BLAMING THE MOUNTAINS

Negligence, deterrence, and humanitarianism as noncoercive bordering practices

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Abstract

As some countries reintroduced border controls inside the Schengen area, illegalization of mobility arises inside the EU. For people traveling to Europe, the passage from the country of arrival to a second one is restricted by the Dublin regulation, which is poorly used as justification to refuse entry to national territories, as it happens in France. Given this context where 'secondary movements' are conceived as forms of mobility to be controlled, this thesis focuses on the strategies employed by the Italian authorities to deal with the presence of border crossers in the Occidental Alps. Tracing the state interventions at the border zone, I argue that the control of mobility does not always imply the use of coercion.

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Introduction

This thesis is an ethnographic account of how a border regime emerges and how it changes over time. It considers the geographical border between two EU countries, namely Italy and France, focusing on the Alpine region. Throughout this work, I reflect on how the Italian state and civil society, separately and sometimes jointly, react to the presence of a migration that is made illegal by the laws of the former and by EU regulations.

This thesis is led by the following research questions. How does a border regime emerge? Which (re)bordering practices does the Italian state put into action in an attempt to control the border zone? And according to which logic? How does the state control mobility without coercion? What is the role of civil society in the broader project of b/ordering (Green 2012)? In other words, how does the state co-opt grassroots mobilization?

What do we learn by looking at the 'politics of control'?

This research focuses on the bordering practices aimed to *control* human mobility rather than on the actions made by people on the move to *challenge* those attempts of control. However, the separation of the two is unthinkable in the realm of facts. The 'politics of control', aimed to constrain, reduce and/or block human mobility, is strictly bound with the 'politics of migration', understood as the forces that continuously challenge these techniques of control (Squire 2011). They are interconnected and equally constitutive of the condition of irregularity. According to Squire, "irregularity can be seen as a product of political struggles that emerge where the movements and activities of national, international and/or transnational agencies come into contact with the movements and activities of migrants and citizens." (7) In other words, irregularity is the condition generated by the enactment of bordering practices in relation to the forms of migration that continuously exceed those attempts of control.

The recognition of the role of people on the move marked a change of perspective in migration studies. The predominant view on the issue has been and still is characterized by a certain determinism according to which people on the move would be constrained and blocked by the 'politics of control' put into place by states. Regarding this limitation, the scholars who go under the name of Critical Border Studies elaborate, among others, the concept of 'autonomy of migration' to refer to the agency of people on the move (De Genova 2017, Mezzadra 2011). They suggest a perspective that is centered on the autonomy of travel, starting from the argument that the movement of people *is* unstoppable, despite attempts to control and to block them. The shift operated by this concept is exactly that of recognizing "the power *of* life rather than the power *over* life" (Vaughan-Williams 2015: 12), that of people on the move challenging the existing system of control over their mobility and their continuous search for ways to escape from it. Therefore, given this important shift, what do we still have to learn by studying the 'politics of control'?

I decided to critically look at the technologies of control because I believe that by revealing how they function we can put them into question. Through ethnographic observations and a chronological reconstruction of the tactics deployed on the border zone, I will show how the technologies employed contribute to the formation of a border regime that is far from a linear, clear and constant line of separation, despite attempts to portray them in a more coherent and effective way.

This research illustrates how the project of b/ordering (Green 2012) is much more complex, even contradictory over the period considered. Regarding this, I will focus on the bordering practices implemented by the Italian state. Apparently absent first, and then present with stronger forms of control and militarization, the state implements a project of b/ordering far from clear measures of control and regularization. In fact, the government relies on the collaboration with (and co-optation of) grassroots solidarity coming from civil society. I will

show how non-state actors have a role in the actuation of the 'politics of control' and how their participation, bonded to voluntarism (Muehlebach 2012), is moved and justified by a humanitarian discourse (Fassin 2018) around the dangers of the mountain. Relying on these forces coming from 'below', the state borrows and exchanges from local practices put into action by non-state actors, although they are moved by motivations that, potentially, would contrast the project of b/ordering. By unpacking the formation and the functioning of the politics of control, I aim to show how these technologies attempt to contain mobility without using coercion.

Structure of the thesis

Chapter I - The first chapter provides a picture of how the border dividing France and Italy in the Occidental Alps became an example of illegalization and the containment of human mobility in the last two years. The first section explains how the categorization of the so-called 'secondary movement'[1] emerges in the EU in relation to the Dublin Regulation. Showing how this mobility is considered as a problem to be solved, we discuss how this phenomenon brought some countries, including France, to the reintroduction of border controls within the Schengen area. The second section is a closer observation of the formation and transformation of the border regime in the Occidental Alps and retraces the main events which took place on the border zone in the last two years.

Chapter II - To situate this research within the existing studies, the first section engages with the literature known as Critical Border Studies. Specifically, it draws on the logic that brought scholars from CBS to question the concept of 'border'. In light of the problematization

[1] As I explain later in the chapter, when adopting this terminology, I take the distance from this concept, created within a EU-centric logic of legalizing and illegalizing mobility to address the migration internal to the EU. According to an EU-centered point of view, such movements in fact emerge as a problem to be solved and the existence of such geographies, despite of the practices aimed to contain them, is considered as an unwanted outcome.

of the concept of the border as a clear form of division, this work retrieves the more nuanced understanding of the *processes* and *practices* of bordering elaborated in response to this analytical impasse. Engaging with this literature elucidates how also in the ethnographic case, the concept of the *border* turns out to be extremely limited, even though this work does take into consideration a specific physical border between two countries.

The second section of the chapter considers the processes of bordering that emerged in recent years on the border zones between Italy and other EU countries, namely Ventimiglia, Como, and the more recent (and unstudied) case of the Occidental Alps. The juxtaposition of these cases brings out the presence of a constant logic behind the decisions of (non)intervention at the border by the government, despite the variations in each area. Secondly, this thesis sims to shed light on the perseverance of those who oppose and challenge, in different extensions and in various ways, to the state project of b/ordering, namely: people on the move, citizens, people in solidarity, associations, NGOs, etc.

In the third and fourth sections, I propose an analysis of the bordering practices employed by the Italian authorities. Reflecting on how the state intervenes or decides to not intervene on the border, this analysis brings out the multilayered nature of the strategies used by the Italian state to control the border. Negligence as an active lack of care first, (Cantat 2017) and containment through deterrence after, are the two ideal models of b/ordering that will be discussed.

Chapter III - The third chapter considers the role of non-state actors in the emergence of the border regime. Through processes of outsourcing and institutionalization, the state co-opts and incorporates the work of NGOs and volunteers, and by doing so controls and employs grassroots solidarity. In fact, from the beginning of the migratory process, different groups are mobilized in support of people on the move following the model of 'ethical citizenship' (Muehlebach 2012).

Although voluntarism is largely diffused in the country, it is worth unraveling how in this context it is moved by a specific discourse around the inhospitality of the natural environment. The practices of the volunteers, in fact, are generally shaped around discourses that portray the mountain as a dangerous place. The emergence of this perspective, which identifies the dangerous element of the journey in nature itself, has serious effects. 'Blaming' the mountain allows the emergence of a humanitarian mobilization (Fassin 2018) in support of border crossers, usually considered a priori as people who lack the expertise and knowledge of the surroundings, and for this reason, are often infantilized. In addition, this discourse hides the political choices and responsibilities related to the management of the border zone. In other words, feeding a discourse that identifies the mountain itself as the dangerousness of the journey obscures the actual cause of the risks related to it: the illegalization of the journey and the tactics (irregularly) put into place to stop people from attempting the crossing.

Methodology

This research relies on the material I collected through participant observation during long stays at the border zone, between 2018 and 2019. During my stay, I contacted people working in the night shelters and volunteers; I spent time with them while they carried out their activities and I informally asked about their work. This analysis relies also on the official statements of state authorities and representatives. Regarding the developments which took place at the border zone while I was not there, I collected news from the internet and I relied on indirect narrations from people I met later.

To conclude, I would like to give an account for the great absence in this work, which is the voice of the border crossers themselves. There are two main reasons why they do not directly appear in this work. Firstly, considering the politics of control rather than the politics

of migration, the questions behind this research are oriented towards the technologies aimed to b/order.

However, this would not constitute a reason for disregarding the narrations of people on the move. Their experience of being identified, 'illegalized', pushed back, robbed, beaten up, humiliated, allowed to die and assassinated in today's Europe reveals the effects of the technologies deployed. I do believe that it is only starting from their experience that a complete picture of the tension between movement and control can take form. Such an inquiry would have exceeded the scope of this research. For the purposes of this work, which instead has the ambition of unpacking the formation and transformation of the technologies of control, I privileged the interaction with those who put them into place.

Chapter I
'Secondary movements' and attempts of containment in the Occidental Alps

"*Sciare senza confini*".

"To ski without borders".

This is the slogan of the international ski area which extends on the Cottian Alps between Italy and France.[2] As it suggests, snow lovers can enjoy winter holidays crossing the borders between nation states without noticing. Likewise, in summer, the area welcomes wealthy tourists attracted by natural sights and golf courses. For them, the border is often nothing more than an imagined line dividing the sites of their leisure activities. Some may have noticed that the queues at the police station entering France are longer than years ago, which is generally the only moment when the existence of the border appears in their daily lives.

However, in this area, the border does not manifest in the same way for all the people who cross it. The same mountains that give the thrill of 'skiing without borders' to some, becomes a scenario of violence and even death for others. It is the case of the people on the move who decide to leave Italy to go to France, either to stay or to move further on[3]. In fact, people who do not own the documents required to cross the border need to find ways to enter the French territory avoiding police controls. They run into high risks for their own safety, especially because the Italian and the French states deploy various techniques to block them.

After an overview of the EU internal regulations aimed to contrast the so-called 'secondary movement' migration, this chapter reveals how a border regime comes into

[2] https://www.vialattea.it/

[3] Generally, throughout this work, I do not adopt categorization such us asylum-seeker, refugee or migrant, even though they reflect different legal statuses. However, given the purpose of this research, I rather prefer to use a larger category which allows to consider all together the people who decide to cross the border and who do not have the required documents to do so in a legal way. For this reason, I will refer to them as people on the move or border crossers, terminologies which focus more on their 'irregular' presence at the border rather than on their legal status. In this chapter only, I will refer specifically to asylum seekers when illustrating the consequences of the Dublin Regulation.

existence in the Occidental Alps, as the area becomes the scenario of a form of mobility that is rendered illegal according to such regulations. Looking at the emergence of the border regime, the focus will be on the responses put into action on the Italian side. Therefore, the narration aims to trace how in the last two years the Italian state has attempted to block and/or control the passage on the border. As we study how the state deals with the secondary movement as a form of mobility that needs to be contained (Garelli and Tazzioli 2018), there appears the relevance of various non-state actors, which operate within or outside the state projects. The narration has the goal of providing the reader a chronology, necessarily incomplete, to understand the changes in the politics of control (Squire 2011) actuated on the border zone. Such politics will be the object of analysis of the following chapters, which will investigate the modalities through which measures of control are enacted and the logic that brings their implementation.

1. The containment of 'secondary movements' and the reintroduction of border controls

According to the European Parliamentary Research Service, the secondary movement is "the phenomenon of migrants, including refugees and asylum-seekers, who for various reasons move from the country in which they first arrived, to seek protection or permanent resettlement elsewhere." (EPRS 2017) Although this research does not aim to investigate the reasons behind this phenomenon, but rather its local unfolding and the reactions that take form around it, it is worth commenting on this definition in light of my own observations.

At the Alpine border, the people I met who had decided to cross to France were motivated by different reasons. The large majority of them, coming from Western African countries colonized by France, would often invoke the connections with the colonizer as a reason for them to choose that territory as their final destination. In addition, personal

connections, such as family members or friends living in France or elsewhere, were also an important motivation for people to leave Italy.

However, what keeps returning in their narratives is the *impossibility* for them to stay longer in Italy. Many of the people I talked to had stayed on the Italian territory for years and were still waiting for their asylum request to be fully processed. During that time (which could go from some months till even three years) they were living in the *campo*, the 'camps' as the inhabitants call the structures provided to them by the government; if they were working, they were exploited and underpaid. Some put an effort to learn the language and 'integrate', as they were expected, but their conditions of living were still precarious. Waiting for their request to be approved, asylum seekers do not have fair access to the labor market, to the education system and to medical services. In many cases, staying on the Italian territory is regular to the eyes of the state, but unbearable for themselves. (Lewis et al. 2015)

This incomplete picture of the reasons that bring people to cross that border, despite the intensification of control and consequently the increase of the risks of the journey, gives an impression of why they decide to embark, once again, in deadly passages. To investigate the multilayered situation that brings people to this choice is indeed a very valid question that would need to consider the recent developments around access to asylum and documents in the country. The entry into force of the law known as 'Salvini's decree' (law 132/2018), in fact, already had consequences for what it concerns the access to asylum and the treatment reserved to people who obtain it. Indeed, the implementation of this law and the affirmation of anti-migrants, racist and xenophobe discourses and actions seem to mark a new crackdown in the living conditions of migrants, which may increase the number of people who decide to leave the country.

However, the journeys that have taken place on the Italian border zones prove that the situation was already problematic. Long before the election of the current government and the

implementation of the above-mentioned law, secondary movement routes had appeared on the Italian borders. Ventimiglia, Como and the Brennero[4] are the three main areas where routes of secondary movements appeared, and which saw, consequently, reactions of the governments in the attempt of controlling the illegalized passage.

In fact, according to the Dublin Regulation, which gave birth to the so-called Dublin system (Regulation EU 2013/604), asylum seekers must address the request of asylum to the EU country of arrival. Accordingly, while waiting for the request to be processed and eventually approved, the person can regularly reside and move within the national territory of the country of arrival. Freedom of movement in the EU, instead, is not granted. On the contrary, as stated by the Dublin Regulation, if an asylum seeker is found in a member state different from the one which is responsible for their request, the person can be deported to that country.[5] The recognition and the deportation happens through the European dactyloscopy database (Eurodac), which is based on the registration of applicants' fingerprints.

In their critical analysis of EU internal regulations on migration, Garelli and Tazzioli reflect on the effects of the implementation of technologies aimed to contain mobility (Garelli and Tazzioli 2018). They suggest using the concept of *containment* to embrace all those practices that "aim to regain control over migrants' autonomous geographies." (2) In their analysis, in fact, containment "is not only blockage and immobility" (3) but rather all those measures that attempt to disrupt, redirect and channel autonomous mobility. It is within this reading that they understand the so-called 'secondary movements' as:

> the expression used by the EU to designate migrants' autonomous movements outside established governmental channels and against the forced geographies of Dublin regulations.

[4] Respectively, at the border with France, Switzerland and Austria.
[5] Deportations to the country that registered the arrival of the asylum seeker do not always happen, in part because of the exceptions (i.e. minors) stipulated in the Regulation, but also because of discretional application of the measure.

> The consequence of the obligation for Italy and Greece to fingerprint (enforced through the presence of Frontex officers inside the hotspots) was that migrants ended up trapped in these countries, if not physically at least legally, due to the implication of the Dublin Regulation. At the same time, the slowness and the exclusionary character of the relocation procedure together with migrants' will to choose the country where to claim asylum, compelled many migrants to decide to move on towards Northern Europe in an autonomous way." (12)

Indeed, the secondary movement emerges as a problem to be solved for the EU. The fallacies of the Dublin System and the inefficiency of the measures meant to improve it at a European level induce member states to intervene directly at a national level. While some states responded with "restrictive or deterrent measures, such as building walls and other barriers, increased border controls, visa requirements, prolonged detention and deportation" (EPRS 2017, 3), others reintroduced border controls internal to the Schengen Area. Which is the case of France. As guaranteed by the Art. 25 of the Schengen Borders Code,

> the reintroduction of internal border control might exceptionally be necessary in the case of a serious threat to public policy or to internal security at the level of the area without internal border control or at the national level, in particular following terrorist incidents or threats, or because of threats posed by organised crime. (Regulation EU 2016/399)

Since November 2015, every six months, France has appealed to this article to reintroduce internal border controls. The measure has been justified in the following ways: "in relation to the emergency state as introduced further to Paris attacks", "EURO 2016, Tour de France", "in relation to the emergency state as introduced further to the Nice attack", "persistent terrorist threat" (for three times), "terrorist threats, situation at the external borders" (twice) and "upcoming high level political meetings"[6].

[6] From "Member States' notifications of the temporary reintroduction of border control at internal borders pursuant to Article 25 et seq. of the Schengen Borders Code" (available here: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/borders-and-visas/schengen/reintroduction-border-control/docs/ms_notifications_-_reintroduction_of_border_control_en.pdf).

Before 2015, the reintroduction of controls on the borders had happened a few times, concurrently with international summits or in the occasion of celebrations and meeting in the Basque countries. After, instead, in most of the cases, the motivations are connected to a supposed terrorist threat. In 2015, in fact, after three terrorist attacks in Paris on November 13th, France declared the state of emergency, which lasted until 2017.

Despite its wording, the 'temporary' reintroduction of controls at the borders has been renewed for four years almost uninterruptedly[7] and continued even after the end of the declared state of emergency. In addition, while other member countries (namely Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Hungary and Norway) motivated the reintroduction of controls due to "continuous significant secondary movements", "irregular migrants attempting to travel to UK", "big influx of persons seeking international protection", "unexpected migratory flow" and "migration and security policy", France only once vaguely mentioned the "situation at the external borders" among the reasons for the borders to be controlled.

2. The opening of a new route in the Occidental Alps

It is under these circumstances, that is under a declared state of emergency and during the reintroductions of controls on the internal borders, that a route of secondary movement from Italy to France opens in the Occidental Alps. Starting from the end of 2017, those mountains become part of the route of border crossers. In the first moment, they would arrive at Bardonecchia by train from inner Italian cities and from there they would try to reach France taking mountain trails, although impracticable in winter due to the snow. A second route, which had the village of Claviere as a starting point, would be practiced later during the same winter.

[7] However, the Schengen Border Code requires that "the total period during which border control is reintroduced at internal borders, including any prolongation provided for under paragraph 3 of this Article, shall not exceed six months. Where there are exceptional circumstances as referred to in Article 29, that total period may be extended to a maximum length of two years, in accordance with paragraph 1 of that Article." (Regulation EU 2016/399, art.25, 4)

Fig.1-2 – Maps of the border zone with highlight on Bardonecchia and Oulx.

Although both villages, Bardonecchia and Claviere, are only a few kilometers from France, border crossers generally need to walk long in the mountain to avoid controls by the French police. In fact, for the first twenty kilometers within France, police, military forces and gendarmerie patrol the border to prevent 'irregular' entrances. This practice has been denounced by various organizations and journalists, who observe the violations of rights during

these rejections.[8] In fact, justified as regular operations within the reintroduction of border controls, French border police uses the procedure of the *refus d'entrée* (refusal of entry), a measure which is normally applied on the borders external to the Schengen area, and so rejecting directly the people found at the border. Its use on the internal borders is allowed by the Schengen code in cases of reestablishment of border controls (ANAFÉ 2019); however, in this way the rejection of the people caught at the border is done without properly considering whether the person has the right to enter the country (i.e. if they are minors) or not. On the contrary, they simply drive people back to the Italian territory, and for a long time (until October 2018) they did so without contacting Italian law enforcement, which is required in the cases of rejection. What is more, French authorities and law enforcement generally justify the impermeability of the border as a legitimate action within the Dublin System. However, as the ANAFÉ (Association Nationale d'Assistance aux Frontières pour les Étrangers) denounces, French border police *refuse* a priori to register asylum requests (ANAFÉ 2019, 62). In other words, law enforcement illegally blocks the request already at the border zone, in the name of a regulation which is not their jurisdiction to apply.

Despite the militarization on the French side and the continuous, often irregular, rejections, the Italian state does not intervene directly for months. This is not surprising and is clearly understood by those who arrive there to cross the mountain. People on the move would clearly explain to each other that the Italian government does not care about them leaving and that is why there are no controls on that side of the border.

[8] To mention the more acknowledged: Amnesty International with other organizations signed a press released denouncing the systematic violations of human rights against people on the move" specifically in the area of Briançon (https://www.amnesty.fr/presse/frontiere-franco-italienne--a-briancon-les-violations); the ANAFÉ, a French association specifically working on the assistance to foreign people at the border, produced an exhaustive report about the situation at the French-Italian border between 2017 and 2018, similarly denouncing the violation of rights against people on the move and also condemning the repression against people in solidarity (ANAFÉ 2019).

The residents, instead, demand action from the state. While some of the inhabitants of the surrounding valleys are worried about the presence of 'irregular migrants', especially because of the negative consequences this would have on their economic activities, others organize in support of the border crossers. A heterogeneous group of people, coming from different experiences (like associationism, Catholic circles, voluntarism, and social movements) but equally committed to the cause, ask for the state to intervene, even if just allowing the use of a public space to run self-organized activities. However, facing denials from the institutions, they organize independently to distribute food, clothes, and shoes in improvised meeting points on the streets.

In winter 2017, the Alpine route, tolerated and passively witnessed by the Italian state authorities in the previous months, starts to be presented as an 'emergency' to be solved and the presence of border crossers, continuously pushed back by French law enforcement, makes its appearance in media. The public discourse and national media frame the travel in paternalistic tones as a risky undertaking for the travelers themselves, and as a burden for the state. In fact, news has focused on the work done by mountain rescue teams who aid people lost in the forests or blocked in the snow.

As a response, in December 2017, the prefecture opens a night shelter in the rooms of the train station of Bardonecchia. As a matter of fact, even before this decision, people on the move have used the train station as a place to rest and wait, but the building would close at night. However, the official opening of the shelter does not have the sole goal of providing covered space for the night. In fact, it is part of a larger project called 'Mission Freedom Mountain'. The project, wanted by the prefecture of Turin, is the result of a collaboration of the

municipalities interested by the phenomenon, law enforcement and volunteers.[9] As the main point, it stipulates the opening of the shelter, surveilled by the police and whose management is outsourced to Rainbow4Africa, a Turin-based NGO engaged in sustainable development and medical aid in Africa[10], which will take care of finding volunteers for each night shift. Another aspect of the project is that of warning people on the move about the danger of the journey and that of reminding them of the possibilities they could have on the Italian territory. The aim of such actions would be to deter people from embarking in this journey and to persuade them to stop even before the border, which explains why sometimes cultural mediators carry out this 'informative work' even in the Turin train station, from where it is possible to reach the border. In addition, this work of deterrence continues inside the shelter, where the volunteers are allowed to offer the border crossers the possibility of getting a new place in the national reception system and, by doing so, may incentivize them to renounce the travel.[11] Also, posters containing information about the dangerousness of the passage and translated in different languages were distributed in the areas of transit of border crossers.

Despite these strategies of deterrence (Tazzioli 2018, see later), people still try to cross the border, even when considered impractical due to the snow and highly militarized by the French law enforcement. For months, the situation stays unchanged. The presence of border crossers is evident and known, as French police often push them back or rescue teams look for the ones in danger in the mountains. The French law enforcement continues to execute irregular push back, and without informing the Italian authorities. During the rejection operations, the

[9] http://www.valsusaoggi.it/profughi-in-valsusa-dal-weekend-apre-il-ricovero-notturno-a-bardonecchia-cerchiamo-medici-e-infermieri-volontari/

[10] Website of the NGO Rainbow4Africa: http://www.rainbow4africa.org/

[11] Generally, the Italian reception system allows to the assignees of a place in the *campo* a limited number of absences. Exceeded that number (which is, in many cases, three nights in a row without showing up), the assignee loses her/his place in the *campo*.

police threaten and beat people up; they insult them and often steal their money. They wait for them on the side of the mountain paths, hidden behind trees or rocks, to jump out when they come close enough. Sometimes they bring dogs to 'hunt' them in the mountains.[12]

Even so, during the winter 2017/2018, people leave every day to try their luck and to cross the border. In better cases, they manage to arrive in France or they are pushed back. But also, people often get lost and some of them, found in hypothermia, need to be hospitalized. At least three persons lost their lives in the attempt. Blessing Matthew, who was found drowned in a river where she probably fell running away from the police[13]; Mamadou Alpha Diallo, whose lifeless body is found on French soil by a group of hikers[14]; and a third person, whose identity is still unknown.[15]

The Italian state silently witnesses these events, believing that it is doing its job with a night shelter systematically overcrowded. The spring and the summer pass, and the route always attracts more people. As a response to the growing number of people who cross the area and observed that the route does not pass anymore only from Bardonecchia, the municipalities and the Prefecture plan to open a new shelter in Oulx, at 15 km from the border. This time again the functioning of the place will be outsourced to an association and will be run by volunteers, except for two paid cultural mediators.

In autumn 2018, a turning point takes place. The invisibilization of the facts happing at the border zone comes to an end. For the first time, national news properly covers the issue of irregularities taking place during the rejections by the French authorities, well-known yet kept

[12] I learnt about these forms of violence directing witnessing or from informtion given to me by people who lived them on their skin. Testimonies can be found in the ANAFÉ report (ANAFÉ 2019).
[13] https://www.ledauphine.com/hautes-alpes/2018/05/18/la-noyee-de-la-durance-serait-bien-la-migrante-nigeriane-de-21-ans.
[14] https://www.ledauphine.com/hautes-alpes/2018/06/01/montgenevre-alpha-diallo-inhume-aux-alberts.
[15] https://www.ledauphine.com/hautes-alpes/2018/05/23/corps-decouvert-aux-alberts-l-autopsie-n-a-pas-revele-de-blessure-traumatique.

invisible until that moment, and high representatives of the government take a stand. A specific episode is used to draw attention on the border and, consequently, to justify the intervention of the state.

On October 12th, 2018, Italian police notices a car of the French gendarmerie entering the Italian territory to drop off two people who had 'irregularly' crossed the border.[16] The case rebounds all over the news and members of the Italian government do not hesitate to condemn the matter as an attack to state sovereignty. The minister of Exterior Affairs announced that he would immediately shed light on the irregularities committed by the French law enforcement and the Minister of Interior, commenting on the same facts, defined as "stomach-turning to leave people in an isolated zone, with neither assistance nor alerts."[17]

A 'border spectacle' (De Genova 2013) is staged, as in a few weeks, the border is depicted as the scenario of human rights violations and of potential threats to national sovereignty. According to De Genova, there are moments when hyper-visibility is given to what happens at the borders (especially the geographical ones, that divide nation-states). Such moments of spectacle "set a scene of ostensible exclusion, in which the purported naturalness and putative necessity of exclusion may be demonstrated and verified, validated and legitimated, redundantly." (1181) Staging the spectacle, specific discourses around how the border should work may appear. The framing built around the episode above, i.e. one of defending the national territory to prevent irregular pushbacks by the French forces, allows a discourse of sovereignty to emerge and implicitly calls for a stronger intervention to 'defend' the territory. It is only after this incident, in fact, that the Italian police has patrolled the area, with cars constantly present at the border, waiting for those rejected by the French colleagues.

[16] https://www.lastampa.it/2018/10/15/cronaca/gendarmeria-francese-scarica-migranti-in-italia-lira-di-salvini-non-siamo-il-campo-profughi-deuropa-lN3DJSXJ4U8NcmSFEcnj9I/pagina.html

[17] https://torino.repubblica.it/cronaca/2018/10/16/news/salvini_sul_caso_clavie_re_vergogna_internazionale_non_accetto_le_scuse_di_macron_-209085239/

In addition, by condemning the French conduct, such discourse attempts to obfuscate the fact that Italian authorities themselves had turned a blind eye for a long time. It is no coincidence that all these media scandals took place shortly after the opening of the second shelter, allowing local governments to put it on display and to provide a striking reason for a sudden intervention waited for a long time.

A second winter passes, and the presence of the state is more visible on the border zone than in the previous year. In the night shelter in Oulx, a few hundred meters from the last train station before the border, volunteers from different associations or NGOs take turns to keep it open; among them, doctors and nurses offer medical support to those who may need it. A couple of containers has been placed in the courtyard of the building hosting the shelter, with the plan of opening them in the day time, so to have a 24/7 place for border crossers. On the side of the train station, a small Red Cross center (a prefabricated structure of few square meters) is open in the day time. Two cultural mediators spend the day talking to people on the move that they intercept around the train station, explaining them the risks of the journey and eventually inviting them to recover at the night shelter.

On the border, Italian police are constantly present with several cars parked on the side of the road, as you enter Italian territory. Normally, they just stay there, awaiting the people pushed back by French law enforcement, to identify them and, generally, letting them go. Every night, an ambulance stays at the border, given the recurrent cases of hypothermia and other emergencies. Useless to say, these measures do not block people from traveling and even less ensure a safe passage. This April, another person, Dermon Taminou, died in the attempt of crossing to France.

Chapter II
An underground work of b/ordering

1. From borders to bordering practices

Within Border Studies, the current which goes under the name of Critical Border Studies (CBS) "has challenged traditional statist notions of what and where borders are supposed to be according to the modern geopolitical imagination and shown how borders are increasingly fractured and multiple while often no less violent in their effects." (Vaughan-Williams 2016, 19) Scholars from CBS, problematizing the geopolitical understanding of border, direct their attention to those practices that are enacted according to exclusionary logics giving rise to a *proliferation* of borders, territorial and not (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013). According to this perspective, logics of exclusion and selection have been the rationale for the physical border, and also proliferate within and outside the national territory (i.e. the bordering practices of FRONTEX) and in everyday practices, through which the division between desirable and undesirable bodies is continuously enacted.

Studying the consequences that the existence of such forms of selection and exclusion may have on the mobility of people but also on the movement of goods and capital, and analyzing the multiple ways through which borders are operationalized, scholars shift the attention from *the* border, as a static object, result of a clear-cut separation, to the *operations* that create and reproduce forms of exclusion and inclusion through the management of the border and beyond.

This shift of focus from the border to *bordering practices* (Vaughan-Williams 2016) enables a broader understanding of the border regime. Having as object the processes that are put into place to create and to maintain the border, this approach takes into account the multiple aspects of their unfolding: how the border regime changes during time, which actors contribute

to it, which resources are mobilized (i.e. laws, law enforcement, voluntary work, etc.), which discourses support the processes, and so on.

As Green summarizes it, "the literature on bordering (or b/ordering) has demonstrated that borders are more of a verb, a practice, a relation, and also importantly a part of imagination and desire, than they are a noun or an object" (Green 2012, 579). Understanding the process of b/ordering as a work, that to be operative needs to be reenacted during the time, and that follows specific ideals about inclusion and exclusion, brings to light another element that is particularly relevant in our case. That is the impossibility of explaining the functioning of a border regime with a merely state-centric approach, which would give an account of how the border operates starting from the regulations and the governmental operations employed. Instead, CBS considers the role of non-state actors, as people on the move themselves, or as citizens (Green 2012; Rumford 2006; Vaughan-Williams 2015).

In this thesis, I focus on the bordering practices enacted by the Italian government. By doing so, I do not aim to suggest that it is in the hands of governments to control migrations or that states have full authority over the border. Instead, I believe that border regimes cannot be fully understood from a state-perspective. However, I decided to focus on state interventions to shed light on the processes that authorities may use in the attempt of governing the border. In fact, it will emerge that the work of b/ordering planned by the authorities is formed in relation to other non-state actors, specifically by co-opting actions of solidarity.

In this chapter, I reflect on those bordering practices that are explicitly retraceable to the Italian government. To analyze the role of the Italian government, it is helpful to start from some observations on the reactions to the same phenomenon (i.e., the appearance of a route internal to the EU) in other border zones.

2. "Alleggerire": one imperative, various practices

> Since France's suspension of Schengen in May 2015, the Italian city of Ventimiglia has become an unofficial chokepoint for migrants heading to France and the United Kingdom. Ventimiglia is the closest Italian city to the French border, and together with Calais, it is one of the main border zones that mark and slow down the way to the United Kingdom for migrants arrived in Italy. It is not by chance, in fact, that the Prefect of the Department of Civil Liberties and Immigration of the Italian Home Office cautioned against the possibility of reproducing 'Calais in Ventimiglia'. Ministry of the Interior Morcone put it even more crudely when he described Italian authorities' interventions at Ventimiglia as aimed at **'lightening the frontier up'** and redistributing people across the territory to avoid organised concentrations of migrants. Yet, unlike Calais, which has become primarily a site of indefinite strandedness and wait, Ventimiglia can be considered a space of transit – not in a linear South to North sense, but as a space where migrants' geographies become fragmented and where forced inverse routes take place. (Garelli and Tazzioli 2018, 13)

'Lightening the frontier up' is the expression used by then Minister of the Interior to explain the interventions employed by the Italian government to control the border zone. To lighten something up, translation for the Italian word *alleggerire* means to disburden, make lighter, unload, but also to alleviate, facilitate, lessen, mitigate, or relieve. Similarly, in other circumstances, Italian authorities used the expression of *decompressione territoriale* (territorial decompression), which in physics refers to the release of pressure (Aris Escarcena 2018, 108). These expressions, in addition to proving the attitude of the authorities toward the presence of border crossers (considered as a burden to be removed, and as a situation about to explode), uncovers the rationale behind the operations meant to control migrants' routes. Once a border zone becomes populated by people on the move, the imperative is that of 'relieving' the area from their presence, to keep them on move to 'unload' the zone and make it more easily controllable (Garelli and Tazzioli 2018).

As it happens in the case of Ventimiglia (Menghi 2018) and also in Como, the work of *alleggerimento* alternatively activated security paranoia and humanitarian mobilizations by

authorities and civil society (Rizzo 2018, 82). In both places, the security-obsessed approach of the institutions motivates various practices such as the strong presence of police, the detention of people on the move in a camp with strict rules and where they access only through identification, and the internal deportations. In fact, on a regular basis, people detained in the camp are deported to the hotspot in Taranto, in Southern Italy. In Ventimiglia especially, the condition of deportability is evident, as the police regularly patrol the streets and the train station looking for people to fill the camp and eventually the buses going to the hotspot (Aris Escarcena 2018).

To 'lighten the border up' is the common imperative which drives the interventions on the border zone, been in Ventimiglia, Como or in the Occidental Alps; however, its application is never the same. While in Ventimiglia and in Como there have been similar practices put into place (i.e. detention and deportation), motivated mostly by security reason, in the Occidental Alps the need to keep the border zone 'light' relied on peculiar practices and discourses, partially unseen.

3. Nonintervention as an active lack of care

In her understanding of how borders operate, Green argues that bordering does not necessarily translate into a strong presence of the state and its machinery (Green 2012). There are ways of bordering, or of b/ordering, as she suggests, that may not be explicit and visible, yet have very concrete consequences. Therefore, when we look at the process of bordering we should consider not only the actions put into place, but rather the continuum of actions and non-actions that operate control over human mobility in various ways. Recognizing the role of non-actions allows taking into account also how deciding to let a situation remain unsolved may be part of a precise project of b/ordering. As Green puts it,

> the fact that borders are the outcome of ongoing activities (what many refer to as "bordering practices" or "border dynamics") does not necessarily mean that there is either much activity

> going on at any given time, or that the activity varies a great deal, or that the outcome of that activity will be a discernable change from what had existed the day, or even the year, before. […] Furthermore, there is a strong association between borders and stopping things from happening, and also stalling things, as well **as generating endless waiting**. Border dynamics can be the opposite of dynamic, as it were. This is not surprising, given that many borders are supposed to act as barriers, intended to control the movement of things, people, and sometimes also ideas, between one place and another. (576)

As it shows, the chronological reconstruction of what has happened on the Alpine border in the last years, the way the Italian state intervenes changes over time, oscillating, in Green's terminology, between dynamic and non-dynamic ways of b/ordering. Until autumn 2018, in fact, there is no strong willing of controlling the area, despite the transit of people on the move is known and so the violations incurred to them. At a given moment (which I identify as October 2018) the state makes its presence explicit at the border through a stronger intervention. It is only then, after several months, that the Italian state starts to enact a process that clearly falls into the large umbrella of dynamic bordering practices (i.e., the presence of police at the border). Therefore, following Green's argument, how can we make sense of the way the border operates, while it seems that nothing happens on the Italian side of it?

Embracing this perspective, I suggest that, even though the Italian state does not implement explicitly any bordering practice for a certain time, the fact itself of being absent from the territory is a form of ordering the border. Not intervening on the border when people are crossing it, and what is more, in highly dangerous conditions, is a form of *negligence* which is part of a specific plan of b/ordering and indicative of a specific exclusionary logic.

In her study on the Hungarian border, Cantat describes the negligence as "an active lack of care rather than acts of violence." (Cantat 2017: 10) According to Cantat, the Hungarian government's decision of reducing the support to asylum seekers is political. Similarly, I suggest that in the Alpine region, the negligence "is not the mere result of a lack of resources or structural conditions – it is politicised insofar as it is imposed on particular people or groups

of people in particular ways." (Cantat 2017: 10) The indirect consequence of this political decision of non-intervening is that of keeping the border unsolved and generating endless waiting (Green 2012). The Italian government does not take an active part in the process of filtering and blocking, but rather witnesses from afar the effects of the border regime. Letting people 'try their luck', as I often hear border crossers saying, is letting the dangers of the route run their course, which may have, or already had, deathly effects; letting them 'try and try again' means to let the mountains[18], the fatigue, and the French police do their job on their bodies.

Considering nonintervention as a form of negligence not only sheds light on the actual consequences of the process of b/ordering but also brings up the exclusionary logic which stands behind the border. Specifically, it uncovers questions on deservedness and belonging. Which bodies are considered to deserve protection? For which people does the state intervene? Whose safety is important and who, instead, is let die? (Agamben 1998; Foucault [1997] 2003)

Following these questions, based on a biopolitical understanding of governmentality, it is possible to recognize the scenario of classification and selection that takes place at the border and is constitutive of it. Even when the route has been opened for months, and the passage of people through the mountains is a well-known fact, the state recognizes the bodies of those who cross the border without the required documents as not entitled of protection nor support. The state classifies and selects, and in this case, neglects to intervene. The negligence reflects the separation made between those lives which are considered as worth preserving and protecting, and those that can be lost, because unworthy and non-belonging (Mbembe 2003). Regarding this, it is indicative that government representatives stand up outraged when French law

[18] The following chapter explores how a humanitarian discourse built around the perils of the territory crossed by the border allows the state to delegate part of the work of control through deterrence to non-state actors.

enforcement cross the border irregularly, but not a single word is spent when the same border kills.

4. Containment through deterrence

Overall, the bordering practices employed in the Occidental Alps, from the most to the less dynamic ones, do not aim to directly block people on the move, as it happens, instead, in other border zones. As mentioned, in Ventimiglia identification, detainment and deportation are regularly used to keep the border 'light' and so more easily controllable. Under the slogan of securitization, the border on the coast between France and Italy is highly militarized also by the Italian government. Through raids in the train station and in the streets, without masking a racist criterion of asking documents only to people on the move, police look for those without documents to fill the Red Cross camp, from where deportations to southern of Italy will take place.

In the Occidental Alps, instead, the existing border regime does not see such forms of explicit control and limitation of movement. Generally, people on the move do not face the risk of being stopped by the Italian law enforcement; it is only in the occasion of being pushed back by the French, that they are identified and simply let go. Although there have been exceptions,[19] there are no recurrent practices directly aimed to detain and to deport, from which we can legitimately infer that there is not the willingness to use such practices to control the border. Then, how does is the border controlled? Which are the bordering practices that control the movement of people without using actual weapons, prisons, forced routes, and expulsions?

[19] In few occasions, in the surroundings of the train stations *carabinieri* asked people on the move to show them their documents. Those who did not have documents on them or did not have documents at all, were brought to the closer *caserma*. There, those identified as irregular on the Italian territory, received an appointment to the *questura* in order to shade light on their legal condition (which normally translates with a decree of expulsion). A similar procedure would also start for those identified as irregular after being pushed back by the French police.

I suggested that political negligence is an answer. Keeping in mind that the government's imperative to manage the border with other EU countries is that of 'lightening up', for that purpose it is convenient to let the French police and the route itself to filter, select, hunt, kill, etc. However, local authorities aim to control the movement of people also through other practices, that in my understanding are oriented to *deter* people from trying to cross the border (Tazzioli 2018). Although not explicit, this mechanism drives the state interventions on the border zone. Within the project 'Mission Freedom Mountain' (whose name ambiguously refers to a freedom that cannot exist under the current system of borders), which is the main direct intervention in the area, we can identify various aspects that support this thesis.

First of all, the opening of the night shelters is indicative of which kind of 'support' the state chooses to provide when it finally decides to intervene. In Bardonecchia before and in Oulx after, the shelter is open only from 8 pm until 7 am. Clearly, it is not a place that people can freely access whenever they need because it is not meant to create a comfortable and safe environment for them to organize their travel. Neither is a place aimed to identify or directly control people, as the access is on a voluntary basis and does not require the identification. Its functioning, instead, strategically limits to cover the mere 'emergency'. Perceived as a matter of security and public decency by some or as a humanitarian need by others, having people in the streets in the middle of the winter at 2000 meters of altitude is an emergency for local authorities to solve and the shelter is the emergency solution given to it. Covering the absolutely essential minimum, the infrastructure provided does not foster people to stay, to take their time, eventually to rest after a failed attempt of crossing the border in order to try a second time. In other words, if we say that non-intervention is a way of keeping the situation unsolved, an intervention of this kind neither solves much.

Indeed, looking at the opening of the shelter per se does not contribute much to the understanding of how the movement is controlled. However, if we go behind its first functionality, we see that infrastructure becomes a scenario of specific practices that do operate as noncoercive ways of controlling and containing the movement of people. In particular, there is a practice that is representative of the state's intention of moving people from the border zone. While I was in the area, a volunteer from the NGO which was running the shelter in Bardonecchia informed me that among the tasks they carried out there was that of offering people on the move the possibility of being reintegrated into the Italian reception system in case they had no other place where to go. In fact, often people on the move renounce their place in the *campo* to travel to the border and try to cross it. Extraordinarily, the NGO had been granted the possibility of managing the reinsertion in the reception system and had the volunteers managing it. Also, in an interview released by the main national channel, the president of the NGO states that in the shelter they try to explain to people on the move that the Italian reception system is "dozens of times better than the non-existing French one"[20].

While we will further explore the role of volunteers in the following chapter, here it is relevant to note the decision taken by the authorities regarding the possibility of reinsertion of people on the move in the reception system. Although reception centers have internal rules which vary from a place to another, in Italy it is unusual for an assignee who lost her place in the *campo* to get a second chance. The fact that an exception is made for those who, once arriving at a few kilometers from France renounce travel, is a clear incentive to leave the border zone. Granted by the authorities and enacted through volunteer work, it is an example of those practices aimed to regain control over migrants' mobility without coercion (Garelli and Tazzioli 2018).

[20] https://www.facebook.com/Rainbow4Africa/videos/964641593723841/

Similarly planned by local authorities in collaboration with associations, the presence of the 'cultural mediators' operating in the train stations is also aimed to reduce the number of people who stay at the border zone. Ideally, their task is that of giving information to the people on the move that they manage to intercept. However, what they actually do is to try to discourage people from attempting the journey, mostly explaining the perils of the mountain and offering contacts of associations and various institutions that could 'help' them in case they decide to stay in Italy. In the border zone, cultural mediators also invite border cross to take advantage of the night shelters provided and accompany them to the designated place every night.

Interestingly, this 'informative work' is carried out not only in the villages close to the border zone but also in the train station in Turin from where it departs the only train line going to the border. When the project started, the mayor of Bardonecchia declared that the activity was going to be held also in Turin "precisely to ensure that refugees would not arrive here. Also, because some migrants do not know that they have the right of family reunification and so they can go to France regularly, without risking their lives climbing snowy mountains with loafers."[21] With this declaration, the mayor condenses in a couple of sentences how the circulation of 'information' becomes a bordering practice. First of all, the fact that cultural mediators work in Turin extends the area of action of the bordering practices, as the aim here is that of containing the route of the so-called secondary movement as early as possible. In other words, this is another case of a work of bordering that does not coincide with the geographical border and rather goes beyond it. A second striking element of the mayor's statement is the paternalistic approach. The people he vaguely addresses (first as refugees, as migrants after) are suspected of not knowing their rights and, consequently, of lacking a well-thought decision

[21] http://www.valsusaoggi.it/profughi-in-valsusa-dal-weekend-apre-il-ricovero-notturno-a-bardonecchia-cerchiamo-medici-e-infermieri-volontari/

before embarking in risky journeys. Unsurprisingly, from this declaration who would emerge as responsible of an eventually tragic ending are the border crossers themselves, who, according to the mayor, would lack the knowledge of the rights they are entitled to and would lack also the experience of the territory, which otherwise would block them from such a dangerous undertaking. By appealing to a humanitarian ideal of protection of life (Fassin 2018, see later), cultural mediators try to convince them to not even arrive at the border zone, in the attempt to prevent the increase of travelers. Here again, operations of containment are carried out without coercion but passing the idea that the border is almost impractical.

In this chapter we started from the problematization of the work of b/ordering, understood by CBS scholars as a complex process that changes over time and that is hard to confine geographically. In line with Green's understanding of bordering practices as dynamic and non-dynamic (Green 2012) and having suggested that deterrence tactics can emerge beside, but also independently from more explicit forms of bordering, I showed how in the Alpine border the Italian government does not intervene using detainment and deportation, as it happens elsewhere, but rather aims to 'lighten up' the border zone showing a humanitarian face. The 'emergency', in this case, does not require the building of a *campo*, the militarization or forced routes; instead, it is solved through the work of volunteers, associations, and NGOs.

Chapter III
Humanitarian actions of deterrence

It is a cold winter night; the mountains are covered with snow.

Right outside the train station, the bus is ready to leave in the direction of the border, the last run for today. As it happens regularly, almost every day, among the passengers there are people who plan to cross the border passing from the mountain. And equally routinely a group of volunteers visits the train station to look for those who plan to embark on such a journey.

A couple of volunteers approach a group of people who are waiting on the line to get to the bus. They talk for some minutes, or better volunteers talk, and the others listen. They are warning them about the risks of the route. In fact, shortly after the volunteers move away from the line and the passengers enter the bus.

The volunteers walk away nodding their heads.

As they pass beside me, one of them, almost to justify her failed attempt, tells me in a sad tone:

"We did not manage."

"Did not manage to do what?", I ask.

"To stop them."

In this chapter, the analysis of the 'politics of control' considers the role of non-state actors at the border zone, specifically through voluntarism. I argue that outsourcing the humanitarian work at the border to non-state actors is part of the state project of governing mobility in ways that are not coercive; in fact, in this case, it does so with a very humanitarian face. The co-optation of voluntary work is in line with other forms of (non)intervention registered in the Occidental Alps: again, the work of bordering here is not a work of detention and deportation, but rather an underground work of containment through deterrence.

Initially, feelings of solidarity and actions in support of border crossers emerge autonomously from the state machinery, if not even in contrast with it. However, local authorities manage, at least until a certain extent, to co-opt and direct the work done by volunteers in ways that are functional to the state project of how the border should operate. This

point is crucial because the process of externalization of humanitarian support aims to benefit from the energy of grassroots organizations (as unpaid work) and at the same time is also a way to control it. Regulating the work of NGOs and volunteers and including it in a specific project of b/ordering, the state strengthens its ideal of how the border should operate, and possibly delegitimates accounts of human mobility divergent from the state one. The depiction of the natural surroundings as dangerous per se, and consequently the representation of the people on the move as inexpert and almost unwise, direct also the humanitarian intervention to a strategy of deterrence. The anecdote reported in the opening shows that the aim of the volunteers is to discourage people from crossing the border because it is too dangerous. In their words, it becomes evident the deterrence strategy: to discourage, to pass the idea that the border is closed, that the passage is impractical.

1. Co-optation of voluntarism

According to Green, "border dynamics can be the opposite of dynamic" (Green 2012, 576) which creates a feeling of endless waiting for those who want to cross them. I argue that the unsolved situation does not only affect the experience of those who plan to cross the border but also of those who live at the border zone. The non-dynamic work of bordering creates a state of waiting that does not pass by uncontested. While the Italian authorities keep the problem of the border unsolved, groups of people who live in the area do not accept to simply witness the unfolding of the phenomenon and take a stand. Initially, a network of solidarity takes place informally. [22] Some get involved as they witness the passage of border crossers in their daily lives, i.e. in the villages where they live, in the train stations that they use, etc. In addition, others decide to join from inner valleys as the situation on the border gets known. Mainly, they

[22] Here I refer to the first period after the appearance of the phenomenon, for which I cannot rely on direct observation but on testimonies that I collected.

organize themselves to monitor the places traversed by people on the move, either on their way to France or after the numerous rejections. They take care of providing food and warm clothes. Eventually, they give medical support to those who come back from the journey and need treatments, i.e. due to hypothermia. Their work is completely independent: they try themselves to collect the resources they may need, they decide how to organize themselves, and most importantly their interaction with people on the move is out of any form of institutionalization.

With the project 'Mission Freedom Mountain', the authorities launch their intervention at the border zone and locate it in the humanitarian field. It consists in fact of the opening of shelters for those who, otherwise, probably would not have a place to spend the night and of the providence of medical support. Significantly, the prefecture outsources the management of these tasks to an NGO operating in Africa for the development of infrastructures like hospitals and small clinics. This is a clear hint of the fat that the authorities locate the project within the field of humanitarian aid.

Besides the official collaboration with the selected organization, soon the project incorporates the work of local people who have operated autonomously until that moment. Already at the opening of the first shelter, in fact, the services provided by the project turn out to be very poor. The plan previews only the presence of a cultural mediator and a medical team for a few hours in the evening. For this reason, although there are paid workers, those who spontaneously have volunteered before they continue to do so. The difference, however, is that their work is not as independent as before. They continue to carry out activities in support of people on the move and they do so by establishing an informal collaboration with the institutional project. They direct people to take benefit from the services provided (i.e. spending the night at the shelter, considering seeing a doctor, etc.) and directly take part in the life of the shelters (i.e. organizing weekly shifts to spend the evenings there, collecting donations for the place, etc.). The collaboration between the institutional project, with its designed participants,

and the groups of local volunteers become solid although based on informal arrangements. In the daily work, relations of cooperation and reciprocity emerge and the boundary between tasks carried out by those who work for the project and those who volunteer around it becomes blurred.

In her study of a solidarity network in Belgrade, Cantat argues that through the institutionalization of the support provided by civil society, the state manages to shift citizens' work to the humanitarian field, de-politicizing their involvement (Cantat 2018). In her study, she looks at the emergence of a heterogeneous constellation of non-state actors, who organized autonomously in support of people transiting through Belgrade. She describes how the Serbian authorities initially allowed the establishment of such activities, also because the government is not providing any service to the people on the move. In 2017, instead, occurred "an important moment of securitization of migration and institutionalization of care." (Cantat 2018, 6) The barracks, which are often the only shelter for many people on the move, are evicted, and the autonomous organizations are criminalized unless they accomplish specific requirements. This shift is borne out by

> a discourse that produces the refugee population outside the camps as legitimately negligible and unworthy of care. The underlying idea is that migrants and refugees lived on the streets out of choice and are thus responsible for their neglect and legitimate targets of criminalization and harassment. The same would go for solidarity actors. (Cantat 2018, 6)

In other words, the launch of a program from the authorities draws a line of separation between a legitimate and an illegitimate way of performing solidarity and of benefitting from it. Besides this consequence, there are other effects I would like to reflect upon, particularly in regard to the institutionalization of voluntarism. According to Cantat, co-optation becomes a synonym for depoliticization, as the securitized approach to contain migration is the only one allowed. This process invalidates the reciprocity and the political which may otherwise exist in the

relationship between people on the move and those who support them. Instead, their interaction becomes professional, a service with beneficiaries. Another issue she observes is how the relations among organizations change: where there was mostly cooperation, after the institutionalization they enter in competition for the funding provided by the state.

In the Occidental Alps, there is not an institutionalization of voluntary work in a strict sense, as it happens in Belgrade. There does exist an institutional project and yet the volunteers almost spontaneously decide to cooperate with it. However, even though the cooperation here is mostly informal, the institutionalization of a specific modality of supporting people on the move imposes itself as the main one and legitimate; because of its resources, poor yet essential, it catalyzes also other forms of solidarity, autonomous until that moment. Local inhabitants who volunteer do not stop to help when the state (inadequately) intervenes; rather they cooperate.

Before, their work was directly aimed to support people on the move and it took place through a face-to-face encounter. Entering, instead, into the web of the institutionalized project, they adjust their practices to those much more regulated of the workers. Once the project wanted by the authorities is activated and it (poorly) solves the 'emergency' (i.e. providing a shelter and medical assistance), it becomes the epicenter of solidarity and the volunteers actively participate to the work of deterrence.

2. Voluntary work as a humanitarian statecraft

> Today, Italian state rationality is invested in producing a "soulful" citizenry that translates the corporeal stirrings of the heart into publicly useful activity. It does so through new legal regimes and other forms of rational and bureaucratic action that have proliferated around the production of ethical citizens. The target here is the soul. When it comes to voluntarism, statecraft is very much soulcraft. (Muehlebach 2012, 18)

In her study of voluntarism in Italy, Muehlebach focuses on the connection between the affirmation of voluntary work and the neoliberal shift of the last decades. Her main argument is that through a set of specific legislations and local practices the Italian state manages to co-opt the work of volunteers, in a way that "everyone – politicians, policy makers, volunteers themselves- thinks of this immaterial labour as valuable because it is located outside of the wage nexus." (Muehlebach 2012, 7) The state transforms feelings and activities into a productive yet unpaid labour force and employs it to cover those services not ensured anymore after the dismantling of the welfare system.

The co-optation and redirection of voluntarism often stay invisible. A certain morality is imposed on the self, to the 'ethical citizen' who considers voluntary work as a duty. According to Muehlebach, the state invests in a work of 'soulcrafting': that is, "the state shifts the burden of the reproduction of solidarity onto citizenry conceptualized as active and dutiful, solidarity is outsourced onto citizens, every one of which is now coresponsible for the public good." (Muehlebach 2012, 12) There is the affirmation of a hegemonic moral, 'The Neoliberal Moral' as she titles the book, which translates to help into a duty. The state aims to produce citizens that will see as their own duties the cracks in the institutions.

This account has the merit of uncovering the cause of the proliferation of voluntarism in Italy: far from being the disinterested realization of innate feelings of solidarity, it is rather the result of specific politics aimed to extract a labour force that can stay unpaid. Without entering into the details of the economic implications,[23] I would like to focus on the more

[23] Muehlebach's understanding of how citizenship is attached to moral values can also shade light on the very diffused ethic in today's Italy according to which migrants should give back to the Italian society what they receive, as if asylum or residence permit were gifts given out of generosity. The expectation of a feeling of gratefulness expressed through very concrete actions (i.e. it is increasing the phenomenon of 'voluntary' work performed by those who are waiting for their asylum requests to be processed) is stipulated in the decree law 46/17 of 2017. The law vaguely encourages local authorities to promote initiatives that see the deployment of migrants, on a voluntary basis, in activities of social values. In this respect, Angelino Alfano, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and one of the authors of the decree, commented that "it is necessary that migrants help the cities

general aspect uncovered by Muehlebach, that is the direct connection between the state and voluntarism. The state actively encourages voluntarism by imposing a certain morality and providing a legal framework to it. This encouragement should be understood as a way of exploiting unpaid labour, as Muehlebach underlies, but also as a process of depoliticizing imaginaries of political action. In the case she considered, volunteers feel responsible for the gaps left by the decline of the welfare state and intervene personally, believing that it an individual duty that of helping those in need. Voluntarist interventions of this kind are the fulfillment of "the humanitarization of the public sphere – a process whereby depoliticized forms of sympathetic action become paradigmatic acts of citizenship." (Muehlebach 2102, 133) In the Occidental Alps, a similar dynamic takes place. The situation left unsolved by the state produces an inner call for solidarity among the people who live in the area, who first organize autonomously and later cooperate with a project coordinated by the authorities. It is significant that even when the authorities launch a program, which would imply that they recognize it has their own duty, citizens still feel responsible and collaborate. Besides, through the project 'Mission Freedom Mountain', the authorities not only co-opt the work of volunteers but, more importantly, they direct it. The intervention consists of humanitarian activities, the objective is that of saving lives in the strictly biological sense of life. Providing food, a shelter, warm clothes; eventually, a place in the reception system in inner Italian cities.

In his book *Life: A Critical User's Manual*, Fassin (Fassin 2018) reflects notions of life and of humanitarianism. According to Fassin, if we look at today's world, an ethic aimed to

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where they live […], and we must avoid that these people spend their time waiting for the meals and therefore be a burden for the community". From this discourse, it is clear that applicants are expected to work for the community who hosts them, but above all they should not be paid because their work is a form of paying back. It has been pointed out that the promotion of volunteering is the name under which a "form of contemporary corvée" is legalized and becomes part of a process of 'meritocratic integration' (Assemblea della Statale, Calusca and No Borders Milano 2017). In other words, it is implicitly required to the applicant to be willing to do unpaid work, from one side in order to demonstrate gratitude (as if international protection were an act of charity) and, on the other, to pay back the expenses of the reception system.

rescue lives stands behind the majority of humanitarian actions. Retracing the history of humanitarianism, he argues that:

> the main distinctive feature between abolitionist humanitarianism ad battlefield humanitarianism[24] – and, by extension, its avatars in response to disaster, famine, or epidemic – is the shift of focus from human rights to saving lives, that is, from life in its social and political dimension, that of the slaves to be freed, to the physical and biological dimension of life, that of the victims to be rescued. […] Humanitarianism therefore proceeds from an affirmation of the prominence of the physical and biological life of those who are affected by these afflictions. (Fassin 2018, 56)

Outlining this dichotomy, Fassin brings to light an implicit consequence of contemporary humanitarian actions. Obsessed by an idea of individual life as sacred, contemporary humanitarianism tends to treat all lives as equal and by doing so does not address the essential question of the unequal values attributed to life and overlooks the geopolitical context.

The ethic of rescuing lives, as in the 'battlefield humanitarianism' described by Fassin, manifests itself in the humanitarian actions performed by volunteers in the Occidental Alps. To protect life, where life is restricted to the physical and biological aspect of it, is the ethical imperative which directs the humanitarian actions at the border zone. However, how does a common understanding of what/who threatens lives emerge?

I suggest that the responsibilization and the mobilization of citizens (and, on parallel, the deresponsibilization of the government) is fed through a specific discourse around the mountain itself: the natural surrounding is considered the main threat to the protection of life. I argue that focusing on nature as a source of threat paves the way for a 'battlefield humanitarianism' to emerge. The premise for the humanitarization of the public sphere lies in

[24] With abolitionist humanitarianism he refers to the ethic that led the mobilizations to end slavery and he uses it in contrast with the battlefield humanitarianism, that represented by the International Committee o the Red Cross first and by Doctors without Borders in more recent times.

the depiction of the surrounding nature as dangerous and hostile, in the presentation of travel as a foolish choice and consequently in an account of those who undertake it as reckless and lacking experience. This understanding is reflected in voluntary work. Under the imperative of protecting life, the actions performed by volunteers range from care to deterrence and are all intended to heal or to reduce the deathly risks of the mountain. Often volunteers go to the train station and try to discourage people from crossing the border explaining that it is too dangerous. In case they fail in their attempt, they ensure that people on the move wear warm clothes and good shoes. They 'clothe them', as they say, with garments they collect through donations. They inform them about the possibility of spending the night at the shelter and walk them there.

The anecdote which opens the chapter is emblematic of the logic that leads the actions in support of border crossers. The volunteer wants to persuade the travelers not to cross the mountain; she feels responsible and sorry that she did not manage 'to stop them' because discouraging them from leaving, according to her logic, would save them. Here, I engage with a critical understanding of contemporary humanitarianism as limited to the physical aspect of life not to discredit or to diminish actions like the one described. It would be wrong to assume that. It is true that crossing the Alps can turn out to be a deadly undertaking, as it happened already. Instead, the merit of this critique is useful to locate such practices and ethics within the larger process of b/ordering.

On the border zone, the humanitarian work, performed by those who are formally part of the state intervention or by those who cooperate with it, is aimed to protect the physical life of people on the move. It fits in the notion of 'battlefield humanitarianism': it operates for the safety of the individual and does not address the socio-political inequalities that systematically produce the hyper-precarious conditions for certain lives. Through humanitarian interventions of this kind, authorities frame a very circumscribed area of intervention (i.e. protection of life as individual safety) and discipline solidarity movements in the same direction. An unwritten

coalition between authorities and civil society takes place with the common aim of deterring people from traveling: for the former, a strategic decision to keep the border zone 'light'; a humanitarian call to save lives for the latter.

Conclusion

Through this work, I looked at the emergence of a border regime in the Occidental Alps through a state-perspective. This focus allowed me to understand how the restriction of mobility does not always imply coercion. On the Italian side of the border zone considered, there do exist forms of controlling human mobility that do no manifest explicitly as bordering practices and yet they are. I argued that nonintervention, negligence, as well as deterrence strategies bound with humanitarian reasons, are practices that create and reinforce the exclusionary mechanism of the border without being coercive in a strict sense. It is rather an underground work and it appeals to the humanitarian imperative of protecting lives.

I decided to focus on the Italian authorities not because they have control over the border. They do not. And neither because they are the only actors contributing to the formation of the border regime. They are not. Rather, I argued that by looking at the actions and non-actions retraceable to the Italian government it is possible to understand those practices that aim to contain movement without showing their repressive face. The same government that deploys detention and deportation, as well as militarization in other border zones, here 'lightens up' the border with resorting to such practices. Instead, it uses less repressive, yet deterring strategies. Firstly, it neglects to recognize that those who try to cross the border are entitled to care, and so it leaves the situation unsolved. Later, through the process of outsourcing and institutionalization of care, covers behind a very humanitarian mask the attempt of blocking the border. Framing such practices as aimed to protect lives, the state project attracts voluntary work and directs grassroots solidarity in the same direction.

Once again, the finitude of the concept of border is confirmed. Irreducible to the line drawn to separate territories, the border is diffused in space and camouflages itself in different social interactions. The border obviously become manifest in the mountains that separate two European states at the time of the suspension of Schengen; but it also arises in a train station,

where someone is paid to convince travelers not to leave; it arises in a night shelter, where volunteers encourage border crossers not to continue their travel because it may kill them. The diffused nature of bordering practices does not mean that the 'politics of control' have full governance over mobility, because they do not. Instead, it reminds that they can hide well.

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