscapes, countercultural demarcations' (Feigenbaum et al. 2013, 206).

10 Inside the camp-space, the proliferation of resistant, insurgent identities is supported not only by outright political action, such as protests or awareness-raising, but also by attempts to reimagine social relations in a completely new way, rearticulating the status quo through an emphasis on practices of social reproduction, not only intended as cultural but also material. The ways in which protest camps blend together forms of alternative living with forms of political action, redrawing the boundaries between politics and daily life, restructure not only the power dynamics of the borderland but also the distinction made by activists between the provision of direct aid and protest (della Porta 2018; Ataç 2016).

11 Rather than establishing the primacy of either direct aid over protest or vice versa, solidary spaces rearticulate power from the ground up through their practicing of alternatives, which enshrine new, reciprocal relationships in the provision of aid, while at the same time shifting the figuration of the migrant away from images of powerless victimhood lacking political agency. The establishment of horizontality in practices of decision-making, communal living and shared vulnerability to police violence in

protest is a definite means of establishing forms of equality in transit that disallow both the rationale of exclusion practiced by the state and the logics of bare-life enshrined in humanitarian protection. Furthermore, the refusal, even the impossibility, to build a coherent long-term movement strategy that might be expressed outside of these spaces, in more familiar political scripts based on protest or claim-making at large, allows for their engagement with a form of 'interstitial politics' (Pignarre and Stengers 2011) that transcends the distinction between direct aid and formally understood political organising.

12 The embodied experience of the camp is crucial for its existence as a political form, and it is the relationship between the political community in becoming, and the individual contribution, that makes it a prime site for political development. The camp form can be fruitfully analysed as a political event where the parts – whether the individual participants or the non-human structures of the camp – all participate in the creation of a space and a political figuration that is much more than their sum. This view has crucial implications for the concept of political agency, as it is commonly understood. If the camp, as a whole, is the completion (the political event) of all the different components that participate in it, the importance and the import of human and non-human agency is both more and less than what it is often portrayed to be.

13 The concept of non-sovereign agency (Krause 2013) allows us to highlight the fact that, when departing from a sense of identity belonging to a human actor, and the diagnostic capacity that that sense of identity often provides,[2] agency is often a fraught and incomplete process that never comes to completion unless inserted into a wider political context. In this case, the action of a single individual often has meaning in the way in which that action interacts with other human and non-human actors, bouncing off their own existence and intertwining with it. Agency then is less an individual possession than it is an intersubjective phenomenon that draws complex ties between identity and political events. This is compatible with the relational understanding of care and vulnerability, not only as a spectrum, but also as an agentic component of political practice. The refusal to identify a privileged subject/object of political discourse or agent of political action evades the creation of that same hard boundary of selfhood and community (Ashley, 1989), a hard boundary that supports and justifies the securitization of migration, the paternalistic logic of humanitarian protection and the dehumanisation of mobile people.

14 This refusal can constitute what Stengers et al. (2010) terms 'minor key' thinking, or an ecology of practices as a thinking tool, for both theoretical and political activism. An 'ecology of practices' as a mode for thinking means thinking through the middle in the sense of:

> Both the middle and the surroundings or habitat. 'Through the middle' would mean without grounding definitions or an ideal horizon. 'With the surroundings' would mean that no theory gives you the power to disentangle something from its particular surroundings, that is, to go beyond the particular towards something we would be able to recognise and grasp in spite of particular appearances. (Stengers 2013, 187)

15 As a political praxis, an ecology of practices thrives on 'hesitation' (Stengers et al. 2010), the process of questioning contextually the validity of accepted and pre-existent norms and rules, as opposed to 'obligation' – formulations that imply and require obedience.

16   The practice of 'hesitation' as a political tool leads to 'giving a situation that gathers the power to force those who are gathered to think and invent' (Stengers et al. 2010, 21). The value of situational and environmental material for enabling political creativity and a form of political enactment that eschews identity and identification, substituting it with a sense of becoming in togetherness between humans and non-humans[3] in the situational milieu, has been articulated as 'minor politics' (Rose 1999; Squire and Darling 2013) and a 'politics of cramped spaces' (Walters and Lüthi 2016; Thoburn 2016). Walters and Lüthi (2016) make special mention of the localized spaces of borders and borderlands produced by migration flows, as both situationally and materially 'cramped spaces' that give rise to new political forms and creativity.

17   The activists involved in these projects refuse to be cast as privileged caretakers of their less-able charges, taking on the name of 'solidarians' (della Porta 2018), living in the camp-spaces along with the migrants, cooperating with them in carrying out basic daily activities of social reproduction[4] as well as management of the solidary-spaces. The role of solidarity in particular seems to set this specific form of activism off from other forms of humanitarian mobilization based on forms of pity and compassion. Rather than reinforcing privilege by hardening the boundary between carer and object of care, activists seem to attempt to navigate those spaces of inequality and difference with a grounded, practical mind-set that allows them to position themselves materially and ideationally *beside and with* migrants.

2.3 Ethics of Care and the Persistence of Gendered Dynamics

18   One feature that is common to all camp-spaces is the way in which they break down the boundary between politics, the democratic public sphere, and the domestic dimension of the home and of social reproduction. By being equipped with necessary 're-creation infrastructures' (Brown et al. 2017), camps successfully politicize the process of care-taking and social reproduction[5], making it part of the political project rather than an obscure, invisible precondition to political action (Ataç 2016). However, gendered power dynamics with respect to the status quo of the wider society often risk remaining unchanged. Authors have suggested that the endurance of such unequal structures points to the ways in which caring for the well-being of subjects is outsourced though oppression (Feigenbaum et al. 2013), while the threat of internal violence and insecurity often generates gendered mechanisms of masculinist protection and feminine vulnerability.

19   Gendered dynamics enter solidary spaces in two forms: as a structuring force for relations of care and the division of emotional labour, and as a productive lens through which (in)security is articulated. As described above, the performance of humanity through solidarity practices is anchored to a mutual sense of vulnerability and a 'moral duty' to care. However, the ways in which such care work is distributed may, under certain circumstances, reflect a gendered division of labour though which women are distinguished as the primary caretakers. This is often due to an understanding of care work as intimate, subservient and nurturing, leading it to be constructed as 'naturally' feminine. The feminization of care work has been shown to be dependent on both the number of women who take up such work in many sectors, and the ways in which the

female 'touch' is constructed socially as caring, as opposed to a masculine touch which might instead be considered predatory (Cohen and Wolkowitz 2018).

20   The identification of care work as intimate and feminine, even when performed in a space that undercuts the usual boundaries between the public and private domain, is accompanied by the development of gendered mechanisms of masculinist protection (Young 2003), where it is the duty and privilege of men to protect their vulnerable charges, such as children and female kin. This mechanism, which structures the private and public divide in liberal societies, as well as gendered constructions of the state and security in international relations, also informs the management of protection and (in)security, as well as exploitation in the borderland. In this situation, women are put in a subservient position, abdicating their agency to their male protectors, while men play the role of both heroes and villains, representing the hope of protection and at the same time the threat of violence.

21   Regardless of the attempt to build inclusive solidary spaces that could serve the needs of all of its denizens, in addition to an organic dialogue on gender issues in the borderland, the lack of any formal and informal measures to enforce security in these camp-spaces have driven relations of (in)security to become dependent on organic, gendered structures of kinship. These relations, based on trust and personal connections, although they represent a vehicle for the construction of a baseline sense of belonging to the community of the borderland, can ultimately end up mirroring the same gendered dynamics structuring patriarchal households, exposing women to gender-based and sexual violence as well as exploitation. Furthermore, racial tensions often offset the coming together of these spaces, when organic horizontality have failed to make an appearance as a levelling force of difference. Awareness of difference and privilege has informed much self-reflection on the part of activists and migrants, sometimes succeeding in creating a viable, equitable community, and sometimes failing in the view of many, contrasting and interlocking the dynamics of difference and power that structure life in the borderland.[6]

2.4 Some Notes on Methodology and Ethics

22   Ventimiglia, like other migration hotspots in Italy, has seen a constant flow of transit and temporary settlement of migrants attempting to cross the border into another European country. It has become a crucial node along the migration routes connecting the African continent and the Middle East to Europe. Like other localities in proximity to securitised borders (such as Calais in France, Idomeni in Greece and Ceuta in Morocco), the presence of migrants, rarely successful in the crossing, has sparked the creation of several solidary initiatives to address the immediate needs of people in transit (such as food, shelter and medical attention). These initiatives are both representative of volunteer humanitarianism by grassroots organizations, and of professional humanitarian actors such as the Red Cross or the UNHCR. Furthermore, Ventimiglia, like Calais, which has been the focus of a large portion of scholarly literature on the matter, has seen not only formal and informal humanitarian organizations working on the ground, but also several waves of mobilization of volunteer humanitarianism. As such, Ventimiglia offers the possibility to analyse some trends that are comparable to other sites in Europe, and also to contrast forms of resistance among themselves, given the variety present across time in the same place.

23 In Ventimiglia, activists have built and seen destroyed several distinct camp-spaces, in addition to other initiatives, which, while not sharing the material form of the camp, fulfilled the same function of opening up solidary spaces that resisted power dynamics in the borderland. This is the reason behind my insistence on the term 'solidary spaces', identifying my unit of analysis not on the basis of their material form, but their process of formation as well as their function. This contingency has allowed for the internal comparison of their respective governance structures and relationships between migrants and activists, revealing differences that further shed light on how understandings of solidarity and humanity, shared by all waves of mobilization, were translated into practice differently, and had equally different outcomes.

24 My empirical analysis consisted in qualitative, semi-structured interviews and a short period of participant observation. Interviews were carried out in a period between February 2019 and March 2019, in English and in Italian. I contacted interviewees first through the public Facebook pages of the organizations to which they belong, and later though referral by other volunteers. Interviews were recorded and later transcribed and translated. I obtained permission to record and to later quote excerpts in my final work. I also offered to have volunteers read through the transcript and have the final say on what could be disclosed in my work, however many refused or accepted without offering any feedback. Quotations and references were anonymised, with specific locations and names being either undisclosed or changed.

25 The same process of anonymisation was applied to the information gathered in my field notes. During my stay in Ventimiglia, I was hosted by the group Kesha Niya in their campsite, helping out with their daily activities at the frontier. The working languages during my stay were the result of an overlapping mix of Italian, French, English and Arabic, which I attempted to carry to the page as undiluted as possible, although my role in putting together this work should make anyone wary of believing themselves to be reading anything other than a (re)presentation of the borderland in Ventimiglia. Much of the crucial information I gathered was the result of my experience as a fellow volunteer on the frontier. I was unable to obtain verbal permission to report several of the exchanges or events that I witnessed due to contextual circumstances, although my role as researcher was disclosed to all activists with whom I worked and to anyone with whom I interacted at length. However, I decided to use some of them in my research regardless, with the proviso that they have no foreseeable negative implication for the safety of the people involved. My choice was informed by the general ethical aim of not only harming none but also attempting to have a positive impact on the dynamics I studied (Schrag 2011; Wolf 1994). Silencing those realities could have no positive implications that I could imagine.

26 This commitment opens up a number of different questions. Firstly, it poses the question of reasonable expectations for the effects that a Master's thesis can possibly have on a very specific and fraught policy area. Secondly, it poses the question of whose good should be struggled for, and what good actually means in the contextual environment of my research. Assuming that I will be able to affect more strongly those with whom I have come in contact with and vice versa, I believe that asking questions and possibly sparking debate and reflections in people who are on the frontlines of these issues is the best possible – or reasonable – outcome that I can strive for. To this purpose, I was asked, and agreed, to circulate the final text of my thesis to the activist groups with which I interacted.

27   If research is intended to spark conversations beyond the boundaries of academia and possibly become useful for practitioners (Ackerly 2008), then it must be written so that it is accessible to them. Far from emptying it of value as knowledge production, it gives back to knowledge a more engaged and practical purpose. Rather than the researcher having differing and conflictual responsibilities to his or her respondents and audience (Wolf 1994), the researcher's interviewees and collaborators can become the primary audience of a scholar's analysis, in view of the relevance it could – maybe should? – have for their lives. Of course, this seems much truer for some research topics rather than others, but I feel that it is especially relevant to research on activism. In my case, I intend to share my analysis with my interviewees in the most complete manner possible, hoping to have written a final product that will make sense to me as much as to them, while also striving to bring something new to the table.

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1. These spaces will be hereafter referred to as 'solidary spaces'. This choice is determined by the context of my empirical analysis. In Ventimiglia, some of these initiatives had the form of camps, however, not all of them did so, regardless of the fact that they fulfilled the same function of re-articulating the power dynamics in the borderland through alternative practices of care-taking and aid.

2. In the case of social movement analysis, the concepts of framing or narrative are very commonly used to mediate the connection between subjective identity and political action (Daphi 2017; Dietz and Garrelts 2014). The two concepts have been articulated in different ways, but they both provide a theoretical framework for the analysis of how political identities mobilized by a group might allow its members to 'read' political situations; identifying issues, attributing blame and proposing solutions, as well as positioning their own action in a wider context of past and present mobilizations. Solidarity, as described above, can be construed as a frame steering political action, however that is not the complete story. While solidarity has guided mobilization in this sense, its translation into practice has just as many implications for the form that political activism has taken, and its outcomes.

3. Stengers (2013) in particular refers to non-humans as both ideational and material matter that causes humans to think. It is interesting to consider how the process could be conceptualized as a sort of 'becoming human' (again) in the case of migrant activism. To this end, it is useful to consider the discursive opposition between abject victimhood and being human in virtue of mutual vulnerability. Thanks to the politically creative environment of the camp-space, migrants are able to become human again, in a process that is totally situated and 'entangled' with its material and social milieu.

4. Here I refer to social reproduction in its widest sense possible: both activists and migrants in Calais for instance were in charge of running Children Centres offering schooling to migrant children; activists in Sarajevo offer English courses; activists and migrants in many camp-spaces cooperate in cooking meals, building shelters and keeping facilities running.

5. The problematisation of the realm of social life or more precisely of social reproduction, understood as the re-production of bodies through the fulfilment of basic needs as well as the re-production of subjectivities through education and knowledge production, as a political arena is

a core contribution of literatures that tackles 'protest camps' as forms of resistance (Feigenbaum et al. 2013; Brown et al. 2017; English et al. 2019). Indeed, the political dimension and transformative potential of these modes of political organising is considered to lie exactly in their capability to foster the practice of alternatives in localised spaces through the creation of new internal social and political organisations.

6. Although these dynamics cannot be ignored, as they play a crucial role in defining relations in the borderland, it would be a mistake to consider the above discussion complete or exhaustive. Due to the limited scope of this study, it was impossible to delve more deeply into the gendered structures that pervade solidary spaces. However, at the same time it seemed equally impossible to entirely exclude a discussion on these issues. Therefore, this might constitute an interesting starting point for further study, rather than a conclusive analysis of the subject.

3. Ventimiglia: A Waxing and Waning Geography of Solidarity Activism

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1 On June 12th, 2015, the French police forces at the border between Ventimiglia and Menton, specifically at the checkpoint by the coastline, the so called *frontiera bassa* in the locality of Ponte San Luigi, refused entry to all migrants seeking to cross from Italy into France. Stuck right in front of the border, but with no way of crossing it, around 200 people took up signs and started protesting, with the help of a few local citizens who supported their cause by bringing food, water, beach parasols and makeshift curtains to provide relief from the hot June sun. The migrants' refusal to turn away and the subsequent four days of stalemate that followed brought the situation to boiling-point. On June 16th, the Italian and French police forcefully removed the protesters, with the logistical support of the Italian Red Cross, who provided vans to escort the migrants back to the train station in Ventimiglia. Videos and pictures of the police operations that day spread quickly in the media, sparking outrage for the extreme violence they portrayed.

> Figure 1. A map of the border drawn by Emanuele Giacopetti in his comic *La Bolla, about the Balzi Rossi squat.* The text reads: 'In reality, borders have not existed in Europe since 1999 / In Ventimiglia they even have two: a lower and an upper one.'

IN REALTA' IN EUROPA LE FRONTIERE
NON ESISTONO PIÙ DAL 1999,

FRANCIA

FRONTIERA ALTA

ITALIA

FRONTIERA BASSA

A VENTIMIGLIA PERÒ NE HANNO
ADDIRITTURA DUE: UNA BASSA
E UNA ALTA.

Source : https://www.graphic-news.com/stories/la-bolla-di-ventimiglia/
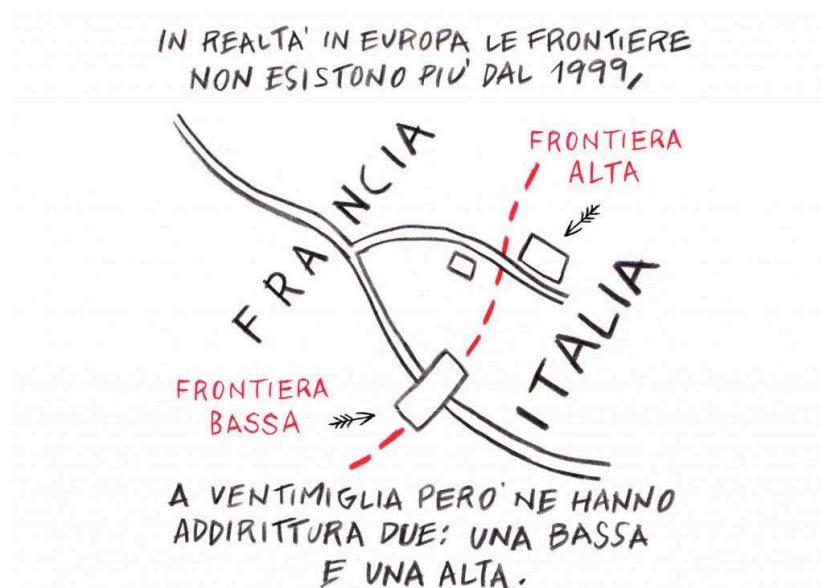
2 Protesters, however, undeterred from crossing the border after the eviction carried out by the police, reached the *frontiera bassa* again in the following days, giving birth to a squat that in its earliest days already counted a hundred people among its inhabitants. Soon after, inspired by the unwillingness of the migrants to abandon the rocks on which they had set up camp, and shocked by the violence they had witnessed, Italian and French citizens were the first to join the squat, giving birth to a community that took the name of the Balzi Rossi squat.

3 This informal space was only the first in a series of solidarity initiatives that have cyclically appeared and disappeared in the area surrounding Ventimiglia from June 2015 to the present. Each one presented different characteristics, goals and organisational structures. In the following sections, I will provide a brief overview of the general features of these solidary spaces, focusing in particular on two aspects: the main functions of those spaces, and their organisational and governance structures. This summary is by no means exhaustive of every single initiative that was born in Ventimiglia, but focuses instead on those spaces born outside of formal political or humanitarian channels that became part of a geography of aid and activism in the borderland.[1]

3.1 The Balzi Rossi Squat

4 Since its birth in June 2015, the Balzi Rossi squat has become a crucial landmark in the geography of Ventimiglia, and its denizens were involved both in routine activities that pertained to the running of the camp, and activities that were specifically aimed at political resistance. These included: running legal workshops on European migration policies, language workshops, and a geography workshop, gathering leftover market produce to use in the kitchen, sorting and stocking donations such as clothes, blankets and tents, running a welcome service for new members who arrived at the camp during the day, engaging in protests and demonstrations at the frontier, and participating in what the interviewees termed 'monitoring' and 'cop-watching'. The latter two practices

consisted in monitoring the two border checkpoints and major transport links and routes, in particular the train stations of Ventimiglia and Menton-Garavan, with the aim of recording police abuse and racial profiling in order to gather information on malpractice and to possibly deter police violence.

5   The political action carried out by the Balzi Rossi squat was not limited to raising awareness of and gathering information on policing practices, but it also extended to demonstrations and marches both in Ventimiglia and near the frontier. One of the most common forms of political action against the frontier was what activists termed 'disturbance actions', where camp inhabitants would gather pots, lids, cutlery and bang them noisily on the steel barricades that surrounded the border checkpoint on both sides. Signs and choruses usually accompanied these demonstrations. Another type of political action that became very common at the border was the blockading of car traffic. The members of the squat would block the road so that cars could not cross on either side of the border. These blockades could sometimes last hours, but in some cases also erupted in violent confrontations with the police.

6   The membership of the camp was extremely varied in terms of both provenance and length of stay. According to a volunteer who stayed there long-term until the final eviction of the squat, there was a constant turnover of participants; those who stayed for only a day or two, those who stayed a weekend or a week, and those who arrived and then never left. The squat became more and more organized as an increasing number of volunteers joined up, putting their social capital and varied expertise at the service of the community, providing inspiration for diverse forms of protest, or building a communal camp kitchen and sanitary facilities. No one seemed to be directing the organization of the squat, either in terms of logistics or in terms of political action. All the volunteers[2] whom I interviewed stressed this lack of formal leadership, as well as their constant attempt to create horizontal forms of participation in the political life of the squat. Although they all confessed to an awareness of the materiality of the differences between the inhabitants of the squat, in terms of mobility (being able to cross the border), as well as of their ability to reach out and exploit a network of contacts and support, they also struggled to overcome those same barriers. When asked how issues came up and were subsequently addressed, one of them said:

> We tried to break that barrier between us and you, we cook together, who decides what to cook? Who knows? The first idea that comes up. What do we need to cook? Okay, let's go get it, this at the level of daily activities. Except for the central assembly, these routine activities grew over time, becoming little by little more fluid. For instance, sorting the clothes that were under the bridge, those that had been donated, I remember perfectly that the first time we said, well, the two of us go, let's go sort them – there were some people who were more hardworking, and maybe I was a bit lazier – and later people joined us, migrants, solidarians, older people, young ones. Especially during the period I was there [at the beginning of the squat, between the months of June and July], these types of activities were growing organizationally [...] Many things just sprang up on their own. I remember someone said, one night let's figure something out for food, and I was still, it was the first few days, and from Nice came one of the representatives of the Islamic community with I don't know how much food for everyone. So you say, okay, let's organize ourselves, but after a while things just came to us. Then there were those who just got up and said, I don't know, the toilet, the showers, someone just got down to it, full of good will, and set them up. There was the sewage drain under the bridge, one or maybe even two, now I don't remember, everything was there, and in one or two days someone fixed them. And so we could build a toilet, like, the actual

structure, and also some showers. It's obvious that there is an issue of where do I go to the toilet, so we build a toilet. But I don't remember it being, I don't remember it being decided, at some point someone got up and did it. (Interview 6, author's translation)

7   More complex decisions, such as the political actions carried out by the inhabitants of the squat, were addressed in a general assembly, attended by an average of one hundred or two hundred people. The assemblies were held at night, during the Ramadan period and after breakfast later on. They usually lasted several hours on account of the need to translate every intervention into at least two languages (between Arabic, English, French and Italian), depending on the language preferred by the speaker, and also on account of their open agendas. The assemblies were not the only instances of deliberation in the camp. They grew in importance as the political momentum of the camp grew, but they were always accompanied by a constant dialogue among individuals and smaller groups in the camp, which grew out of proximity and coexistence. The very fact of living together and tackling daily necessities together allowed people to organize organically.

8   Nevertheless, the fluidity with which people arrived at and left the squat, as well as the diversity of goals of those who stayed[3] made it difficult to craft a coherent and overarching political project out of the assemblies. On the one hand, it allowed people to feel included even when they had differing political leanings, opinions on courses of action or simply a different amount of willingness to risk police repression. Each member of the squat could opt out of any sort of activity, depending on their own personal willingness. On the other hand, the lack of a clear political project, among other issues, became a serious hurdle when some of the volunteers attempted to create a nationwide and transnational movement out of the experience in Ventimiglia.

9   Many activists that had joined the squat tried later to remain active in the field by establishing themselves as network links between the squat, and thus the border, and their local realities. However, the lack of an easily identifiable locus of struggle elsewhere, such as the border check point, and the inability of activists to effectively translate the violent experience of precariousness and oppression on the Franco-Italian borderland made it more difficult to create a viable political movement in other cities. While instruments of control were, and are, equally in place in other localities, such as racially selective checks on transport and in the urban space, they have remained more invisible, creating a substantial hurdle to large-scale mobilization. This highlights the importance of a present spatial opposition, such as the checkpoint, by enabling such political forms to emerge out of a bounded spatial entity such as an independent camp. In addition to a relative failure to create a nationwide movement, the squat faced an extremely intense eviction operation on September 30th, 2015. Although many activists and migrants chose to stay in Ventimiglia and later attempted to keep the experience of the squat alive by fostering a great number of demonstrations, it seemed that the 'bubble' — as denizens were wont to call the Balzi Rossi camp — had burst and could not be re-created.

10 After the eviction many of the migrants, 'the guys' (as most of the activists term them), were moved to a facility run by the Italian Red Cross near the train station in Ventimiglia and were effectively prevented from joining in any kind of demonstration. The successful attempt by the authorities to separate local activists and migrant-activists, as well as destroying the actual locus where their political activism had

converged, effectively hindered the continued existence of spaces of encounter and resistance that could support solidary and migrant activism. Moreover, many activists were forced to leave the broader area of Ventimiglia due to expulsion orders issued by the police.[4] The Balzi Rossi squat, in the four months of its existence, had attempted and failed to become a movement proper. The activists themselves denounced their own failure to build a lasting political project and find the necessary resources for bringing it about.

3.2 Progetto 20K and the Infopoint

11 Although the Balzi Rossi squat had disappeared, many activists who had experienced life in the camp kept returning to Ventimiglia in an effort to provide relief to the migrants who were still determined to cross the border. At the same time, the municipality of Ventimiglia, in order to discourage the creation of new informal camps, banned the provision of food to migrants in public spaces. This measure, allegedly implemented for sanitary reasons, was ultimately an attempt to discourage migrants from staying in Ventimiglia by eliminating all those support networks that had been born through shared political engagement at the Balzi Rossi squat.

12 The increase in repression of solidarity activism that accompanied this new phase of migration flows through Ventimiglia, coupled with the increase in the militarization and strictness of the border controls on both sides, did nothing to stem migration flows. Rather, it created a situation in which organized crime, human traffickers and *passeurs*[5] held more power and could strengthen their hold on their victims. Volunteers that had been present in Ventimiglia at this time reported many more cases of physical violence, gender-based violence, and instances of sex-trafficking, than for those who had stayed in Ventimiglia over the summer. Similarly, the number of deaths in attempted crossings increased, as migrants attempted to climb on top of trains, squeeze in the space between coaches or attempted to cross into France though a mountain track aptly called *il passo della morte*, literally death's pass. As one volunteer described the situation:

> Almost every day I crossed the border back and forth, while there were hundreds, thousands of people who were there stuck attempting to find a way to cross that same border, sometimes risking and losing their lives, or anyway being seriously affected personally, psychologically, because it really is a very violent situation, and all this to cross a border that for us [Europeans] hasn't existed for decades. So it's a paradoxical situation [...] A waste of resources, also public ones, to control and stop something that obviously cannot be managed this way. It's obvious that people who arrive in Italy with dinghies because they're fleeing Libya, or some other place, don't have to stop here necessarily. (Interview 3, author's translation).

13 At the same time, the number of people arriving in Italy and attempting to cross into France reached its peak between the summers of 2016 and 2017, fostering the birth of other informal encampments that outside institutional responses understood more as hiding-places than budding communities. Volunteers who had become active in this field during the time of the Balzi Rossi squat, as well as other local and international civil society groups, responded to the emergency by setting up alternative spaces where migrants could find safety, legal aid, food, clothes and a sense of community. These initiatives varied in terms of services offered and degrees of cooperation with formal NGOs or the authorities. However, over time constant cooperation and

proximity led these separate groups to become a relatively loose and open network that spanned the whole geography of the borderland, both on the Italian and the French side.

14   It was at this stage, in 2016, that the collective Progetto 20K was born. Activists who had been present during the last days of the Balzi Rossi squat and had chosen to remain in Ventimiglia in an attempt to find alternative means to continue that same project of solidarity, founded the collective and subsequently opened up the Infopoint Eufemia. The Infopoint, opened alongside some other local groups such as Popoli in Arte and Meltingpot, was a space where they offered legal aid, access to internet and electricity, clothes, tents and other support material as well as, starting from 2017, a women-only space once a week. Before the official opening of the Infopoint, the collective was also involved in distributing food and meals, irrespective of the local ban on distributing food in the street to migrants. This specific ban was seen by activists as another sign of the increasingly absurd attempts by authorities to break down ties of solidarity and basic aid between civil society and migrants.

> We started going there after the eviction of the squat, because at that time there was the municipal ban by the Mayor, who's still the current Mayor, Ioculano, banning the distribution of food to the migrants who were in the city, their aim was to avoid the creation of new forms of solidarity, these camps… We're talking about almost a thousand migrants there in the city, so naturally they had to stay somewhere, they had to cook for themselves somewhere, or anyway, taking care of their own basic necessities: food, sleep and right after, attempting to cross the border. We started cooking and distributing meals, like we were distributing something illegal. It was a paradoxical situation, we were in a car, distributing meals quickly so the police wouldn't come and see us doing it. (Interview 3, author's translation)

15   As the activities of the collective became more nuanced, including the provision of legal aid and monitoring of the territory of Ventimiglia and the border proper, activists felt the need to create a space where these activities could be stably carried out. The aim was to create a fixed location, which could become a landmark in the geography of migration in Ventimiglia for both activists and migrants, a space where people could rest and receive the help necessary to regain control of their lives.

> 20K has this function of permanent observatory on Ventimiglia, but I think that the real advantage of 20K was understanding that we need to have, we need to gain space in Ventimiglia, and opening up a spot like the Infopoint was the proof of that. Breathing, the city needs to breathe. And so, this way, [20K] has done a good job and now we need to regain what we have lost.[6] Because in Ventimiglia a space like that is missing. I mean, Kesha Niya[7] does an incredible job because they have a presence, a monitoring function, but they are present in spots, and you understand [it's important] to know that there is a free space where you can go in and ask for information in a border town like Ventimiglia, where apart from Caritas, which yes, they give you clothes and a bag with a sandwich and an apple, but done that, it's over. (Interview 4, author's translation)

16   Monitoring, much as it had been for the activists in Balzi Rossi, was one of the crucial activities carried out by the collective. The presence of a significant number of volunteers, who cooperated with the collective in a constant turnover,[8] made it possible to have several monitoring shifts starting at 5 a.m. and ending at 2 a.m. the next day, during which volunteers patrolled the train station, the border, the riverside and the beach. Monitoring had two principal functions. On the one hand, activists were trying to record the number of arrivals, as well as people's gender, age and provenance,

and whether they were alone or traveling with family. On the other, monitoring was a tool to record racial profiling during police patrols in the train station and discourage episodes of police brutality.

17 As the situation in Ventimiglia became more and more violent and fraught for the activists, it became increasingly obvious that there was a real need to offer some basic formal training, and also to take true stock of the psychological conditions of those volunteers who had been in place for longer periods of time. The constant change among volunteers tied to the collective was in this case a precious resource, allowing people to take time away from their work in Ventimiglia, but it also became a problem in terms of the day-to-day management of activities and in terms of decision-making. The collective organized assemblies to direct their activities each month, as well as longer meetings held every few months to reflect on past actions and determine a general direction for the future. Although these meetings were open to everyone, decision-making processes were not entirely horizontal, as activists who had been involved for longer or who had taken up positions of leadership seemed to have a greater voice as well as a bigger stake in decision-making.

3.3 Kesha Niya: No Borders, No Problem

18 In the early months of 2017, another group of activists reached Ventimiglia with the purpose of assisting migrants in their journey, Kesha Niya. The group was born in 2016 and was settled in the La Linière camp in Dunkirk. After the destruction of the camp, many of its members chose to relocate to Ventimiglia, where they could continue their work, which consisted mainly in providing meals to migrants in the style of a community kitchen. The name Kesha Niya is a Sorani Kurdish phrase for 'no problem' and the motto of the group[9] is 'no border, no problem'. The group, defined by one of their own activists as a 'group of friends', shares many of the attitudes, aims and internal workings of the Balzi Rossi squat, although no real connection exists between the two. Before its arrival in Ventimiglia, Kesha Niya worked in an environment that was quite similar to Balzi Rossi, where the practice of cooking and sharing a meal could foster horizontal relationships and equality between migrants and activists, and where resources were gathered through alternative practices such as market recycling, dumpster diving, or the more formal channel of private donations.

19 The internal workings of the group thus try to reflect this commitment to non-hierarchical organization by involving everyone (migrants and activists) equally in both the daily activities of the group and their decision-making processes. However, since their arrival in Ventimiglia, the lack of a common space with common facilities comparable to the Linière camp or the Balzi Rossi squat have changed the action of the group, effectively creating a distance between the volunteers and the migrants, which is also reflected in the workings of the other organizations present on the ground. Although Kesha Niya activists do not share their living space with migrants anymore, they have maintained a horizontal and consensual approach to decision-making, with a particular awareness for the unspoken and hidden hierarchies that so commonly structure group dynamics.

20 Kesha Niya began their action in Ventimiglia with the provision of packaged meals prepared in their camp, and later distributed in the city from their vans. In 2017, their membership gravitated around 30 people stably housed in the area[10] and they travelled

every day to Ventimiglia to distribute the food. The provision of meals later transformed to include both a breakfast and dinner distribution in fixed locations, held respectively on the roadside at the *frontiera alta*, in Grimaldi, and in via Tenda, in Ventimiglia. In particular, the breakfast service functions as both a space for the provision of food to people held during the night in the French police station and released during the day, and for the monitoring of the border itself. Activists who manage the breakfast service take note of the number, provenance and gender of the people released back into Italian territory, provide them with basic information about Ventimiglia and the spaces where they are likely to receive aid, offer friendly advice or lend a willing ear to those who feel the need to complain about their situation or simply share their experience, record any incident of police brutality or other unlawful practices, whether through evidence or through the testimony of migrants reaching their movable camp. They also provide food and drink, medicines, a charging station for phones and a Wi-Fi hotspot.

Figure 2. A hand-drawn map[11] in Italian showing the main landmarks of humanitarian aid and solidarity present in Ventimiglia.
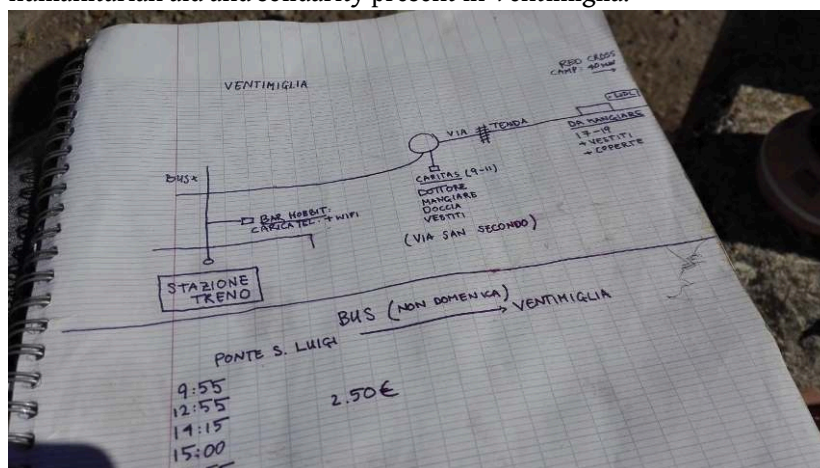
Source: Personal archive of the author.

21   Kesha Niya monitoring activity did not start with the breakfast service, however. Although at the time of writing, it is the only monitoring hotspot[12] managed by activists left in Ventimiglia, in 2017 and in 2018 Kesha Niya activists cooperated with all the other associations, collectives and NGOs present on the ground in organizing monitoring shifts in the train station, on the riverside and the beach. Monitoring was carried out by mixed teams usually representing two or more organizations, of which at least one tended to be a professional NGO, whose easily recognizable badges and vests were an additional form of deterrence against harassment by the police forces.

3.4 Bar Hobbit

22   The Bar Hobbit is a small café a few streets away from the train station in Ventimiglia. From the beginning of the migration crisis in 2015, and especially at its peak in 2016 and 2017, it became a space where migrants could rest, eat and drink something (sometimes provided for free), without fear of being turned away. The experience of

the Bar Hobbit started almost by accident as the owner, nick-named Mamma Africa, describes it; with a simple, unthinking answer to a wordless request for aid:

> It was August 15ᵗʰ, so Ventimiglia was empty, in the meantime there was the municipal ban by the current mayor, and the prohibition to distribute food to the migrants in the streets, and I had already started welcoming them, before August 15ᵗʰ and with some guys, I had that bond of friendship with recurring costumers, you know? And so I told them "Guys, on August 15ᵗʰ I will make lasagne for you", very simple, without meat because many are Muslims [...] In the meantime, that morning, there was no one, but there were some women on the opposing sidewalk, sitting on the steps of the shops closed for the holiday, with small children, and I heard the children cry. So, here there was nobody, because everyone was coming at 1pm to eat. So I told them, to these women, I walked up to them and said that they could come in, they didn't have to buy anything, if the children needed water, the bathroom, they could use everything. Then they came in, and the children ate, I had leftover brioches, some pizzas because I hadn't worked, since it was a holiday, and I gave them food and water. This gesture surely, and the use of the bathroom, there were children who [whose nappies] where full of poo, so, I let them wash, I don't know if you noticed there is a changing table, I got it for that occasion, I understood that they needed nappies for the children because many didn't have them, and I also understood that time that a woman needed sanitary pads. So let's say that that first year I didn't think about my job, I didn't think with my brain, I thought with my heart, that kind of thought. (Interview 2, author's translation).

23 From that moment onwards, word spread among migrants in Ventimiglia, and the Bar Hobbit became a well-known hotspot where migrants could receive or purchase food, charge their phones, use the bathroom, and spend time while waiting to cross the border. It became known to the locals as the *bar degli immigrati*, the immigrants' bar, and locals little by little stopped crossing the threshold and started boycotting the bar. At the time of writing the bar was frequented only by migrants, activists and other humanitarian personnel attached to the Red Cross or Caritas. The change in the clientele and the loss of local customers drove Mamma Africa to significantly change her way of doing business in an attempt to keep her bar open.

24 These changes were still not enough to support the continued existence of the bar over the years, and it risked closing between 2017 and 2018 and was saved by a fundraising effort made through crowdfunding. This influx of capital was enough to keep the bar open another year and pay off its debts, however, the Bar Hobbit risks closure again. The existence of the Bar Hobbit was not only endangered by its economic difficulties, but also by the consistent and continued flow of threats and oppressive violence. Vandalism, as well as personal threats to Mamma Africa herself, in addition to severe pressure from the authorities to stop welcoming migrants or to face the consequences, were some of the attempts made by the wider population of Ventimiglia to make this solidary space disappear.

25 However, its owner remains undiscouraged by these attempts, and firm in her decision to help migrants in Ventimiglia. The Bar Hobbit has thus become a crucial landmark in the geography of activism in the borderland, providing a meeting space for migrants as well as for activists. Here, meetings among all the solidary groups, independent volunteers and professional NGOs are organized every other week (in a billiard room converted into a conference room at the back of the bar), other local initiatives are advertised, and Mamma Africa has become a figure of importance in cases of emergency, especially for what concerns trafficking.

26 Trust and respect seem to be the bedrock of Mamma Africa's relationship with the migrants. These ties are born out of the recognition of the risks to which she exposes herself and the protection she offers, and they firmly put her in a position of authority inside her own bar as well as in the broader network of solidarity activism in Ventimiglia. Many other activists not only recognize the wealth of the work she does but also credit her with a superior capability to establish trust and communicate with people in need, especially women who are seeking to escape sex trafficking. This capacity, which Mamma Africa defines as purely personal and instinctual, well summarizes the importance that personal relationships, willingness to help and case by case diagnosis and prognosis of situations have for solidarity networks in Ventimiglia. These operational processes stand in clear contrast with the bureaucratic protocols employed not only by formal humanitarian actors but also by more professional civil society organizations such as international NGOs, warranting a closer look at how these informal networks perform a certain politics of migration and mobility in the borderland, providing spaces of resistance as well as of aid and care.

NOTES DE BAS DE PAGE

1. This determination was made on the basis of activists' testimonies, giving precedence to those initiatives that had featured prominently in their narratives.

2. I will use the terms 'activist' and 'volunteer' interchangeably in my writing. Although not all volunteers would cast their action in a frame of political activism or resistance, and some would also distinguish very starkly between direct aid provided to migrants and fruitful political action, for the purpose of my analysis this distinction is not only of little analytical use, but also untenable. Furthermore, the term 'volunteer' in many of my interviews was used interchangeably with the term 'solidarian', to distinguish European nationals from migrants, who, in turn, were often simply referred to as 'the guys' or 'the *shabaabs*' (young men in Arabic).

3. Some people chose to stay in Italy and claim asylum there, while many others preferred to cross the border. Among those who wanted to eventually leave the country, some wanted to cross the border in a small group, undetected, while others wanted to take their struggle to the point where everyone would be able to cross together without fear (Interview 6).

4. Expulsion orders became one of the most used forms of oppression of political resistance, effectively removing Italian activists from the borderland. It became such an immediate and automatic response, that any minor offence or even the mere presence of activists together with migrants in the public space was enough to engender such a measure. Because oftentimes expulsion orders were abused by the police forces in their attempt to crack down on solidarity activism, many activists made appeals to the judiciary, and won, on account of these measures being used beyond the scope of the law.

5. *Passeurs* are small-scale traffickers who offer people a ride from Italy to France, usually for a high fee.

6. This interview was carried out in March 2019; at the time of writing the Infopoint had been closed down due to the refusal of the landlord to renew a lease contract. The closing of the Infopoint had been official since December 2018.

7. Kesha Niya is an independent group of activists who arrived in Ventimiglia in 2017 and have since then become another crucial node in the solidary network in Ventimiglia. A more detailed description of the group's internal structure and activities will follow in the next section.

8. According to one of the founders, during the summer there have been surges of 150 or more volunteers joining the open network of the collective. Volunteers are mainly women, ages range from 20 to 40 years old and the average length of stay is extremely variable. As was the case with the Balzi Rossi squat, some people only stay for a few days or a week, while others stay for months or resettle entirely. Also some migrants became involved in the running of the Infopoint, but they were decidedly fewer than those who had been active in the Balzi Rossi squat. Those who chose to cooperate with the Progetto 20K collective were those who had decided to remain in Italy and had also managed to find some work or a more stable situation for themselves in Ventimiglia. The surge of migrant-led activism, which had kicked off the Balzi Rossi occupation, was never fully repeated in the following years.

9. Unlike Progetto 20K or other NGOs who worked on the ground in Ventimiglia, Kesha Niya has no formally recognized status as an association or a non-profit organization.

10. Kesha Niya activists reside in camps that the group has built on the French side of the border on private lands, thanks to their personal connections with French residents sympathetic to their cause. Because of the precariousness of these arrangements, the group has had to allocate activists in more than one camp, and to change location several times.

11. Activists copied this map by hand several times in several languages and later distributed it to migrants. It specifies the positions of the main landmarks, their address and the services or facilities offered. It also records the timetable for the bus, which connects the border with the city centre of Ventimiglia, and the price of the ticket.

12. Since February this year, professional NGOs such as Oxfam, Save The Children, Doctors of the World and We World have also begun to join the Kesha Niya activists at the *frontiera alta.* While the presence of professional NGO observers is valued because of their legal expertise and institutional contacts, many activists have expressed frustration with the constraints that regulate the activities of these groups, and their unwillingness to do more and work outside of their strict organizational mandates.

4. Solidarity as an Ethic and as a Practice: Rediscovering Humanity, Practicing Reciprocity

1   The solidarity initiatives that were born in Ventimiglia present very different scopes, organisational forms and political or humanitarian aims. Nevertheless, they share some striking similarities in the ways in which volunteer-activists frame their actions as a necessity guided by 'humanity''', 'solidarity' and a somewhat deep '"instinct to care'. Furthermore, the informality that distinguishes them from professional or institutionalised humanitarian actors represents another layer of their specificity. It is this very feature that allows activists to practice forms of care and reciprocity that deviate from the scripts of care and dispossession that often play out in formal humanitarian settings with regards to migration. Finally, informality also has an effect on political horizons in these spaces. While informality is a resource for practicing reciprocal care, it is also a limit to the construction of a familiar political movement, as it fosters short-term immanent focus, indicative of *other forms* of politics available in those spaces.

2   The following sections will unpack each of these three dimensions of solidary spaces, beginning with the concept of solidarity as a necessary human ethic, and moving on to the importance of reciprocity and mutual care and vulnerability in order to translate such an ethic of solidarity into practice. The last section will be dedicated to the ways in which gendered understandings of care and protection, respectively reflecting a feminised and masculinised character, inhabit these spaces, and the informal, affective relationships of the borderland. The presence of gendered structures often translates into unequal burdens of care, which throw into stark relief the need to take vulnerability seriously as a spectrum on which both the care-giver and the care-recipient can be found. Accounting for the vulnerability of the care-taker provides an opportunity not only to truly build relationships based on reciprocity, but also to be aware of the harmful consequences of unequal burdens of care.

4.1 Being Human: The Necessary Ethics of Solidarity

3 Many of the volunteers who became active in Ventimiglia became involved either through word of mouth in their social circles or after witnessing instances of violence and suffering that called them to action. In the latter case, many professed that they had immediately felt an extremely negative emotional response, which only worsened and increased the urgency of action when they analysed also the role of the state, of *their own* state in perpetrating violence or abandoning the vulnerable. For many, indifference was deemed impossible.

> As a person who lives in Genoa, I'm in Genoa but I come from the hinterland, I come from these valleys, living this situation like someone who is watching on the big screen hurt me. We need to share, we need to participate, I could not live this situation any longer, being a spectator was something that hurt me within […] So for me it was a necessity born also of the fact that I was born in these localities and seeing how we are becoming ugly. I am worried about social decay, because migration, the big migration flows, the crises, we will see them, they will be cyclical, they will happen again and again. But it is how we respond as a society [that's important], and we are not responding well. It's a question of ethics, it's an urgency from within […] When people have faced torture and drinkable water[1] is denied them we are not talking about politics. We are talking about fundamental rights. Politics, local administrations, they firstly need to protect the most vulnerable, otherwise what is their purpose? If a democracy fails to protect the most vulnerable, it has failed. And if we turn our backs to those who are in need, and we cannot deny that they [the migrants] are in need, because then it means that we are denying the obvious. If in a democracy, we stop, we turn our backs on the most fragile, then we are over. (Interview 4, author's translation)
> That [the violence] for me was the trigger. I remember that when I saw the video I was studying. I closed my book and said, I'm going, because it was... it was really awful, and it was the sort of show that maybe you are more used to seeing from police forces that, I don't know, it was really oppressive, it was awful and I think that was the spark that made me say, okay, there're the guys at the border, they are the ones that decided to start this struggle and we can't leave them alone. We can't leave them alone not because they are not able to do this on their own, because they have been able to start it and they have been able to stay on those rocks even though they were doing the Ramadan, and it was 40° in the shade. We can't leave them alone because it is our state that is committing this stuff and we can't leave, we can't let it go and prove ourselves indifferent. (Interview 5, author's translation)

4 The impossibility of being a silent witness to such suffering and being complicit in perpetrating injustice is a theme that recurs also in other testimonies. Furthermore, the experience of living and crossing the border freely, which was for so many migrants an insurmountable obstacle, was compounded with a lived, embodied reality of the differential mobility regime that regulates the borderland, giving another dimension to claims of injustice attached to the checkpoints. The vulnerability of the migrants, who were seen as unjustly suffering at the hands of the state, triggered political action, while the reading of migrants as mournable, non-expendable subjects provided the necessary background to such a process. Few activists would openly call their action political, or dictated by political beliefs. For them, responding to the crisis, and more importantly to the politics of abandonment that the state had implemented in the borderland was a question of necessity and of basic humanity.

5 These two words came up again and again during my fieldwork, when each volunteer was asked why they were there to provide basic necessities such as food or drink. Two

such exchanges recorded in my field notes were particularly poignant. When asked for her motivations for being at the border, a Kesha Niya volunteer stated 'We are friends, just a group of friends from Italy, France, England, Germany who come here and do this [...] I don't like to say to help. My friend, [there's] a lot of people in the police station, 10 km from Ventimiglia, no food, no water, someone *has* to do this. It's important.' If being in solidarity is a result of mobilising on the basis of a shared humanity, solidarity itself then becomes a facet of the very same notion of humanity espoused by activists and produced through their commitment to action.

6   Similarly, a volunteer from Calais, responding to a migrant's surprise upon seeing free food and drink offered on the roadside, said 'It's not strange, it's human'. As yet another activist put it, underscoring the fact that even for migrants, the reception of basic aid, for free and without strings attached, is often a novel experience: 'Yeah, we do it because of the heart, but people don't understand, like no matter where you are from, the concept of something being free is just impossible. Maybe if it's a favour from a friend, but in the streets, free food and drink is just not possible. And it's, you know, stuff is there we can just share it.'

7   Aid and solidarity then, among strangers and across borders, is a surprising concept in its simplicity. In the face of frustrated fundamental rights and human dignity, which activists recognize as belonging to the migrants as much as to their fellow citizens, activists have become active in denouncing and addressing this wrong, through protest and direct action. Their solidarity is anchored in a perception of mobile people as fully and inalienably human. This reading of mobile bodies as non-expendable and entitled to rights is what empowers their suffering to trigger solidary action. Solidarity in this case is a frame for action mediated by the understanding of migrants as belonging to a human community to which moral and ethical commitments are attached (Wilde 2013). By witnessing the frustration of such commitments by the state, whose legitimacy hinges on its role of protector, activists feel the need to intervene to address this wrong.

8   'Being human' for the volunteers who worked at the frontlines of the crisis is again a strikingly simple concept. It is entirely grounded on affect and on the search for sometimes banal commonalities, whether that is a similar taste in music, or a shared football game.

> Like, I remember once, one of the moments, one of the most moving ones, there was this group of friends from Sudan, they came from the same village, they were my age, so, this is the thing, because, ok there is a lot of adults, everything you want, but many are young, like normal young people, like simple, they could be your friends. They also become your friends, because maybe you listen to the same music, and so, it's like this. So empathy, if you can feel it, it's also simple to feel it, because you connect with them. (Interview 5, author's translation)
> You realize we're all brothers, when you see the shabaabs laughing, when you find yourself along the river at seven at night, with the guys kicking a ball without any shoes and you saw them laughing, then you understand you are doing the right thing. And then, you say, I'm doing it just for this, because now you can kick that ball and we are both happy. And the same when you saw a child laughing and smearing a biscuit all over your face, and you saw him laugh and so I'm happy with you, and you saw his mom laugh and who knows how long she'd gone without laughing. Maybe that was all it was. (Interview 4, author's translation)
> With my friendship group[2] it was basically, because like, a lot of my friends back in the UK are very similar, and so it was just like in that a natural attraction, our

humour and the way we were brought up and stuff [...] I think it's just like emotions, we're the same because of emotions. (Interview 1)

9 The emphasis on contingent, contextual similarities echoes an understanding of human solidarity built on commonality and difference as matters of degree, entirely dependent on the saliency of relevant features in the present moment (Rorty 1989). In the solidary spaces of Ventimiglia, markers of difference such as documents or access to the social and political fabric of the polity, which determine exclusion through the action of state officials and humanitarian actors, cease to matter. Instead, shared affective relationships and the experience of common living become more salient. This process also mediated difference, in the form of the abandonment of stereotypical notions of activists being more educated, or more politically aware than migrants. This is also another recurring theme in some of the interviews. Volunteers realised early on that what they saw as their contribution as someone who 'knows better' or has a better grasp of the situation was nothing more than a fiction.

> When I had the guys sitting down and pouring their heart out, and it's not even because the situation is like that, but because someone had tried to give them a t-shirt for free, these people are not stupid, that's what actually instantly... It's very easy to think that as a volunteer you are the one that you're super clever, you're the graduated one. But actually, I spoke to a guy who worked for the United Nations back in his own country. It's actually insane when you listen to what they've gone through and you actually listen what experiences they've had, which is just the same as people who said oh, I have just graduated from an engineering degree, it's just like my friend in the UK, it's just so insane. (Interview 1)

10 This reversal was crucial for the building of horizontal relationships, also fostered by the practices that underpinned political and social action, especially at the time of the Balzi Rossi squat.

> Some of the migrants who passed through, one in particular, his memory has remained with me. Because he was a wonderful person, he *is* a wonderful person, let's not say where he lives, he's well and happy, and he had a great attention with regards... he thought a lot like a group. He had a – I must say that I think he had other political experiences, he had a well-trained sensibility, otherwise I can't explain certain things, or anyway, if not, congrats because it means you're someone with some impressive capabilities. He has an attention to group dynamics that was amazing, impressive. And that is the example that stayed with me. If for me, in my own way, but also others, we scratched our heads on how to make, how to help the struggle the most, I had in front of me when we spoke a person who reasoned like I did, much better, with a greater awareness and with the awareness of many different viewpoints. It was clear that [...] we were not in the same conditions [...] but he had full awareness of that distance and how to bridge it. That kind of attention towards the whole community had a great impact on me. I learned a lot, I don't know how to say, I learned a lot, it's one of the things that slaps you in the face and tells you that just because you are white and with a PhD doesn't mean you know more than others. There was this guy who was on a dinghy until the other day and who has this care, that I had to learn through political assemblies, but he had it with something more, and something different, beyond being more or less, something different. That, that was really beautiful, I must admit. (Interview 6, author's translation)

11 Through their activism, volunteers and migrants not only perpetuated a form of solidarity built on shared humanity, understood as shared affects, political agency and similar life trajectories, but they also produced an understanding of what it means to be human in practice, through their daily activities and achievements. Crucial to their

understanding of 'being human' is the ability to determine one's future and present, by freely choosing one's path. This includes crucial life choices such as settling in one state or another, escaping a trafficking ring, but also more mundane matters, such as cooking one's own meal or choosing one's own clothes.[3] Ultimately, the recovery of humanity that the activists were proposing was the recovery of social bonds and solidarity, understood as communal ties hinging on belonging. Being tied to a social space, through people, networks and practices was the necessary condition for migrants to take control of their journey and put an end to it where they wished. Participation and emotional attachments were the crucial components of their political action.

> There's also who stayed in Italy. Because they found their place, their environment, some got engaged, some got married, some had children [laughs]. And really, that is the basis that brings you to do certain things, the freedom to choose and transform your life however and whenever you want. (Interview 5, author's translation)
> We are humans, they [the migrants] are people who are living extremely difficult situations, it's true that there are people who tell them what to do, there's the lawyer, there's the public health officer who does checks, but they are alienated. They are alienated, they are wretched, as you said there is no one who is able to make a joke. In our Sisters' Group the girls could have nail polish, they could pick their own clothes. And here is the difference, it's not welfarism, we left them there and we told them, here, these are the clothes, take what you like, choose them, try them on. Becoming women again, not going to Caritas to receive a package. It's a small thing, but that works as well, to feel like people [...] More than friendship, it is renewed self-confidence. Because recovering your self-confidence means looking at the future with a new enthusiasm, otherwise these people are lost from the very beginning. This is the difference. There are people who don't even know where they are anymore, if no one speaks to them, tells them a story, how can you settle, love the place where you are? If no one asks you who you are, what do you do, if no one listens to your story? (Interview 4, author's translation)

12   From here stems the importance of the personal and social ties that developed between activists and migrants. More than the provision of aid in the short term, such as food, shelter and clothes, more than legal advice and language lessons, it was the opening of a personal, intimate communications channel that opened up the possibility for true change. From a situation of constant forced mobility in a suspended time and landscape, migrants were finally able to engage with a community, understood as a network 'primarily constituted through informal directly interpersonal relationships' (Calhoun 1999 cited in Humpage and Marston 2006), that welcomed them as equal members, participating in its activities and its decision-making processes. Far from being bare life or powerless victims, they could and did make their voices heard and their actions count. For this 'recovery of the human' to be truly successful however, it was necessary to not only start out with an ideal of humanity and solidarity that is inclusive but also practice equality and inclusivity in ways that fostered reciprocity and openness. The various practices that allowed for the creation of a true, if fleeting and embryonic, horizontal community in the borderland of Ventimiglia are the focal point of the next section.

4.2 Performing Privilege: Dangers of Solidarity

13   Many studies of humanitarian camps and initiatives, as well as of solidarity activism have pointed out that, in many instances the relationship between volunteers or

activists and the populations they strive to help is a vehicle of privilege. Camps in particular have been shown to create specific hierarchies inscribed into space and on bodies through differential mobility regimes, as well as a differential attention for their (in)security (Hyndman 2000; Fassin 2007). In some cases, the same can be said for solidarity activism. As Mahrouse (2014) points out in her monographs on the racial power dynamics that structure transnational solidarity activism, often the presence of white, preferably European or North American volunteers and activists is required on account of their pacifying effect on local violence and harassment, and the fact that they can effectively rely on their privilege to legitimize struggles or capture international attention.

14 However, on the ground, this assumed white saviour identity, apart from being a product of openly racial power dynamics, and even when accompanied by anti-racist commitments, is increasingly complicated by local political and geopolitical dynamics, becoming either ineffective or an exercise producing new imperialist identities and scripts. These crucial markers of inequality are not necessarily articulated in terms of race as a stable power geography, but rather as a series of interlocking systems, which touch on perceptions of class, citizenship, race, gender and sexuality and are mapped on bodies over time and space. In the Franco-Italian borderland, a racialised and class-based regime of mobility, which privileges white and apparently well-off individuals at the expense of racialised, gendered bodies, was clearly in place. The existence of this imagined backdrop to policing practices was increasingly obvious to migrants and activists alike, and it often provided opportunities to fool controls or to challenge their effectiveness.

> The greater part of police checks was carried out in the stretch [of the train lines] leading up to Menton. So we went to check ourselves just to see if, for instance, and it happened sometimes, sometimes not, depending on your clothes and attitude, also to French guys, or Italian ones, who were black and so were stopped by the police. This happened very often [...] I'd say that 70% of the time it was like this. That remaining 30%, I have to say it depended very much by the clothes and the attitude of the young man in question. A suit and tie, and a good smell [would save you] [...] They even asked for my ID because they thought I was from Syria. I'm half Iraqi, so sometimes when I crossed they [the police] would ask for my documents. [laughs] Actually, a group of Albanians, they always did this thing, with total nonchalance – no, they weren't Albanian, they were, I don't remember precisely, they were from Eastern Europe. So they would wear some light trousers, a white shirt, with their sleeves rolled up, the shirt a bit open, sunglasses, and nothing on them, no backpacks, no bags, and they crossed [laughs]. Easy as can be. Because they were brown, but it looked like a tan, so [laughs]. But that's the thing, it depends on your attitude. Because if you go up to them [the police] looking hesitant, or intimidated, they would stop you. There was a Moroccan friend of mine, he's Italian, his parents are Moroccan, they [the police] always stopped him, every single time. We had been there for six months, you know? I knew each cop's face [laughs]. (Interview 5, author's translation)

15 For the migrants themselves, the question of colour is not only an instance of open discrimination,[4] but also a clear lack of reciprocity. As a woman I met during my fieldwork put it, 'Here they don't like this colour. But God created this colour and it's not going away. You are white but you're not God. In our country, there's French, there's anyone, we still respect them, we talk to them, we love them. Not because they're white, because we are all human [...] I will cross today!

16 This differentiated mobility regime, although justified in terms of citizenship or nationality, revealed quite clearly the racial and political economic background against which belonging is constructed in the European imaginary. Activists and migrants were both painfully aware of their relative positionality vis-à-vis the border and police controls. Volunteers often took advantage of it through what they termed monitoring practices. Those monitoring practices effectively inscribed a hierarchical, racialised power pyramid by determining whose body was more or less likely to be on the receiving end of police brutality. NGO professionals, with their vests and badges,[5] irrespective of their embodied racial or gendered features, were considered perfect deterrents to violence and harassment. As formally recognized humanitarian and non-governmental actors, they enjoyed full legitimacy in the eyes of the state authorities, and in some cases represented an extension of state policy, as is often the case for humanitarian personnel, performing state policy through other means.

17 Activists instead occupied a shifting middle-ground between the positionality of local humanitarian personnel and that of the migrants. Their presence during monitoring shifts was similarly thought to discourage police brutality, although they were also very often on the receiving end of threats, harassment and police action, such as arrests, identification checks or expulsion orders. During protests or other political actions conversely, they stood on the same plane as migrants, in the likelihood of experiencing extreme police violence. Furthermore, activists perceived their differential mobility vis-à-vis the border in comparison to migrants as another marker of difference, although their relative capacity to cross the border unimpeded was only one aspect of their privilege as European or Italian citizens. Finally, solidarians saw their capacity to tap into a social network of willing helpers and allies in their struggle as another, sometimes more crucial form of privilege, which put them in a relative position of power with respect to the migrants even in the camp-space.

18 In light of the distance and disparity that migrants and activists perceived with regards to their respective positionalities, the potential of the camp-space to give birth to eventful alternatives becomes more crucial. Often in the camps power dynamics can play in completely different ways. The study of camps, and protest camps in general, is important precisely because of the way they restructure power dynamics by restructuring space. By bordering a space outside of the hierarchies and power relations of the borderland, activists and migrants were able to subvert or substantially change the status quo, creating different structures through their practices. The opposition of the solidary spaces to the outside was thus not only necessary for the existence of these spaces as independent entities, but also fundamental for allowing their internal dynamics to coalesce around forms of organic horizontality as they renegotiated external power formations.

19 On the one hand, in the Balzi Rossi squat, the creation of an organic community, which was open and inclusive, managed to subvert certain unequal power dynamics and substitute them with horizontal practices and equitable cooperation. On the other hand, in the informal camps created after 2016, the lack of a true sense of community, of times, spaces and practices of aggregation and the rising numbers of camp denizens allowed these camps to become theatres of racial and sexual violence as well as trafficking and prostitution. The more common episodes of violence were fights during the distribution of meals, when migrants would queue up to receive food. The fear of

going without food for the night, or possibly the whole day, created tensions that often exploded in episodes of violence around racial tensions. As one volunteer described it:

> Actually it's really about the racial conflict, that was quite intense. Every now and then there would be a huge fight, between two races.[6] Yeah, like, every dinner time, they would actually always argue between individuals, those with lighter complexion they would like they would say, no we, we should go in front of you because we are better than you, basically. (Interview 1)

20 The informal camps that were built along the riverbed in 2016 and 2017 never managed to become a space of aggregation to the same extent as the Balzi Rossi squat. Political efforts to rearticulate the power dynamics of the borderland remained confined to the space of the Infopoint, or the Hobbit Bar, while under the bridge in Via Tenda there remained a very fragile balance born out of simple coexistence. Rather than building a community that could bridge difference, those informal camps remained spaces where families or groups of friends lived together, without mixing with one another. Although such spaces also saw convivial moments of laughter and exchange, the spectre of violence always remained present.

> I always made sure, if I was walking under the bridge at night time, well, not at night, when it gets dark, I'd always make sure that I am with someone who I am super comfortable with [...] Even though how hard the situation is, living under the bridge, there are so many times when everyone is laughing, and like you know just sharing the most stupid memory, because you know, someone has to take a bath and they're really cold, like just really like small things like, people get so much closer, I guess. (Interview 1)

21 The lack of an obvious common spatial opposition, such as the border checkpoint, and the construction of the camp as a hiding place rather than a form of protest effectively disallowed the negotiation of the camp-space as a full-fledged example of political resistance. In turn, missing adversarial spatial practices hindered the creation of the same type of organic horizontality which made the Balzi Rossi squat viable, informing its decision-making processes and every other aspect of communal living.

4.3 Practicing Reciprocity, Levelling Inequalities

22 Life in the Balzi Rossi squat was very different from life in the riverside camps. Each morning the squat greeted the new day with an open assembly, planned the routine activities of the day as well as the political actions that could be undertaken in the near future. Every denizen was involved in the daily running of the camp and everyone could participate equally, to the best of their ability. These participatory community activities such as cooking, retrieving food from markets or other local producers sympathetic to the cause, storing donated materials, welcoming new volunteers, were slowly born out of coexistence and proximity without any intentional design. As one of the volunteers who arrived at the camp during the first days of the squat put it, the practice of cooking was extremely useful for fostering an early start to cooperation and horizontality.

> As soon as we started to cook we realised that that was already a chance to meet people in the squat, because you involve them in cooking, so while you cook, you chat with them, and so you know them. So, there was already a first process of encounter, of exchange, already with the practice of cooking. Then there was the question of the sharing of the meal, once you cooked. And that was also a very important moment of exchange that I think in the beginning was really important

to kick off assemblies. Because at the beginning, there weren't any. When we arrived, there were the solidarians, there were the squatters on the rocks, but it all was very rough, in terms of relations. Cooking surely helped to kick off some processes. (Interview 7, author's translation).

23 Although the population of the squat was constantly changing, as well as shrinking and enlarging, the practices of communal living remained stable over time and provided the bedrock for a small political community to flourish. The political importance of these practices rests on the idea of reciprocity, which is fostered by the equal burden-sharing and participation that this entails. The alienation that is often diagnosed as a product of humanitarian approaches to encampment and the production of subjectivities of abject victimhood has been long identified as a product of the lack of reciprocity that characterises those relationships of aid (Turner 2016; Nyers and Rygiel 2012). By reversing the terms of the relationship through practices of reciprocity, the Balzi Rossi squat allowed for equally politically powerful subjectivities to emerge both among activists and among migrants.

> That night for the first time we didn't cook by ourselves. From the early afternoon many came to our camp stoves bringing with them flavours and recipes from the countries they left, comparing them with our dishes and exchanging pots, samples and help. Ibrahim, who looks like he's a great cook, asks us to sample his dishes to check if they're ready and at 8pm he offers us a plate of *chorba* (He cannot eat yet because he's observing Ramadan and the sun has not set) and with a smile he says "*You're welcome*" [In English in the original]. Welcome to my story, to my life. A great twist: it was us who had gone to Ventimiglia to tell them "Welcome". (Staffetta Eat the Rich 2015, author's translation)

24 Reciprocity fostered in practices of communal living was also conducive to the realization of a deep sense of equality between the denizens of the camp. This in turn allowed for an implicit rejection of any sort of dependent relationship between volunteers and migrants, in clear contrast with the state-led humanitarian response to the crisis. In the words of one volunteer:

> We eliminated any form of dependency,[7] by consensus and almost in a way, implicitly. Like, I am not here to tell you what you have to do, what you don't have to do, what you have to eat, when you have to eat, how you must behave [...] Perhaps, the first experience [as a migrant] you have is the landing at Lampedusa and in Lampedusa you already come into contact with an organized structure, with a welfarist reception system through which I am making you depend on my system, and this was made visible also by the notions, by the information that they had on the European system. (Interview 5, author's translation)

25 The rejection of co-dependency was transformed into practices that could foster individual choice and freedom in the camp. Firstly, everyone could and did participate in every part of the logistical running of the camp, establishing relations of reciprocity of aid. Secondly, the volunteers strove to provide as much relevant information as possible to the migrants, with regards to language, geography and migration policy so they could have the tools they needed to continue their journey or stay in Italy, depending on their wishes. According to the volunteers, this exchange of information was their way of putting their privilege, in terms of cultural and social capital, to good use in support of the political struggle initiated by the migrants on June 12th, 2015, creating an ambiguous relationship between the practice of reciprocity, forms of privilege and inequality.

26 It is this reversal that permits an articulation of subjectivities, where neediness does not immediately translate into powerlessness or abject victimhood. Neediness in this case is a cry for help that does not erase the full humanity and subjectivities of those receiving aid, rather it *testifies* to their humanity. Furthermore, the ability to be involved, to give back is a signal to migrants themselves that they are welcome to be included in the community, on an equal footing with their 'hosts', thus avoiding feelings of inescapable indebtedness (Nyers and Rygiel 2012). For many migrants their new, unstable condition is shocking and difficult to come to terms with. For each gesture of solidarity they receive, some are determined to give something back. An exchange I had with a young Afghan man on my first day of fieldwork clearly delineates this dynamic.

> Z[8]. Where are you going on holiday?
> A. I am not going, I don't have the money.
> Z. Then call me and I'll give you. You gave me a banana and I'll pay you back.
> A. Okay. [I laughed embarrassedly, thinking that my gift of a banana could not be worth that much gratitude]
> Z. You don't believe me! I have money, my father is a judge in Afghanistan. And now I'm in this shitty situation.
> A. Okay, I believe you.
> Z. Give me your email address, and please answer me.

27 The attempts to create a factual equality between all camp denizens extended also to the political actions and processes initiated in the squat. This community eschewed banners and particular political claims or colours, save for their rallying cry 'We are not going back, we need to pass', which was what the migrants who had started the squat had first articulated as their demand. The addition of other volunteers over time only made it more difficult for the authorities to silence the migrants' political claims and to evict their squat immediately.

> You see, a phrase that surprised us at the time when we spoke with, with the people who wanted to cross the border, they told us once, *we are strong if you are here*, [in English in the original transcript]. And in that case, that was completely self-evident. In a normal situation I think it is like this, normally, migrants, the migration question is silenced, and probably at the time it would have made its way into newspapers very strongly, but that intervention [of the solidarians] made the situation even more difficult for the authorities, who could not evict the squat fully. (Interview 6, author's translation)

28 While the political activities that centred on the squat grew in their frequency and complexity, the risk attached to repression grew alongside them. The increasing risk to which activists and migrants exposed themselves became on the one hand a possible vehicle for the activists to reassert their privileged position as European nationals:

> The first camp, in 2015, at the Balzi Rossi was extremely heterogeneous so people came from all sorts of backgrounds, especially from the north of Italy, that's also true, simply because of the locality of the squat, and no one put on a hat. There was not one movement who had put a header on the thing, and that, you can also write that in your thesis, that was the issue in later years. Because yes, you can do assemblies with 100 people where you speak 5 different languages, it's complicated, but the strain is necessary. And there was sharing, and that was beautiful, there were also moments of gap, because making choices in an assembly is hard, because maybe they, the migrants, feared exposing themselves too much when repression became harsher, and we instead knew that we could risk a bit more, but what do you do? Do you force them? It's their life, in the end. So uniting the two things wasn't always easy. (Interview 5, author's translation)

29   On the other hand, common vulnerability to risk also became a uniting factor that pulled camp denizens closer to one another. The participation in protests and 'frontier jamming' actions, as well as the sheer exposure to police violence, mediated the differences between camp denizens by uniting them against a common enemy, but also by fostering affective relationships born out of care for others' wellbeing. Furthermore, members of the squat strived to keep the political direction of the squat as open as possible, accommodating for different points of view and allowing people the freedom to dissociate from actions. Decisions taken in the assembly were never final, but took on the shape of a constant, never-ending dialogue that also kept recurring outside of the assemblies, in small groups over time. This process, similar to the affinity group model[9] of other protest camps, was entirely informal and organic, springing from coexistence and communal living rather than an intentional political organization.

30   The lack of purposeful political direction and the necessity to keep the community open and mutable hindered the birth of a proper, nationwide political movement. Many activists saw this as the failure of the squat. Other activists, who were active at a later time in Ventimiglia, were instead more sceptical about the value of protest and political movements but were also very aware of a supposed tension between direct aid and political mobilization. This contrasting commitment to either political mobilization or direct action and aid are also explored in other studies on solidarity activism (della Porta, 2018), leaving the impression that aid stands as a distraction from the more important and fruitful instrument of protest.

31   Is the creation of camp alternatives a lesser political endeavour than outright protest? It certainly is a *different* sort of politics, but an important form of political action all the same. In the space of the camp, where volunteers were still mindful of the ways in which their actions could convey their privilege and prove to be less emancipatory than they seemed, the creation of an alternative that articulated subjectivities in the struggle, in contrast with the workings of the borderland, was a crucial political action. As Mamma Africa put it in her interview, and a sentiment later echoed by other volunteers, the border is not just the checkpoint. The exclusionary processes of the borderland evidently follow people into their homes, cutting them off from the local social fabric:

> Where is the frontier? The frontier is not between Italy and France, France and Germany, France and England. That's not the frontier. Where is the frontier? Independently from the colour of your skin, because you can be white or black, it's when you find yourself in a state, where you have no documents, you have no work contract, without a work contract you can't have a home, you have no right to access health services. It's not about identity, I cross and identify myself. That's not the frontier. That's an entry ticket, an exit ticket, like in a cinema, I pay the ticket to come and see. That's not a frontier. Migration is not these people crossing on foot, migration is what they leave behind, what they suffer in the journey and until they get to the end, that is migration. (Interview 2, author's translation)

32   A man I met during his crossing put it similarly:

> Yes, I come only to look at Italy! [sarcastic laugh] I don't fight, I don't sell drugs, I don't do bad, but there's no work and I don't beg. You can take my prints today, tomorrow, two thousand times, I'll still come, until I cross. (In English in the original)

33   Not only do people contest their right to move (i.e. 'We are not going back, we need to cross'), but also the right to *stop somewhere* and have access to the elements that make

up what we would consider a normal life, a job, a home, a social network to which we belong. In that sense, although the camp alternative is not a viable long-term solution, it opens up certain alternatives that begin to integrate migrants into a social fabric that welcomes them as its members and not as temporary visitors. The camp can be understood then as an example of 'interstitial politics' (Pignarre and Stengers 2011) where the status quo of the migrating subject, who is often found in constant movement, in a suspended time frame and in a spatial vacuum (Mountz 2011), is subverted through the creation of bonds that link them to a new solidary geography. However, this political project is not born out of the affirmation of a privileged political subjectivity, but rather through the contextual effort to respond to social and political dynamics as they arise, working through 'the middle' of the situational fabric (Stengers 2013). This sort of politics, which eschews banners, long-term strategies and great declarations is instead a politics of 'doing possible things' (Kesha Niya 2017), whose definition is as changeable as the fluctuating dynamics of the borderland, although it is no less relevant, for its fluidity.

34 Rather than challenging the logics of the borderland in movement, the opening of solidary spaces (the Balzi Rossi squat, the Infopoint, the Hobbit Bar) bracketed off certain localities from the relations of power and exclusion that govern migration. By doing this, solidarians and migrants articulated alternative modes of being and of living together that resisted the alienation of the mobile subject and the creation of bare life through exception and suspension. These bonds often took the shape of familial ties, of sisterhood, brotherhood, sometimes even motherhood. Many of the volunteers described their encounter with the migrants as the encounter with a new younger or older brother, a long lost sister, or a new adopted son. This dynamic can be witnessed in every solidary space that has been opened in Ventimiglia, no matter how transient, from the Hobbit Bar to the make-shift squat-cum-observatory on the *frontiera alta* organized by Kesha Niya.

4.4 The Feminine Burden of Care and Forms of Masculinist Protection

35 The language of family, interestingly put forward more strongly by female interviewees, is by no means politically neutral and brings forth gendered dynamics that may give rise to many imbalances and difficulties. The importance of intimate exchange and relationships, as well as emotional support provided by volunteers, often leaves female activists in a position of greater demand that their male counterparts, where they often find themselves having to deal with a thorny balance between their self-fashioned role as helpers and their own personal and mental well-being. This dynamic might be said to represent an example of the 'feminization of care work' (Cohen and Wolkowitz 2018) insofar as it not only concerns a type of work that is mainly performed by women,[10] but also a type of interaction in which female volunteers are preferred to their male counterparts.

> It's difficult to… because obviously I'm a woman, and being surrounded by so many men, obviously you know, that some of the friendships are really just fake, they really just want your attention, because you're a woman, that sort of thing. Yeah, so I had that quite often, but then, I had genuine, real, friends as well. I would be hanging out with them, and being really comfortable being with them, and they also shared their life stories with me and stuff, genuinely, yeah. (Interview 1)

36 The importance of personal relationships and of care work, with its emotional burden, drew volunteers' attentions to the conflictual relationship between their own desire to help, the *moral necessity* of solidary action, and their own well-being. Their informal provision of care might ultimately create bonds that transcend professional roles and thus run deeper, filling the void of human relationality that opens in transit, addressing the issues of alienation that volunteers diagnose in the borderland. However, it also leaves volunteers vulnerable to instances of extreme emotional strain while shouldering the bulk of the emotional labour required on the frontier. This conflict remains ultimately unresolved to a large extent, with volunteers identifying this mutual vulnerability in the provision of care as the best feature of their action as well as its greatest danger, setting their work apart from professional organizations and NGOs, whose bureaucratic organizational dynamics sparked the frustration of more than one volunteer with whom I interacted.

> Surely this was one of our strong points. Humanity shining through, no? Through people. You are... it is not your profession, you are not doing a job, it's something you believe in, you are not an Oxfam observer, you are not an Intersos observer, you are Arianna, you are Marco, you are Giulia[11] and that surely made it so that people came closer. On the other hand, we always took up the issue of training, because I cannot deny that there were episodes of, it would be wrong to say burnout, but often getting so close to suffering and to the constant deprivation of rights challenges you. Maybe from this perspective people who do this professionally and are used to doing it can have that necessary detachment. I have seen people who have stayed in Ventimiglia for three months sleeping in a tent, this winter, they were there under the snow, but I also saw their pain later, because if you cannot detach yourself, and as a person you cannot, afterwards, there's pain, there's suffering. So yeah, this is the upside and the difficulty as well. (Interview 4, author's translation)

37 Care labour is an extremely feminine domain, characterized by the mobilization of personal relationships as instruments of political change. It is only possible to speculate as to why people in transit reach out more readily to women. Some activists suggested that they might seem less threatening and more trustworthy, while male figures in transit often represent the possibility of further exploitation and violence. The creation of viable ties of trust and aid is entirely based on a contextual experience of the situation, rather than predetermined roles, formal requirements and mandates, highlighting the informality and contingency that rule these processes.

> The best kind of relationship [with migrants] comes to me through the situation that is born in that instant, and it's my instinct, it might also be wrong what I do, it's not a certainty that it is right. But it is my instinct as a woman, as a mother, as an aunt, as a cousin, as a sister that drives me to act that way. Until now I haven't gone wrong, of course, if people ask me advice, for lawyers, for... I'm not up to that, but fulfilling in that moment the need for affection, a shoulder to lean on, I am there for that. (Interview 2, author's translation)

38 Emotional availability sometimes leads to requests to which volunteers are not willing to comply, and many have learned to cope swiftly and directly with requests for personal contacts or displays of affection, if unwelcome. For some, these instances are also opportunities to reflect more about their role in the borderland and the work that they do. When they face difficulties however, their narrative goes back to the necessity that brings them to the field and a seemingly inescapable responsibility to be active and resist the dominant power dynamics which see migrants silenced and marginalised.

It is a very difficult space, it is difficult for the women in transit and it is difficult for [female] volunteers. Because you have to deal with situations... we cannot hide this, situations of promiscuity, difficult situations, situations with people that have been traveling for long with many different backgrounds. It is true that sometimes your smile can be misunderstood and you need to be careful, it seems like a slap in the face but even that, maybe, that is a lesson, I mean, you have to understand that, it is a further push to stay human. Because we cannot... what do you do then? Play the same game? Then we should say no, it's not worth helping [them]. But we cannot think this way. (Interview 4, author's translation)

39   The dimension of kinship that is born in these spaces is not only made up of the tricky balance of emotional labour, but it can also become the theatre of a long-term dialogue on gender issues and cultural differences, as well as a space where rules are enforced through relationships of trust and respect. The reliance on mutual trust and personal relationships for the enforcement of order is another feature of the role that horizontality plays in camp-spaces, tying people together not on account of formal structures but rather on account of a sense of closeness determined by a common opposition (adversarial spatial practices) as well as the creation of an embryonic community, born out of liminality.

I've always felt comfortable, I slept in a tent for 5 months and no one ever came to bother me. Also because I was crazy and half hysteric and so I yelled at people, I scolded them, I treated them like my younger brothers, exactly like this, I scolded them all the time, because that's how I behave generally... But many, there were people better than me at mediating, let's say, I also explained myself to them, when you live 24/7 with someone you build relationships, and when someone does something wrong or you treat someone badly there is space for dialogue, to understand cultural differences as well if you will, because there are [...] The thing was, what I tried to explain was that it's not like they had to treat me well as a woman because I was there helping them and I was Italian, they had to treat me well as a woman because I was a woman, period. And they had to treat their sister well just the same, as far as I am concerned. (Interview 5, author's translation)

40   The language of family became then not only a means to vehicle belonging to the solidary community of the borderland but also a tool for the exercise of authority and the enforcement of rules and standards of behaviour, enriching the varied horizontality of solidary-spaces with another layer of togetherness. The most striking case of such dynamics is that of Mamma Africa.

I had to assert my authority, put forth some rules because for all I care you can wash but the bathroom needs to be clean, since you are going to wash you ask for the mop and you dry the floor. Because there are women and children going in there, but not even that, it might be your brother who goes in there, slip in the water or step in the dirty water on the floor, that's not nice [...] I disciplined them, like small children. They are not used to receiving orders from a woman, so for me it was a double [effort]. They left the bathroom dirty, even though I had put a sign saying 'clean it', even though I had put the mop to their disposal, nothing, so I locked the bathroom. Since everywhere else they could not go in and in the train station they had to pay to go to the bathroom, they understood. (Interview 2, author's translation)

41   The enforcement of rules and order based on informal dialogue and horizontality was not enough, however, to disallow the emergence of cases of sexual violence both at the Balzi Rossi squat and in the informal camps, highlighting the limits of horizontality when it comes to gendered power dynamics. Two such cases, one for each camp, was reported to me by the volunteers whom I interviewed, in addition to the many tales of

sex trafficking and violence that came up in conversation. The cases that were reported involved the rape of a volunteer in the Balzi Rossi squat by one man in transit, and the rape of a sixteen-year old Ethiopian girl by a group of five Afghan men. In the latter case, no one mentioned to me any response to the incident, while in the former, the whole squat was involved in dealing with this episode of violence, with the women attempting to care for the victim and the migrants and volunteers spoiling to lynch the accused perpetrator, who later ran away. According to a volunteer, the only one who mentioned the case, this reaction, while violent, stemmed from a drive to protect the victim:

> This thing about their response, beyond the fact that it could be violent or not, was an action of protection and respect. When I was saying [earlier in the interview] that we were often only women, because often it happened that for days at a time we would be 3 men [volunteers], 5 women and 180 men. That is not an attempt to justify or down play what happened, but also speaking for my personal experience... they, there never was this thing where you are a woman, you wash the dishes, no it was more like, you are a woman, you are helping me, you are my sister. It was very much like a brotherhood, and sisterhood, so even if it was only women you never felt in danger. And even after, after the rape incident, some of the migrants who had stayed for longer, they were reprimanding [others], scolding, saying "Oh, look, you have to behave with them" [...] They would scold the new ones who arrived and who would treat you badly because you're a woman. Then, in reality, it was a very rare occurrence, they were few. (Interview 5, author's translation)

42 A similar reliance on informal relationships, stemming from the sense of (in)security that permeated these spaces, was also present in the riverside informal camps that succeeded Balzi Rossi, where horizontality and adversarial spatial practices were not articulated in such a way as to succeed in creating a viable community.

> My dad said – my dad came to visit for like a week – there was, the guys he really trusted and said okay, Jane[12] is your responsibility, so that gave more of a brother kind of relationship as well. (Interview 2)

43 Although in this case the notion of 'brotherhood' is mobilized in a way that promises protection, it is sometimes the case that, for women in transit, brotherhood can just as easily mean exploitation. In some instances, trust placed in kinship relationships is betrayed and leaves plenty of room for violence. This is the case of sex trafficking rings, where reliance on informal ties between people met in transit drives women to a situation of exploitation, while female volunteers who struggle against sex trafficking strive to earn women's trust to disentangle them from such dynamics. This shows how mechanisms of masculinist protection, entailing the subordination of women's agency (Young 2003) to that of their male counterparts are a clear structuring force of the management of (in)security in these spaces, highlighting the double and thin boundary that links protection to violence and oppression.

> Logically, a woman coming with her child, does not believe us whites but believed her brother and she doesn't know that her brother sells her [...] It is not easy [to build trust] in very few minutes, because many times you do not have an hour, or a day at your disposal to make them understand that you are on their side [...] I am proud of that [of succeeding], or when they came... There was one time, we're talking about 2017, a woman with four children and pregnant with another, I gave them food, brioche and juice, and a toy to go on with their journey, and when they got to France they call you and they thank you, and for a couple of months since their departure, sometimes even now they call me to tell me "Thank you, Mamma" [...] Or another time, last year, a girl arrived, they brought her to me, a girl at 7 a.m., that had been beaten early in the morning, stoned, she had a hole in her head this

big… Because she had refused to prostitute herself in their ring, and in those conditions, where do they bring her? Not to the hospital, they take her to Mamma Africa. (Interview 2, author's translation)

44 The moral and ethical necessity of bearing witness to the events of the borderland and of not appearing indifferent to the plight of people in transit does not eliminate the difficulties that dealing with such a politically charged context entails. Whether it is personal risk – of arrest, of physical violence – or the strain of the emotionally demanding situation, many volunteers face the impossible task of balancing their commitment to the cause with their own personal wellbeing. Furthermore, many are critical of the long-term consequences of their actions, wondering whether they might ultimately have negative consequences for people in transit and what kind of responsibility they should bear in their regards. Attitudes are very varied on these issues. Each volunteer I interacted with had their own sense of right and wrong and their own personal boundaries related to questions of legality, collusion with *passeurs* or to advice given to migrants. Some also openly discussed the importance that they placed on distancing themselves physically from Ventimiglia and only coming back when ready to face the gruesome stories that greet them every day.[13] However, for many (female) volunteers the sheer necessity that they feel to be present in the borderland sometimes trumps any difficulties that they face.

So the job of a volunteer is devastating, because you know you have to keep doing it but it hurts, because these people, today you see them, you greet them at night, you don't know if tomorrow they'll be there still and you don't know what's in store for them. Nothing rosy is waiting for them. And even after that border, to which they aspire so much, we ask ourselves often, we try to help them in the crossing any way we can but towards what? What are you going towards? Because there is nothing, there is no heaven beyond that border. So it is hard, hard. Because many women, I saw them lose their light, the light of hope, but it's also true that among women, the very fact of holding a sister and letting her feel at home can turn that light on again. Even if it's little, that is what is needed sometimes. (Interview 4, author's translation)

45 The wellbeing of every participant in a conflictual situation, such as that of the borderland, is valued contextually, seeking to find solutions that do not entail anyone's suffering. By constructing a moral dilemma in such a way, volunteers are not in a position to elevate their own well-being above that of migrants, whose recognised neediness is what drives political action and informal humanitarian assistance. Furthermore, the framing of solidary action as necessary and intimately human entails an additional layer of moral commitment to the construction of the role of solidarity activism and volunteer humanitarianism in the borderland, firmly anchoring the provision of care and the recognition of mobile people's vulnerability and non-expendability in the framing of solidary identities.

NOTES DE BAS DE PAGE

1. This is a reference to the summer of 2017. At that time, the local authorities closed the drinkable water taps close to the bridge under which many migrants slept. This choice ultimately denied access to drinkable water to several hundreds of people.

2. The volunteer I interviewed in this case said that she had become extremely close with a group of migrants, and whenever she referred to them during the interview, she would call them 'her friendship group'.

3. Producing a truly inclusive communal space often meant for activists the creation of separate spaces for men and women. In the Infopoint especially, it become obvious early on that women would not attempt to use the computers at their disposal while men where using the same space. Furthermore, as women were more often in charge of taking care of children, the provision of aid in the caring of their children was often a necessity to offer them respite from travel and their daily caretaking duties. Finally, all those women who ended up in trafficking rings were often unable to truly take advantage of the aid volunteers offered, and as already stated in chapter 3 it was rare for the activist network in Ventimiglia to be truly able to put a dent in sex trafficking. Humanity, then, as free choice and unencumbered agency, could be said not to be a possible path for all.

4. Discriminatory practices are not only the purview of the police. Public and private services in the locality of Ventimiglia also refused migrants on the basis of colour. Whether it is a taxi service insisting on knowing the skin colour of its clients, or a bus driver refusing to take on more than 10 migrants because that would cause a disservice to other white users waiting at other stops, racial discrimination is common and goes entirely unchecked.

5. Interestingly, one of the volunteers working with Kesha Niya identified in the badges and vests of NGO personnel a distancing device, which kept migrants wary of them and made it impossible to build an open and horizontal exchange.

6. This was the only interview in which the word 'race' actually came up and was repeated several times. In other interviews, possibly on account of the fact that they were carried out in Italian, while Interview 1 was carried out in English, the word race never came up. However, activists found other ways to communicate the same concept. In particular, in Interview 5 with an activist who lived at the Balzi Rossi squat, the language became increasingly creative. As she explained to me, in the squat they found different ways of communicating racial differences by terming the denizens of the squat white, 'macchiato' (like a cappuccino) and black. Another pair of terms used to mark difference in the squat was 'locals' and 'migrants', where locals signified people with European citizenship. Although these language markers came up, activists mostly referred to the people they met as their friends, by their name. They referred to people as 'the guys' or 'the *shabaabs*', and 'solidarians' or 'activists' in the cases in which they were singling out their relative 'role' in the story, often seemingly more for my benefit and my understanding than any desire to mark their difference.

7. The original Italian noun used by the activists is 'assistenzialismo'. In context, it refers broadly to a culture of welfarism, and handouts that create dependency and is detrimental for individual freedom and autonomy. However, if this expression might have a different meaning in the context of a debate on state welfare and social policies, in this case activists used the term to diagnose a clear trade-off in state-sanctioned humanitarian action between the provision of aid and the individual freedom and political agency of the recipient. This analysis of the reception

policy for migrants in Italy largely corresponds to a broader critique of humanitarian responses to migration stressed by the literature on the topic.

8. Z. is the initial of the young man's given name, which I use to refer to his part of the dialogue. A. refers to my own initials.

9. Affinity groups are smaller decision-making units used by new social movements and protest camps to foster a sense of organic horizontality in their decision-making structures. They strongly resemble small groups of friends in their workings, reaching decisions by consensus, and feeding back these decisions to a bigger assembly, which in turn deliberates again by consensus (Feigenbaum et al. 2013).

10. The reasons behind the discrepancy in the numbers of male and female volunteers represents another interesting avenue of research, unfortunately largely beyond the scope of this paper.

11. Names were changed and bear no similarity to the original ones.

12. This name has been changed from the original in the transcript.

13. This detachment can also be taken to represent another layer of privilege that separates migrants from volunteers. Although both are entirely mobile and changeable populations in Ventimiglia, there is an unmistakable ease in the ways in which activists (and students of the topic) can *opt out* of the violent dynamics of the borderland if they so desire.

Concluding Remarks

1 Solidary spaces offer a complex view of the interactions between identities, practices and non-human situational elements in the determination of political outcomes. On the one hand, the construction of solidary identities around a contextual rather than essentialist notion of humanity, or rather around the contextual discovery and rediscovery of such humanity, articulated in terms of neediness and vulnerability, leads to a mindful attempt to honour such a conception of the human in practice. On the other, those very practices, which become a vehicle of horizontality and reciprocity, inform the production of politically active and relevant subjectivities striving for the recognition of mobile people as fully human and fully agentic, where humanity is conflated with the possibility of freely determining one's life path. Finally, adversarial spatial practices, and thus the role of space constructed through both human and non-human presence, concur to ground and to offset the creation of such alternative identities, political subjectivities and communal practices, determining the degrees of cohesion and horizontality to be found in these solidary spaces.

2 Each of these dimensions powerfully rearticulates relations of power in the borderland, substituting exclusion and abandonment with affective ties of belonging, and mobilizing precariousness in search of politically meaningful subjectivities rather than to their disavowal. In this way, solidary spaces resist various forms of state-led responses to migration, rearticulating not only the figuration of the migrant away from abject victimhood and dangerous strangeness, but also that of members of the host society away from neo-colonial, white saviour scripts so common in humanitarian interventions, through the discovery of mutuality and especially of common vulnerability. In this context, care as well as suffering are not unidirectional and unidimensional aspects of the figure of the care-giver and care recipient respectively, but interact constantly, often operating a reversal in their relationship in paradoxical ways.

3 The complex relationships and affective ties forged in the borderland, however, do not negate the persistence of mechanisms of power and privilege. The existence of gendered dynamics, even in the absence of the devaluation of care and care work, in the form of a sexual division of emotional labour as well as the affirmation of mechanisms of masculinist protection in the management of (in)security, testify to the ubiquity of power dynamics even in the most embryonic and transient of social

formations. Furthermore, the presence of racial conflicts and discrimination inside these spaces shows how, regardless of the emancipatory potential of these spaces, they nevertheless are only partially capable of putting forward alternative visions and worlds, having to grapple constantly with the processes pervading their outside, against which they are defined and in which they are intimately entangled, giving rise to ambiguities between power and violence and their alternatives.

Interviews

1. Interview 1. Skype interview with an independent activist, attached first to Kesha Niya and then the Infopoint, 20 February 2019.

2. Interview 2. Interview with Mamma Africa, owner and manager of the Bar Hobbit, Ventimiglia 18 March 2019.

3. Interview 3. Skype Interview with a Progetto 20K activist, 19 March 2019.

4. Interview 4. Skype Interview with a Progetto 20K activist, 22 March 2019.

5. Interview 5. Interview with a Balzi Rossi activist, Bologna 25 March 2019.

6. Interview 6. Interview with an Eat the Rich activist involved in the Balzi Rossi squat, Bologna 25 March 2019.

7. Interview 7. Interview with an Eat the Rich activist involved in the Balzi Rossi squat, Bologna 25 March 2019.

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