From Lampedusa to the Susa Valley: solidarity networks in two border battlegrounds

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Abstract: Since the beginning of the "reception crisis" in 2015, the term "solidarity" has been widely employed in Europe by networks supporting migrants in transit. These networks – while increasingly important and prominent in contemporary Europe − are still understudied and have only recently been addressed in migration studies. The research takes place in two crucial border zones: on the one hand, the island of Lampedusa, which is a sea point of entry into Europe through Italy; on the other, the Susa Valley, an alpine point of exit from Italy that allows the passage to France. How are the solidarity networks put together? How do they interact with the mobility practices of migrants in transit? How do the practices of solidarity fit in with the ways authorities act at the border? The ethnographic fieldwork was developed in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic and aims to answer these interconnected research questions.
Keywords: Migrant routes, solidarity, borders, battleground, ethnography

1. Introduction: putting solidarity in the foreground

Italy is a crossroads of multiple routes from the Balkans and the Mediterranean and it represents a crucial field in which to observe undocumented transit migration, different forms of governance and social reception. We can imagine the peninsula as a space dotted with numerous, ever changing, border-zones − in other words social and political battlegrounds (Ambrosini 2018) − where incoming and outgoing movements, and key players such as local authorities, inhabitants, border agencies, police, social workers and activists either meet, support one another or clash.

The aim of this article is to place "solidarity" in the foreground in order to better grasp the dynamics, conflicts and types of unexpected cooperation in border zones. Although it constitutes the very foundation of our disciplines (Durkheim [1893] 1933), the concept of solidarity has been overlooked in modern social sciences and political theory (Kymlicka 2015). Since the beginning of the "reception crisis" in 2015 (Rea et al. 2019), this term has been widely employed in Europe by grassroots networks supporting migrants in transit (Birey et al. 2019). These heterogeneous local and transnational networks − which comprise NGOs, religious associations, and humanitarian groups (El-Shaarawi and Razsa 2019) − while increasingly important and prominent in contemporary Europe, are still understudied and have only recently been addressed in migration research (Fontanari and Borri 2017; Bauder and Juffs 2019), structuring the emerging subfield of solidarity studies (Giliberti and Potot 2021).

Solidarity networks within Europe have been supporting migrants and refugees on the move by providing private hospitality, spaces of care, practical knowledge, essential goods, and support to facilitate border crossing (Giliberti 2020). Babels (2019) has shown that, despite the institutional reception system, this "grassroots hospitality" pertains to a dimension of citizenship, framed between the intimate and the political. In addition, these networks denounce dubious institutional practices around and against borders. Although such actions have mainly been observed through a binary polarization between the political and humanitarian spheres, a hybridization process of these two dimensions has been occurring (Siapera 2019; Della Porta e Steinhilper 2021) as a consequence of the persecution of humanitarian practices, framed as akin to smuggling, within so-called "solidarity crimes" (Fekete 2018). In this context, criminalized humanitarian practices become more similar to political ones, while the latter, forced to exist in an emergency context, become closer to the former; many support groups experience processes of "*ad hoc* federalism" (Giliberti, Potot and Trucco 2020) as they converge into broader advocacy coalitions, recently analyzed through an emerging framework which combines civil society and social movement studies (Della Porta 2020).

In this framework, Sinatti (2019) theorizes the coexistence of a "minimalist humanitarianism" - based on a logic of mere protection and support for the "bare life" of migrants - with an "enabling humanitarianism", in which the *Solidaires* try to facilitate the agency of people on the move. In the same vein, other authors talk about "subversive humanitarianism" (Vandevoordt and Verschraegen 2019), a notion that no longer addresses migrants as mere recipients of aid, taking into account their socio-political subjectivities. Other scholars theorize the concept of "strategic humanitarianism" (Schwiertz and Steinhilper 2021), a form of support for migrants in which actors combine a repertoire of politically motivated actions with a narrower humanitarian framework. The temporal dimension also plays an important role in this hybrid dimension of solidarity. If humanitarian action is often considered limited insofar as it is crushed by the immediate needs of the present, the action of social movements is instead conceived in terms of the future. The temporalities of solidarity networks also hybridize in this sense on different repertoires, connecting their actions between the present and the future, on the one hand to resolve institutional shortcomings in the here and now, and on the other hand to propose scenarios of future-making (Vandevoordt and Fleischmann, 2021).

In addition, a growing body of scholarship (Bauder and Darling 2019) has begun to examine "sanctuary cities" on account of their political commitment to fostering a welcoming environment. Along the routes of undocumented migration, "sanctuarization" is a social process, nurtured by hidden practices of resistance (Scott 1990) and often enacting the working of a contemporary "underground railroad" as a practical infrastructure for the right to move (Queirolo Palmas and Rahola, 2020), crossing several border zones and offering a wider range of opportunities and encounters. Furthermore, migrants in transit may develop practices of mutual aid and self-help during their journeys and may rely on kin or ethnic solidarity networks, both in their countries of origin and in the countries of arrival (Snel, Engbersen and Leerkes 2006).

This article explores the practices and players of civic solidarities in relation to undocumented movement; the ethnographic fieldwork takes place in two crucial border zones: on the one hand, the island of Lampedusa, which is a sea point of entry into Europe through Italy; on the other, the Susa Valley, an alpine point of exit from Italy that allows the passage to France. According to the European lexicon of migration, the former concerns "primary movements", while the latter involves "secondary movements" across internal borders of the EU.

Table 1 provides a rough idea of the volume of passages in the two contexts compared against the larger movements of entry by sea and exit at the French-Italian border. The data indicates the number of attempts registered by the Italian authorities rather than the effective number of people in transit. The landing data does not take into account the thousands of migrants who were pushed back directly by Libyan and Tunisian authorities nor the deaths which occurred during the crossing; similarly, the rejections at the Italian-French border do not provide any indication of successful border crossings. Data also shows that the pandemic – which severely restricted all kinds of mobility – did not actually significantly decrease the volume of migrant crossings.

Tab. 1 – Sea Landings and readmissions at the French/Italian Border (Bardonecchia and Ventimiglia Police Station)

	Landings in Lampedusa	Total Landings	Readmissions in Bardonecchia	Total Readmissions from France
2017	9,057	119,369	6,129	29,963
2018	3,468	23,370	6,925	27,004
2019	4,500*	11,221	7,882	24,690
2020	15,600*	33,394	4,732**	23,960**

Source: Home Affairs Ministry and Border Police, Zone 1 (2020), Mediterranean Hope (data with an asterisk). Two asterisks: data updated as of 3-12-2020

Over the last 30 years, Lampedusa − once a remote island of fishermen − has been progressively transformed by authorities into a border zone, both materially and symbolically, as well as a stage for the global spectacle of migration. Unauthorized migrants on the move get stuck in offshore camps (Ticktin 2009) from which they can only exit through institutional transfers; as occurs in other locations around the world, Lampedusa's insularity means that migrants are often stranded and are required to wait without any indication of how long they have to do so (Andersson 2014).

The Alpine route affecting the Susa Valley is a more recent border zone; since 2017, a significant number of international migrants has entered this territory in an attempt to cross the border and reach several European countries (Del Biaggio, Giannetto and Noûs 2020). According to estimates provided by Medici per i Diritti Umani – Doctors for Human Rights (MEDU 2021), about 15,000 people have crossed the French-Italian border via this route since 2017. Up until 2019, it was predominantly migrants from Sub-Saharan countries who chose this border node to cross; since 2020, however, we have witnessed the arrival of people predominantly from the Balkan route.

These spaces where unauthorized movement takes place now house specific camps and relocation centers, hotspots, hubs, checkpoints, digital platforms (Anderlini 2020). However, also due to solidarity networks, different interactions may take place and other spaces of porosity may be created; this is the case of informal shelters and makeshift settlements, which are not only temporary locations or springboards for debordering, but also places of sociality, creativity, and coalitions where solidarity becomes "contentious" and "generative" (Agustín and Jørgensen 2019).

This being said, the types and structures of solidarity vary in different places of entry and exit, depending on distinct constraints and opportunities, players and practices, among migrants on the move, authorities and border agencies. For instance, the border agencies in Lampedusa converge in strengthening control and containing arrivals (Orsini 2016); conversely, in the Susa Valley, they adopt an implicit policy of "*laisser passer*" (Ciabarri 2015), delegating the task of blocking and rejecting migrants to the French authorities.

The ethnographic fieldwork behind this article was developed in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic – specifically from October 2020 to February 2021 – and aims to place the following interconnected research questions in the foreground in a comparative perspective: How are the solidarity networks put together? How do they interact with the mobility practices of migrants in transit? How do the practices of solidarity fit in with the ways authorities act at the border? To what extent does the specificity of the border zone – entry and exit points, primary and secondary movements – explain the actions of networks and how the pandemic has shifted their functioning?

The ethnographic data for this research was collected both in person, during the months of October, December and February and remotely (Giliberti and Filippi 2021; Dicks, Soyinka, and Coffey 2006) in the subsequent months thanks to the social relations established through the previous fieldwork. In this framework, seventy-six interviews, and repeated encounters and observations in situations of

daily life (bars and restaurants, public squares and houses, workplaces and piers, alpine shelters and trails) were carried out with several subjects that make up the landscape of the island and the valley: local administrators, policemen, lawyers, international organizations officers and cultural mediators, NGO workers and solidarity networks activists, fishermen and sailors, mountain guides and rescue squads, high school teachers and priests, health workers and university students.

2. **Lampedusa as an entry node**

The migrant support networks in Lampedusa congregate around the "Lampedusa Solidarity Forum", an informal coalition which, since 2015, has brought together people from different religious backgrounds, political backgrounds, and forms of engagement, such as volunteers or NGO professionals in the humanitarian field. The Forum consists of about fifteen permanent members and a much wider network of connections. This is how the internal functioning of the group is described by an activist: "We are an open assembly, so open that we also involve those who do not live in Lampedusa, those who come here in the summer and those who want to walk with us for just a stretch of the road" (Paola, Lampedusa, 10/12/2020).

The birthplace of the Forum was the pier, which is the spot where individuals who wished to welcome migrants would gather. According to the genealogy reconstructed by one of its members (the parish priest), the Forum was born out of the emergency, disrupting the official management of landings and imposing a non-military presence: "We had no legal permission to be on the pier. Sometimes authorities tried to chase us away. Then, when it was needed, they rolled out the red carpet for us " (Don Carmelo, Lampedusa, 11/12/2020). The alternation of ostracism and red carpet treatment was dependent on the authority's needs and, in general terms, to the alternation of security and humanitarian stages in the institutional practices of border governance (Cuttitta 2014). Subsequently, the Forum obtained official recognition on behalf of the institutions as the *representative* of civil society for migrants upon landing.

The pervasive presence of institutional players linked to borderwork and the role of the island as an offshore confinement space (Mountz 2015) impact on how solidarity networks may operate. There are four main modes of action: first of all, the Forum performs humanitarian work on the pier, which is *integrated* into the institutional management of the border. The activists are connected via a WhatsApp group and every day, thanks to information from the Coast Guard, they update one another on potential upcoming arrivals. At every landing they bring food, drink, and thermal blankets; they make their non-military presence visible by standing on the pier and displaying an empathetic and affectionate disposition towards the migrants. From the pier, the rescued migrants are transferred to the hotspot, where the dimensions of reception, detention and surveillance begin to overlap; unlike at the pier, authorities do not recognize a field of action for solidarity networks within the spaces of the reception center.

Secondly, the Forum engages in cultural and symbolic work, generating other narratives on migration: activists, for example, attempt to find the names of those who died in shipwrecks, they take care of the local cemetery, they contest the presence of the hotspot on the island viewing it as a prison, they oppose the establishment of quarantine ships as a response to the hotspots' overcrowding, and fight for the immediate transfer of migrants to the mainland and the opening of humanitarian corridors and legal entry routes.

Thirdly, the Forum concretely supports the extension of all moments and situations of porosity and interchange between migrants and the island, coming into conflict with local authorities who try to limit the range of movement and freedom of migrants as much as possible. The parish is the heart of the solidarity networks, and the square in front of it is the main place for meeting and conviviality. This is the account of the activists who welcomed us into a large room of the church dotted with photos of Pope Francis' trip in 2013. Don Carmelo start, however, mentioned a change which has occurred over time:

> Before COVID-19, we often had meetings, dinners, parties and events. We even organized film screenings in Arabic. To protest against the blockade of NGO ships during the Salvini period, we slept in the churchyard. "Mediterranean Hope"[2] then made its office available and it became an internet café of sorts. The guys who saw us at the dock came here; they knew they could trust us. Today the new mayor does not want to have migrants around, he wants the center to be a closed space, more like a prison (Don Carmelo, Lampedusa, 11/12/2020).

Another activist from the Lampedusa Solidarity Forum reminisces about the time when the center was managed by the Municipality and the militarization of aid and reception had not yet been consolidated. Like many other interviewees, he mentions the existence of a *hole* in the Hotspot's fences; this was tolerated by the authorities before the COVID-19 pandemic and regulated the movement of migrants on the island in a variable and contingent way.

> Back then migrants wandered around the island with us. They came into our homes. Now they have even fixed the holes in the fences. Since the pandemic began, renovations have resumed at the Hotspot. When they finish, no one will get out (Maurizio, Lampedusa, 14/12/2020).

Solidarity − which focused on porosity and encounters − was halted while control and detention on the border work were strengthened and rhetorically legitimated in terms of public health (Giliberti and Queirolo Palmas 2021).

Lastly, the Forum acts on issues which are not strictly linked to migration but are related to more general problems of the island, connecting with other local groups and social initiatives. The Forum members we meet, almost all of whom make up the stable core of the group, possess a high cultural capital (they are university students, graduates), work in the public sector (school and health sector), come from professional working environments (i.e. lawyers), NGOs and ecological and alternative tourism, or, as in the case of priests and nuns, enjoy a symbolic capital of a religious kind. What most clearly distinguishes this group is its origin: just as with regard to the key role of neo-rural dwellers in the Roya Valley (Giliberti 2020), even in this context, it is the neo-islanders – people who over the last 20 years have chosen Lampedusa as their home – who take centre stage in providing solidarity to migrants in transit.

In the eyes of the *real* locals, the neo-islanders are foreigners, even if different from tourists: using Simmel's definition (1971), they are "the foreigners who came to stay", the ones who in this context deal with other foreigners passing through, which are referred to as *Turks* in the island jargon. For example, at the end of a meditation meeting we took part in, the yoga teacher said with conviction: "All the activism is propelled by us, the immigrants, the neo-islanders" (Rino, Lampedusa, 15/12/2020). He also highlighted an overlapping effect: these very same people are involved in different kinds of activism, from the creation of the library to the historical archive; from the foundation of environmental committees to the struggles to provide health for all; from feminist work to gender equality work. As a matter of fact, a local branch of *Non Una Di Meno* – the main Italian feminist and trans-feminist movement – was established while we were conducting our fieldwork. Activism is a way through which different generations of neo-islanders distinguish themselves from the islanders; they meet and network with each other, bringing differed attitudes and strategies gleaning from what they have learned in urban contexts.

When we meet the mayor, the leader of a center-left coalition, not only does he proudly claim to have come up with the idea of the quarantine ships as a solution to the risk of the island becoming "another Lesbos, a refugee camp in the middle of the Mediterranean", but he also mentions the people of Forum by sarcastically bringing their origin into the conversation: "Why, are there some Lampedusans there?" (Totò Martello, Lampedusa, 11/12/2020). Lorenzo, who has been a new

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[2] A project of the Federation of Evangelical Churches in Italy, part of the Lampedusa Solidarity Forum, whose main objectives are monitoring, assistance and data collection on landings and routes in the Mediterranean.

islander for 25 years and is a professional skipper, underlines this interplay of positions and relationships within the framework of an island that lives off border economies as well as tourism (Friese 2012; Orsini 2016):

> I mostly pass my time with the islanders, I do not like the idea of isolating myself with the group of *forestieri*, as solidarity activists do. Those in solidarity are a minority and are often neo-islanders; the hostile racists are also a minority and are islanders. The bulk of the population is resigned, the phenomenon is structural. We don't even talk about it so much at the bar. Then during winter, people live thanks to the border (Lorenzo, Lampedusa, 15/12/2020).

He travels by boat between Tunisia, Malta, Linosa and Lampedusa, sharing the fishermen's the traffic and trade routes: "Several times in Monastir, which is where I leave my sailboat during the winter season, I've been offered 2,000 euros to transport people. I don't though because I don't want any problems. This being said, I am, of course, against borders, states, and passports" (ibid.)

Indeed, what remains on the sidelines, in the shadows, in the narratives gathered during this fieldwork is support towards "illegal" transit, one of the crucial activities of the "underground railroad" in contemporary Europe. From Lampedusa, migrants can only move thanks to institutional transfers. Yet, we do collect traces of invisible connections in both inbound and outbound movement. Harriette, for example, had welcomed numerous migrant women, who had previously been formal guests at the Hotspot to her house. In addition to telling us about the experiences of other inhabitants who took in hotspot fugitives, she reveals the bonds she built with travelers which opened up a network of relationships which connect Libya, Tunisia, Lampedusa and Europe; these connections can put her in a difficult position:

> I talk a lot − not with many people but only with a select few − because when I talk, I open up. I used to bring migrant women to this bar for a chat, right here where you and I are now. Sometimes they'd ask me for my phone number. For them, having someone's phone number or an address is like having a talisman. Sometimes, women would have their husbands in Libya call me or the husbands would call me from the sea asking for help or tell me they were arriving from Tunisia. After they leave Lampedusa, they ask me for help to continue their journey or they call me to say that they have arrived and that they are fine. But what can I do? Many have told me to be careful, that I could be charged me with migrant trafficking! I feel like I can't keep all these relationships, it's too much for me. I'm sad to say that I've stopped for now (Hariette, Lampedusa, 12/12/2020).

With regard to forward mobility − that is from Lampedusa to mainland Europe − some activists are legally prosecuted for aiding illegal immigration; put differently, they are prosecuted for committing a crime of solidarity. They opened up their homes to people who wanted to break free from the hotspot's leash. We also gathered other witness statements which describe how, in the name of solidarity, activists in recent past have helped migrants get on board scheduled ferries to Sicily and hide. As previously documented about Omonia in Athens (Queirolo Palmas, Rahola 2020), even here there is a vast and highly accessible fake ID market which allows people to attempt border-crossing. This is how a Borderline Sicilia lawyer describes that period:

> Between 2017 and 2018, there was an overcrowding of Tunisians at the Hotspot; at that time, many small boats arrived... Tunisian fishermen were selling off their small boats and many boys were attempting the crossing. They stayed at the hotspot for up to 4 months... many were also rather informed young people, used to resistance, who came from Redeyef, a combative unionized village of miners. They organized themselves, also thanks to activists and regular citizens, sleeping outside the Hotspot around the island. A boy was found with a fake ID while trying to go to Porto Empedocle; he mentioned a network of smugglers who were selling these documents and whose intentions were not connected with the world of solidarity (Cecilia, Catania, 16/12/2020).

This example reveals the autonomy of migrants in transit (De Genova 2017); they use both solidarity networks and more traditional providers in the field of debordering in a combined and instrumental way, with the aim of moving forward in their journey, avoiding the institutions, skipping compulsory and unpredictable waiting times, while also experiencing the ever-incumbent risk of deportation.

3. Susa Valley as an exit node

One of the most important exit nodes from Italy is the Susa Valley, a mountainous territory located in the North of Italy on the French-Italian border. In terms of the social and political dynamics of this area, it is important to note that one of Italian's most influential, radical, and long-lived postwar social movements developed here. That movement is the No TAV Movement, founded in the early 1990s to oppose the construction of a new railway line for the transit of goods (Senaldi 2016). Over the years No TAV has represented – and still represents – an effective counterpower in the governance of the territories in which it is located (Chiaromonte 2019). In this sense, it has led to the development of a particular sensibility among local citizens when it comes to the social dynamics that affect these territories. As often happens in border-zones, this awareness has also turned into the creation of solidarity networks directed at migrants in transit.

Starting from our ethnographic, we uncovered several solidarity practices performed by the solidarity networks of the Susa Valley. A first practice is linked to the hospitality towards people who come here to cross the border. There are two structures in the Susa Valley that provide hospitality: *Rifugio Fraternità Massi* and *Casa Cantoniera Occupata*; there are also examples of hospitality provided in private homes (Altin 2019). A second practice is what Tazzioli (2020: 3) calls "alpine rescue", which "may include sharing geographical and topographical information with migrants or equipping them with clothing appropriate for the alpine passage". In this sense, solidarity networks point out the right trails to take, as well as provide clothing appropriate for the harsh winter temperatures: "when they are about to take the trail, if we don't give them proper boots or windbreakers, as well as tips on where to pass, the result is that they die on our mountains," says a solidarity activist linked to the *Rifugio* (Claudia, Oulx, 06/10/2020). The third practice of the solidarity networks is monitoring, advocating and organising cultural events aimed at raising awareness of the territorial community. The final practice the solidarity groups engage in is to maintain contact with other similar organizations along the migrant routes. For example, they are in connection with the solidarity groups of Triest and Milan for migrant coming from the Balkan route, or the Briançon group, just after the French border. They liaise with these networks to support people on the move, constituting what has been called an "underground railroad" (Queirolo Palmas and Rahola 2020).

The pandemic affected both the migratory push through these territories and the internal organization of solidarity. With regard to the former, the 2020 spring lockdown led to a halt of "secondary movements" within the national territory, while "primary movements" continued with the same intensity of previous years. Once the first lockdown ended in the summer of 2020, a large number of people headed to the Susa Valley, reactivating a state of emergency. From October to December, about 4,700 people transited through the valley (MEDU 2021). With regard to the internal organization of solidarity, the block on mobility imposed by the government in order to manage the pandemic led to a decrease in the contribution of solidarity from the territories of the Susa Valley which were further away from the border (Giliberti and Filippi 2021). Lastly, the pandemic became an additional tool imposed by the French government to regulate migration: starting from February 2021, the French government requires a negative result molecular swab carried out within 72 hours from the intended travel as a precondition to crossing the border.

There are two solidarity networks in the Susa Valley; they are different in terms of their political/humanitarian approach, discourse, practices and modes of action. They more or less cooperate with one other and are organized around the two previously mentioned places of

hospitality. *Rifugio Fraternità Massi* was established in September 2018 thanks to the initiative of a local priest with the funds of a private foundation. Its purpose is to provide shelter for one night to those who arrive at the border with the intention of crossing it. The shelter does not remain open continuously to encourage people to move on quickly[3]; as Don Luigi, the founder of this project, tells us: "if people come to Oulx, it is to go to France – there's no other reason. This is also why this space closes every day... to invite people to leave" (Don Luigi, Bussoleno, 09/10/2020). This perspective stems from the inescapable awareness that "those who wish to get across, ultimately do so", as the ex-mayor of Oulx repeatedly tells us (Paolo De Marchis, Oulx, 12/2/2021). Moreover, this approach is further supported by an implicit *laisser passer* policy (Tazzioli 2020); as a police in Bardonecchia reminds us, "we don't reject people; the French do that" (Policeman, Bardonecchia/on-line interview, 13/11/2020).

The shelter where we spent a few nights observing its operation can host up to sixty people; it has four officially employed social workers; it is managed with the support of fifty volunteers who, on a rotating basis, assist the work of the operators; volunteers are Catholics, scouts, private social sector workers and No TAV members. Almost all of them are locals; most of them are middle-aged women. In terms of practices, they claim that the humanitarian practice of saving lives in the mountains[4] is their primary objective: they point out the right trail, equip people in an appropriate way to save lives and, to this end, they do not flaunt the political significance of their initiatives. Inside the shelter, there is no self-management; services are provided by paid operators and volunteers. The Italian volunteers also monitor the number of people departing by bus from Oulx to Claviere, where the trails begin, and then communicate this to the French activists who will verify the arrival of the total number of border crossers upon their arrival. If someone is missing, the emergency procedure is activated; this involves the Mountain Rescue, the Police and the Fire Department. As Giulia, a volunteer at the *Rifugio Fraternità Massi*, states:

> Folks will arrive here, maybe wearing denim jackets and canvas shoes. It's clear that − with 2 feet of snow and -15 degrees Celsius − venturing out to the trail will put their lives in serious danger. So we give them winter jackets and boots. When they leave, we let the Briançon solidarity activists know how many people are traveling, so they can check to see if everyone has arrived. At that point, the people are taken care of by our French solidarity partners, who give them hospitality. They also bring back the shoes and snow clothing, which will continue to be used by the people who venture on the trails (Giulia, Oulx, 09/02/2021).

Casa Cantoniera, the second crucial solidarity establishment in the Susa Valley, is an old building squatted in December 2018[5]. It has an explicitly anarchist political orientation. The activists, mostly young women under the age of 30, come from all over Italy and Europe and the turnover here is very high. Their idea of hospitality is to create a "safe place" where people in transit can rest before continuing the journey. Inside, forms of self-management are developed with the intention of giving back agency to the people who are housed here. In this sense, the staff here refuse to differentiate between *occupants* and *migrants*, as an activist explains to us:

> We all do assemblies together, often they are multilingual assemblies, with people who translate. It's very tiring, but for us it's essential. We don't divide the house into occupants and migrants − we are all just people living the house through. We support the self-determination of the people on their journey and the house is completely self-managed by everyone. When someone arrives, we show them the house and we tell them to make themselves comfortable wherever they want and wherever they can find a place (Carla, Oulx, 13/02/2021).

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[3] The shelter is open from 8 p.m. to 8 a.m.
[4] On this border junction, since 2017 to date, the bodies of 5 people attempting to cross the border have been retrieved.
[5] At the time of finalising this article, the *Casa Cantoniera* was evacuated (March 23, 2021). Said evacuation had been announced some time ago, but until now it had been postponed.

With regard to the "mountain rescue" team, they provide counter-mapping of the territory (Casas-Cortes et al. 2017) to ensure the personal safety of migrants in transit and equip people adequately to cope with the extremely low temperatures of the Susa Valley in winter[6]. However, they reject the idea of humanitarian welfarism and describe their intervention in terms of a direct political attack against the border. They do not see eye to eye with other solidarity entities in the area and with the local community and, in this sense, the anarchist activists are at the center of many conflicts. At the time of our ethnographic observation, there was a heated public debate about a possible eviction of the occupied building. The volunteers of the *Rifugio Fraternità Massi* collected signatures to stop a possible eviction, given the emergency situation of winter 2020-2021[7]; however, 500 citizens in the valley submitted a complaint to the prefect requesting rapid eviction of the premises.

It is possible to identify two types of migrants in transit that can be directly associated with the two hospitality facilities described. The first group are people we can describe as "migrants in transit". In the vast majority of cases, they arrive at *Casa Cantoniera*, mostly through migrant word of mouth. Through this chain of information, the migrants are told where to stay and are given the GPS coordinates of the paths in the mountains. The second group are migrants who are long-term residents in Italy and who, for whatever reason, have decided to move: these are "people in orbit", according to the definition of a legal helpdesk clerk who assists people who are rejected. They are rejected at the border after an attempt to cross by train or Flixbus. They are then transferred by the Italian police to the only shelter recognized by the institutions, the *Rifugio Fraternità Massi*.

"Migrants in transit" come generally from the Balkan route; they arrive in the Susa Valley by train, after years of travel, with a precise destination in mind. In many cases, these are entire families. They reach Briançon – the first French town on the other side of the border – through high mountain passes from the last Italian village before the border, Claviere. This is an extremely complex and dangerous passage at the best of times, but even more so at specific times of the year. The main trail is about 18 km long; migrants generally walk it at night with no lighting to evade rejection on behalf the French police. In winter, these places often reach temperatures of around -20°C and are often covered by massive amounts of snow. Hassan, a "migrant in transit", tells us about his experience through a silent conversation in Farsi and Italian, by way of *Google Translate.*

> My wife and I left Afghanistan two years ago, with our two children and her brother, and we never stopped. We went through forests, always in fear of being deported by the police. The risk of not making it was high. It could have led to our deaths. We left our home countries because of the war and chaos there. We faced so many problems, but we didn't forget to play with our children along the way. We came to Europe for safety. We want to go to Germany because they are nicer to migrants (Hassan, Bardonecchia, 13/02/2021).

As for the second category of migrant, these are generally people of African origin who have not found their place in Italy and who decide to try to rebuild their lives by moving to France. In some cases, these are people living in Italy in a somewhat legal way; others they are people who, for various reasons, have lost their right to humanitarian protection (Filippi and Giliberti 2021). They travel from their city of residence, discovering only at the border that the documents required by the French authorities are very specific (laminated residence permit, return ticket from France, money needed for the stay, etc.); since February 2021, even a compulsory negative molecular swab is required. Failure to present any of these documents leads to rejection on behalf of France. Therefore, in the Susa Valley, success in crossing the border is strongly marked by the solidarity and cooperation of activists on both sides of the border. This is happening in a context where the Italian authorities have loosened their grip and they silently support the exit processes.

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[6] During our February 2020 ethnographic observation period, temperatures averaged -15°C.
[7] See: https://www.change.org/p/prefetto-di-torino-c-%C3%A8-chi-accoglie-e-chi-respinge-no-alla-chiusura-della-casa-cantoniera-oulx

4. Comparative conclusions

The solidarity networks with migrants in the two border areas – Lampedusa and the Susa Valley – present some similarities and several differences. One difference is their context as they respectively represent a point of entry to and exit from Italy; another is their different position along the two border nodes on the migrant routes. While, in the case of Lampedusa, "containment" is the main concern due to the generalized institutional struggle against "secondary movements", the border node of the Susa Valley shows a different dynamic, partly due to the *laissez passer* approach adopted there. Moreover, solidarity on an island in the middle of the Mediterranean, like Lampedusa, or in a high-mountains area, like in the Susa Valley, manifests itself in different ways.

Transit support, which is a widespread and continuous practice in the context of the Susa Valley, takes on a different meaning in Lampedusa, and at given moments in the past, it only marginally existed in Lampedusa. The key element in interpreting this difference is the island's insular nature and detention-like dimension; the hotspot is Lampedusa itself – migrants can only leave via institutional channels. In this sense, also solidarity is insular on Lampedusa while in the Susa Valley the transit support networks are closely-integrated with other nodes *downstream* – in Trieste or Milan – and *upstream* of the border – in the Briançon area.

Hospitality towards those who try to cross the border is a daily action of the solidarity groups and networks that we met in the Susa Valley, particularly in the two "shelters"; this is not the case on Lampedusa, where newly disembarked people immediately experience the process of "detention" and "containment" (Tazzioli and Garelli 2020), firstly in the hotspot and then on the quarantine ships, "floating hotspots" (Giliberti and Queirolo Palmas 2021). In addition, the cooperation that arises among migrants on the road is crucial. It is often built on an ethnic or national basis and it is complementary to the action of the solidarity networks in sharing advice and travel maps, and locating places of hospitality. In this sense, cooperation among migrants become a constitutive element of these routes.

In both contexts, solidarity groups are not only engaged on the frontline in support of migrants, but in the territory in which they live, they are also active in other struggles, whether social or environmental, against large-scale works or in support of strengthening of public services for the local population. It is not surprising then that, in the Susa Valley, the No Tav Movement plays a crucial role in relation to the composition of both solidarity networks.

At the same time, the Forum's supporters in Lampedusa are the same people behind the environmental and cultural committees. These networks, while fighting for a certain territorial model for their inhabitants, find it unacceptable that migrants, "undesirable subjects" (Agier 2008), are forced to cross borders risking their lives.

In Lampedusa − and in other places such as the Roya Valley − the neo-islanders, that is the new "alternative" inhabitants (Giliberti 2020), are key players of the solidarity networks; conversely, in the Susa Valley, local solidarity is mainly formed by the locals. This is also due to the impact that the No Tav Movement has had on the social and political dynamics of the territory over the last thirty years, as it has left an important legacy in terms of active citizenship.

Finally, the management of the pandemic has contributed to increased control and attempts to contain migrant mobility with procedures such as the mass transfer of migrants who land in Lampedusa onto quarantine ships, or the introduction of COVID-19 tests as a reason for rejection at the French-Italian border.

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