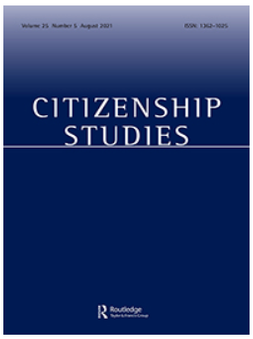

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Towards a genealogy of migrant struggles and rescue. The memory of solidarity at the Alpine border

Martina Tazzioli

Department of Politics & International Relations, Goldsmiths, University of London, London, UK

ABSTRACT

This article advances a genealogy of migrant struggles and citizens solidarity practices, with a focus on the French-Italian migrant passage. It contends that scholarship has mainly mobilised a spatial approach to migrant struggles, while the temporality of solidarity and the collective memory of struggles have remained under-theorised. Then, the article moves on by focusing on the French-Italian Alpine border and it analyses the longstanding history of migrants' passages there and, jointly, the mobilisations that took place in that area over the last decades exploring how these sedimented a citizen collective memory of solidarity practices. The final section deals with the history of mountain rescue at the French-Italian Alpine border and shows how migrants were saved by volunteers. The piece concludes by arguing that an insight into the memory of migrant struggles and solidarity practices enables foregrounding the transversal alliances which have been built between migrants and citizens and unsettling binary opposition between the former and the latter.

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What European states defined as 'refugee crisis' has been characterised by an escalation of border deaths and by a sheer politics of migration containment but also by the multiplication of migrants' spaces and struggles. Indeed, Europe has become *migrants' Europe*: the incorrigible presence of illegalised migrants has reshaped the geographies of the European space. Migrants have made 'spatial claims' – not only through specific demands but also by appropriating mobility and opening 'conjunctural spaces' of life (De Genova 2015, 5). These scattered migrant spaces are eminently ephemeral, precarious and temporary: migrants are repeatedly subjected to violent evictions, dispersal measures and push-back operations, which are enacted by states to regain control over unruly movements.

The French-Italian Alpine border is nowadays a key landmark in migrants' geographies, even if it is less in the spotlight than other border-zones – such as for instance the migrant route along the French-Italian coast. The Alpine border has been constantly patrolled by the French police that on a daily basis enacts push-back operations at the border. Yet, it is also a place where collective mobilisations in support of the migrants in transit have been rife: French and Italian citizens have put in place mobile infrastructures of solidarity across the border, by opening temporary refuges – as safe spaces where

CONTACT Martina Tazzioli martina.Tazzioli@gold.ac.uk

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migrants can rest-, providing medical and legal support, provisions and clothes, as well as advice about the most dangerous mountain paths.

Scholars have pointed out the circulation of political vocabularies and right claims across space and have highlighted the connections among diverse migrant struggles and solidarity movements that take place in different sites (Agustin and Jørgensen 2020; Featherstone 2012; Hardt and Negri 2017). However, it is not only a matter of transversal connections across borders: solidarity practices and migrants' presence have shaped the memory of many places across Europe. In some cases, the collective memory of past solidarity movements and struggles has been reactivated in the present and informed current mobilisations. Philip Marfleet has rightly contended that in order to understand current forced migration, 'we need to know how today's movements are related to those of the past' (Marfleet 2007, 137). This piece concurs with such a view and pushes it further by asking: how could we take stock of collective struggles and spaces of life that migrants opened up and that are quickly erased by states, both physically – through evictions – and politically – without leaving any trace? To what extent is a collective memory of solidarity nowadays reactivated to support the migrants in transit? The paper engages with these questions through a focus on the Alpine migrant route at the French-Italian Alpine border and investigates how the memory of migrants' passages and mountain rescue has sedimented over time and has informed current solidarity practices in support of the migrants in transit.

In order to come to grips with ephemeral and fleeting migrants' presence and movements, this paper argues, it is essential to bring into the analysis the memory and the temporal dimension of the struggles. By tracing a genealogy of struggles and solidarity practices, this article intervenes in the critical citizenship studies debate by showing how solidarity practices shaped citizens' collective memory[1] and how they have been reactivated in the present to support migrants in transit. In so doing, it unsettles alleged fixed oppositions between 'migrants' and 'citizens' and their respective reification as sociological categories, by showing that on the Alps migrants had been rescued and safe refuges have been opened because of the humanitarian principle according to which nobody can be left to die on the mountains.

As far as critical migration studies is concerned, the paper foregrounds the temporality of migrants' struggles and passages (Cantat 2016; Stierl 2019). As Mainwaring and colleagues stressed 'solidarity practices and horizontal alliances [. . .] draw on sedimented knowledges of struggle' and, yet, memory is 'not solid terrain: it needs to be reactivated, renegotiated, reshaped, revisited' (Mainwaring et al. 2020, 82). Similarly, in their research on solidarity movements along the Balkan route, El-Shaarawi and Razsa speak about an 'assemblage movements upon movements' (El-Shaarawi and Razsa 2019, 93) to designate the mutual intertwining, both in space and over time, between political activism and migrant struggles. Such an analytical angle raises both methodological and theoretical challenges, since it pushes us to account for the collective memory of struggles for movement which are temporary and often under the threshold of political visibility. Following Mezzadra's invitation to gesture towards 'another temporality of struggles' (Mezzadra 2010), I explore how to think together precarious and temporary migrants' spaces on the one hand, and the reactivation in the presence of the memory of past solidarity movements.

The paper is structured in four sections. It starts by taking into account literature on solidarity practices and migrant struggles, and it investigates how to trace a genealogy of those movements in order to account for their temporal dimension and the collective memory of these latter. The article moves on by focusing on the Alpine migrant route and situates contemporary migration within a longer history of mountain runaway. Then, it draws attention to the collective mobilisations at the French-Italian border and the sedimented memory of those solidarity practices. The final section deals with the history of mountain rescue at the French-Italian Alpine border from the Forties on, and on migrants being saved by volunteers. The piece concludes showing how an insight into the temporality of solidarity and on the genealogy of struggles might unsettle the opposition between citizens and migrants. Migrant solidarity movements at the French-Italian Alpine border constitute a case in point for thinking through a genealogy of struggles, due to a longstanding history of migrant passages and struggles for social justice of those valleys.

Methodologically, the article builds on archival research, empirical material and interviews that I collected during my fieldwork at the French-Italian border between 2018 and 2020 in the Italian cities of Bardonecchia, Oulx and Claviere, as well in the French city of Briançon. As part of that, I conducted interviews with the Red Cross, with local NGOs and activists who nowadays support migrants. In order to trace a genealogy of mountain rescue, I did archival research in the section of the Alpine Rescue (Soccorso Alpino) in Bardonecchia. I interviewed six Italian citizens who between the Seventies and the Nineties volunteered in Soccorso Alpino and saved migrants, and two French citizens who in the Nineties found and rescued foreigners on the French side of the border. Interviews with the border police in Bardonecchia and with the mayors of Bardonecchia and Oulx helped in understanding which memory of migrants' passages has been recorded on an institutional level and how migrants' presence is managed nowadays. Throughout the paper I put 'migrants' in inverted commas when I want to underline how in specific years and historical periods, some individuals have turned into migrants, due to changes in laws or policies.[2] At the same time, the migrant/citizen divide enforced by states' laws and policies, is (partly) unsettled through the practices of rescue and solidarity at the Alpine border that I focus on.

The article benefits from historical works that advance a 'history from below' approach (Rediker, Chakraborty, and Van Rossum 2019). Putting critical migration literature in dialogue with the history from below scholarship enables inscribing current migrant solidarity movements within a longer genealogy of rescue and solidarity practices on the Alps. This means shifting from a history that includes and speak about racialised subjects (e.g. migrants) towards an account of invisibilised struggles that change our way of writing about borders and solidarity. Relatedly, it enables teasing out connections between present and future political movements, as Marcus Rediker has pointed out: 'if you can recapture lost struggles in ways that are meaningful to the present, you can transmute the past into the present and future' (Rediker 2005). This analytical sensibility towards the memory of the struggles involves challenging the temporality of the event as an exclusive analytical grid for coming to grips with the political dimension of migrants' struggles. The perspective of a history from below helps in getting out of 'the pervasive violence of nationalist history, which limits what we can consider as part of our history' (Rediker 2020).[3] For instance, the experiences of solidarity

enacted at the border have contributed to build transversal alliances between migrants and citizens (Rygiel and Baban 2019).[4]

Thus, by, mobilising this twofold analytical angle, this article departs from works which rethink national identity in light of migrants' presence (Derderian 2002; Hajjat 2005; Noiriel 1995). As part of this scholarship, authors have highlighted that frontiers 'crystallise in a particular way the memory of a nation in its relationships with the other states through conflicts' (Hanus 2019, 2), and therefore constitute crucial sites for investigating the constituent role of migration in redefining the nation. Here I gesture towards the mobile (and precarious) solidarity infrastructures and to the legacies that migrant struggles produce beyond national frames, that is to the new socio-political spaces that they have opened up. That is, instead of claiming back or revisiting national histories, such a genealogy is oriented, first, at foregrounding struggles for movement and practices of solidarity that remain outside the official archives. Second, in the place of re-territorialising solidarity practices within a national framework we could turn to political claims which 'are articulated and claimants are produced create new sites of contestation, belonging, identification and struggle' (Isin 2009, 371).

The Alpine migrant route

Some collective migrants' struggles have been widely reported in the media and newspapers – as it was the case with the *sans-papiers* movement in France. The fact that these struggles were carried on by organised movements in an urban contexts and which raised specific claims to the authorities definitively helped them to reach such a political and media visibility. This also made possible to keep memory of the *sans-papiers* movement and show how it influenced and informed other migrant struggles[5] (Diop 1997). Instead, other migrant struggles are temporary and are invisibilised or are kept invisible by migrants themselves – as it is the case of s*truggles for movement*. It is precisely due to their temporariness that these struggles are also difficult to record – and to keep an archive of them: often, they do not leave any trace, after the punctual moment when they took place. The French-Italian Alpine border has become a key passage for the migrants who were crossing to France. This has been the case in particular since 2017, with the hardening of controls along the coast – between Ventimiglia and Menton – have exponentially increased and became more violent with France's suspension of Schengen in 2015. Therefore, since then many migrants started to reroute their journey from the coast to the Alps, and tried to make it to France by hiking on the uphill mountains. Yet, it is important to highlight that the Alpine migrant route has a longstanding history of migrants' transits (Hanus 2019). As the mayor of Bardonecchia, a city on the Italian side of the border, declared to me:

'the fleeting presence of African migrants we have been witnessing at the rail station of Bardonecchia and on these mountains is definitively unusual and, to some extent, new. But the transit of other kinds of migrants, for instance from the Balkan region, or eastern Europe is by far a longstanding phenomenon. Italians who in the aftermath of WWII were trying to reach France without authorisation, used to pass through this valley. There is an important migrant legacy here'.[6]

Many among those migrants have been helped by locals to make it to France, others paid some smugglers; indeed, in particular until the Fifties, the smuggling activities had

been crucial for the economy of the Alpine valleys (Tombaccini-Villefranque 1999). At the same time, that Alpine area became a space where temporary shelters had been opened for the people in transit, workers in particular (Siestrunck 2013). The rugged mountain environment has never been a deterrent factor; on the contrary, the Alpine crossing point has always been a relatively porous border, much less regimented with respect to other frontiers.

Who were the 'migrants' who hiked on the Alps to reach France on the sly ? As reconstructed by Sandro Rinauro in *The Pathway of Hope*[7] ('Il Cammino della Speranza'), a relevant number of Italian citizens crossed to France 'illegally' in the first decades of the nineteenth century; and the Italians' crossing on the Alps increased in the aftermath of World War II, due to the mobility restrictions implemented under fascism by Mussolini,[8] and the bilateral agreements on workers quota between France and Italy (Rinauro 2009).[9] The illegalisation of (some) Italian workers sheds light on the instability of 'migration' as well as on the constantly blurring between migrants and citizens: although they were Italian citizens, Italian authorities – and not only the French ones – treated them as unlawful emigrants.

In 1947, Egisto Corradi a journalist from the Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera*, joined a group of people who were trying to cross to France 'illegally', hiking on the Alps. The first of the four articles he published was entitled 'I leave on foot towards St.Bernard mountain together with clandestine emigrants'. The 'clandestine emigrants' that Corradi described in his report, were Italian workers without documents to expatriate: the four episodes published in I*l Corriere della Sera* focused on the moment of border crossing, on their arrival in France and on their decisions to return to Italy. Border controls at the Alpine frontier were quite frequent at that time and even more in the late 19th century and in the first half of the 20th century, when the frontier was patrolled both for military reasons and, on both side of the border, to prevent Italian citizens to cross to France. The expulsion of 'illegal' Italian workers was in fact quite frequent, as reported also by French newspapers.[10] Instead, later on when the people who crossed the border 'illegally' were no longer Italians but, rather, from third-countries, border controls and patrolling activities became more asymmetrical, that is they had been mainly enforced by the French police and by far much less by the Italian authorities – as these latter have no interest in keeping 'migrants' on the national territory.

Like at that time, today French authorities patrol the borders to spot and push-back non-European citizens from countries who had been racialised and labelled as 'migrants'. French police's border patrolling at the French-Italian Alpine border is nowadays all-pervading, both at night and during the day (Bachellerie 2020). Thus, in order not to be spotted by the police, migrants walk on secondary paths and often wander off the beaten tracks, running the risk of getting lost and of injuring themselves. As activists from both sides of the border stress, migrants are object of an extenuating 'men hunt' (Chamayou 2012) on the Alps. As a local from the city of Bardonecchia stressed to me, 'it is very difficult to give an advice to migrants who try to cross to France, since the French police (PAF) constantly monitors all paths with technology apt at spotting people at night too'.[11] It is noticeable that in winter migrants are not discouraged by the extreme weather conditions nor by the snow and try to cross anyway, since 'they hope that when weather conditions are adverse, the police monitors less frequently, but unfortunately this is not

the case'.[12] After crossing to France, migrants are not safe yet: indeed, they can be apprehended on the French territory and pushed back to Italy.[13]

The current migrants' passages at the Alpine border should be situated within the history of border controls and of 'clandestine' crossing and labour migration. Building on Marcus Rediker and colleagues, I propose to speak of migrants crossing the French-Italian Alpine border as mountain runaways: by advancing a 'global history of runaways', Rediker and colleagues have highlighted the centrality of struggles over mobility and, at once, of mobility as tactics of flight and resistance against modes of coercions and exploitation (Rediker, Chakraborty, and Van Rossum 2019). Although the fugitives they refer to in the book were slaved workers, sailors and convicted workers that absconded or escaped from plantations and, more broadly, coerced labour, the history of runaways can be mobilised as a heuristic lens for analysing migrants' crossing on the Alps.[14] Reading contemporary migrant passages in light of a history of runaways enables retracing a genealogy of heterogeneous struggles for movement, highlighting some continuities over time between people who ran away from employers, from coercion, or for finding a better life. Indeed, as explained above, the Alpine passage has constituted over the decades a crossing point and, at the same time, the site of 'clandestine' journeys and smuggling activities. The practical knowledge sedimented over the years by runaways appears as a crucial element for recursive struggles to happen. Relatedly, situating the current migrants' border crossing at the Alpine frontiers within a longer history of runaways enables unsettling he migrant/citizen divide and looking at how some individuals have been racialised as 'illegal migrants' or as "clandestine crossers.

More specifically, James Dator has drawn attention to the 'geographical knowledge' of the runaways on the one hand, and the 'topography of power' on the other as important stakes of many struggles over mobility (Dator 2019, 60): the knowledge of the territory and the transmission over time of practical information, made possible for runaways in the past, and today for migrants on the Alps, to move, escape and cross without being detected. Fugitives and illegalised workers have been crossing the Alps for decades to reach France. The *struggles for movement* carried on by those who were racialised as 'migrants' has a quite longstanding history at that border. 'We have always seen people in transit here' as I have been told by a citizen from Bardonecchia, 'such as foreigners who were trying to make it to France by dodging controls; so, the presence of migrants does not really take us by surprise'. Therefore, as I have illustrated, the Alpine valleys at the French-Italian border have been shaped by collective mobilisations and practices of solidarity and, simultaneously, the passage of diverse people who at certain point have been racialised as 'migrants'. These two histories are usually narrated separately, while the purpose of a genealogy of migrant struggles is precisely to analyse these together and to take into account their mutual entanglements.

Mobile infrastructures of solidarity and the memory of struggles

Border controls, bilateral police agreements, border patrolling and police measure have been enforced on the Alps in a quite uneven way. The Alpine migrant passage is on the one side less in the spotlight of media visibility than the coastal route, and in fact until now no 'migration crisis' has been staged by the French and the Italian authorities there. Yet, on the other, it has become a quite dangerous crossing point, as the mountain

environment that has been weaponised through the massive presence of French police which chases migrants on the paths at any time (Del Biaggio and Heller 2017). The Alpine border represents a salient example of a space that has been shaped over time by diverse struggles and solidarity movements (Tazzioli and Walters 2019). Mountain shelters have also played a key role in the history of solidarity practices that have shaped those Alpine valleys: between the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, mountain refuges constituted safe spaces where people in transit could stop and take a rest, as it is the case of the Montgenèvre shelter[15] on the French side of the border. This and other shelters were mainly used by Italian workers, pilgrims, fugitives and soldiers (Fontana 2012).[16] Actually, the refuges had not been built to protect 'migrants': most of them were military shelters, but then ended up in hosting anyone in transit, on the basis of the principle that nobody can be left to die on the mountains; for instance, Italian workers without valid documents to expatriate were hosted in the refuges at Col du Sautron, Col Agnel, Col de la Madeleine and Col Lacroix. As reconstructed by René Seistrunck although controls on the Alps were very capillary in the late 19th century, the border remained porous: 'Italian people were crossing the Alps to find a job in France [. . .] many people at that time walked on the mountain paths and deadly incidents were very frequent' (Siestrunck 2017).

With the increase number of 'Italian emigrants',[17] at the turn of the 20th century the need of opening refuges for the people in transit became more glaring: as reported in the chronicles of the French newspaper *Journal de Barcelonnette i*n 1902, French authorities planned to open the refuge at Col de Sautron due to the many 'miserable workers who cross every year'.[18] Thus, in that context mountain shelters worked as infrastructures of solidarity along the Alpine migrant route.

Over the last three years, Italian citizens from the Susa Valley and French citizens from the Nevache Valley and the Clarée Valley, have mobilised widely in support of the migrants in transit. They have opened up temporary shelters along the route, they have organised daily patrolling activities in order to spot migrants in distress (*maurades solidaires*) and equipped migrants with adequate clothes for hiking in the snow. Migrants usually arrive in the Susa valley by regional train from Turin and get off either in Oulx – where they take a bus to Claviere, the last Italian village before the border – or in Bardonecchia, and hike on the dangerous Col de l'Echelle. When the presence of migrants became particularly visible at the rail station of Bardonecchia in winter of 2017 and for two years, a local NGO of doctors, *Rainbow for Africa*, used a room next to the rail station for providing medical care and a safe space where the migrants who were crossing to France through or who were pushed back to Italy could spend the night. As two volunteers declared to me 'we are here just to cure those who are injured and who need some rest; or action is only humanitarian, we give them some technical equipment, such as warm clothes, and some tips to avoid that they could freeze'.[19] The volunteers from that NGOs did not act for contesting border controls, but to save migrants as individuals in need of medical and humanitarian assistance. Thus, by foregrounding the medical-humanitarian dimension, they de facto unsettled the migrants/citizens divide. Even if the volunteers are deemed to be there only for humanitarian assistance purposes, the shelter has been an important solidarity hub for migrants and basic humanitarian actions turned out to be crucial interventions to support migrants crossing (Tazzioli 2019). In the city of Oulx, activists in collaboration with a local cooperative are doing

a similar experiment, hosting the migrants in transit in a house close to the rail station: every day, volunteers patrol at the station when trains arrive from Turin to spot and direct migrants to the house.[20]

Yet, it is important to stress the varied landscape of migrant solidarity at the French-Italian Alpine border: NGOs, NoBorder activists, locals who were moved by the principle according to which nobody should be left to die on the mountain as well as citizens who in the past mobilized in other collective struggles. In March 2017, some activists occupied a room inside the church of Claviere and called it *Chez Jesus* ('At Jesus' place'), to recall the sanctuary function of churches, in opposition to the anti-immigrants discourses of the priest in Claviere. *Chez Jesus*, which was violently evicted in September of the same year, was an important safe space for the migrants in transit, where they also got counter-maps made by activists for marking the dangerous paths to France. In fact, activists in Claviere overtly claimed to support migrants to cross to France, against the migrant-hunt carried on by the French authorities against migrants across the mountain at any time of the day. On the French side of the border, in the city of Briançon the network *Tous Migrants* established a structured system of solidarity: many volunteers and alpine guides patrol the border (*maraudes solidaires*) and in 2017 they opened a shelter next to the rail station where migrants who make it to France can take a rest. In fact, the refuge of *Tous Migrant*s in Briançon works also as a sort of free police zone.[21] The capillary geography of migration control has been countered by mobile infrastructures of solidarity, formed by knots and hubs – such as the shelters – and by mobile channels of support – made by people who patrol in the snow to find migrants in distress (Brigden 2019).

The presence of mobile infrastructures of solidarity at the Alpine border has not come out of the blue. On the Italian side of the border, the Susa Valley has been the stage of an important cycle of protests and collective mobilisations: during WWII, anti-fascists fugitives concealed themselves there or crossed to France by hiking on the Alps; in the '70s, locals from the valley mobilised against the construction of road infrastructures and since the mid '90s the well-known 'No Tav' movement have been actively opposing in mass the high speed train project. Thus, these struggles were not in support of migrants but for other social justice claims. Then, since 2017 many of the people from the Susa Valley who have been involved in the No Tav movement acted in support of the migrants by putting in place mobile infrastructures of solidarity. As one local activist told me 'we act in solidarity with the migrants, in the same way we did mobilise, and we still do, against the high speed train, as it is part of our shared political tradition to support social justice claims, and today migration is one of the main stakes'.[22]

Taking into account the political spaces opened up by solidarity practices should not lead to a romanticisation of solidarity nor to think of these as stable political communities and frequent episodes. In many border-zones collective mobilisations in solidarity with the migrants are highly precarious and safe refuges are at constant risk of eviction. Thus, a focus on the temporal dimension of solidarity practices and the memory of migrants' passages enable highlighting their legacy and how this shaped some territories. Indeed, as I stressed above, retracing a history of solidarity towards migrants in transit might help in understanding how a certain political and collective memory has been sedimented and then reactivated in the present through practices of solidarity towards the migrants in transit. Importantly, works on sanctuary practices and abolitionism (Buff 2019) have

drawn attention to the history of solidarity movements and to the legacy of the abolitionist movement in the current pro-refugees struggles. In fact, first, the history of sanctuary and abolitionism is not retraced by these authors for commemorating or keeping memory but, rather, to highlight the reverberations of those political experiences in our present. Second, such a genealogy enables situating migrant struggles in Europe within a broader internationalist perspective (Mezzadra 2020; McNevin 2019). Irrespective of their intentions, experiments of migrant solidarity, spatial occupations driven by claims for freedom of movement and collective mobilisations in support of migrants might be seen as practices that open up and link to transversal alliances that unsettle binary oppositions between 'migrants' and 'citizens'.

A genealogy of mountain rescue

In the documentary 'Milky Way: nobody saves himself on his own' (2019) about the history of rescue and migration on the Alps along the French-Italian border, a citizen from Bardonecchia clearly states that 'on the mountains, rescuing is a kind of collective duty; when you know that someone is in danger, it' s automatic to mobilise, and to do it collectively'.[23] The genealogy of mountain rescue is entangled in many ways with migrants' crossing and struggles for movements: the humanitarian practice of saving people on the mountains is in part also a history of migrants in danger being saved by locals while they were trying to cross on the sly. Tracing a genealogy of rescue is something slightly different from 'just' writing a history of it. Indeed, if we consider Michel Foucault's definition of genealogy, this 'disturbs what was previously considered immobile; it fragments what was thought unified', and 'shows the heterogeneity of what was imagined consistent with itself' (Foucault 1978, 147). A genealogical method foregrounds the instability and the contingent character of power relations and, at once, the possibilities of disrupting, altering those specific configurations of power and knowledge. Thinking in genealogical terms involves gesturing towards an 'historical knowledge of struggles' (Foucault 2003, 8) and solidarity practices – most of which have remained quit invisible and part only of marginal archives that might be 'sites of perturbation' (Stoler 2010, 19) of the history of national borders and of nation states.

Hence, I use a genealogical approach for engaging with migrants' presence and of solidarity practices that have generated a sort of 'parallel geography' across Europe (Beneduce 2018., 162). Genealogy enables tracing partial continuities between past and present mountain rescue activities and, at the same time, interrogating the extent to which the memory of rescue practices has contributed to get people mobilised for the migrants. Mountain rescue activities are by no means specifically addressed to migrants but, rather, to everyone who is in danger and, indeed, are driven by the humanitarian principle 'on the mountains nobody should be left to die'.[24] Yet, few among the people rescued in the past were foreigners or 'illegalized' Italians; and thus, the history of mountain rescue is also in part the history of the encounters between rescuers and 'migrants' in distress. The longstanding practice of rescuing people in distress on the Alps is part of a shared memory in the city of Bardonecchia and Claviere – on the Italian side – and of Briancon – on the French side – among many. As part of this collective memory, few people in Bardonecchia, in particular the elderly, recall the fleeting passage of 'migrants' there, during the '70s and the '80s; or better, as one of them told me, 'it was

not easy to spot them in the city, but we knew about their transitory presence as some of them had been rescued or we found them dead on the mountains'.[25]

In the late '40s and in the '50s', the 'migrants' rescued on the Alps were the Italians. Later on, in the '60s and in the '70s, as I found out in the archive of the Alpine Rescue in Bardonecchia, the 'migrants' became third-country nationals, mainly from the former Yugoslavia and from Eastern Europe. Ultimately, 'migrants' from the past are part of *Soccorso Alpino*'s archives only as injured runaways in danger. Those lives remain unknown 'until the blank gaze of power come to rest' (Foucault 2000, 169) on them; or better, in this case it is only through the encounter between rescuers and the injured runaways that the presence of the latter could have been recorded. However, this archive is far from being exhaustive of the rescue operations and of the migrants saved in the Susa Valley over the last decades. Indeed, does not provide an overwhelming picture of the rescue operations, which happened in the Susa Valley. In fact, other sections of Soccorso Alpino did not keep any record of rescue operations which happened in the past and, therefore, I had to combine the piecemeal archival material with testimonies collected from people who found and saved migrants on the mountains.

In the small archive of Soccorso Alpino in the city of Bardonecchia, the first record of 'illegal' crossers traces back to June 29 1956[26], when 'in the attempt to expatriate to France, people of Italian nationality, ended up in danger' and were rescued. Few days later, on September 2 ' an Italian citizen who was trying to reach the French city of Modane' was rescued by Soccorso Alpino . Two decades later, the nationality of the 'illegal' crossers found in distress on the mountain had changed. An archival file from March, 24 1974 states that 'a person of foreign nationality has been rescued today – he is without documents, and he is likely to be a Moroccan citizen'. This is in fact the first record stored in the archive of Bardonecchia that report the rescue of a foreigner. In the 1980s, citizens from former Yugoslavia were found in distress the Susa Valley: notably, the term 'migrant' is never used for designating the people rescued. 2 February 1982, 'three persons of Yugoslavian nationality who were not well equipped, had been rescued while they were trying to expatriate in a clandestine way'. Before the beginning of the so-called 'refugee crisis' in 2015, other 'illegal crossers' had been rescued at the Alpine border. For instance, Moroccan and Rumanian citizens who were crossing to France had been found by Soccorso Alpino team from Bardonecchia. For instance, 8 March 2003: 'search and rescue intervention was conducted to find out non-European citizens who got lost while they were trying to cross in a clandestine way'; 6 June 2003: 'four Romanian citizens have been saved while they were trying to enter France illegality and they found themselves in danger'; 1 April 2009: 'a Moroccan national, that was without regular documents, was found in danger and rescued in the attempt to cross to France'.

Alongside the archives, oral history is key for retracing migrants' fleeting presence. Paolo, a retired doctor in Bardonecchia who was the head of *Soccorso Alpino* in the '70s and then continued the activities there even in the '80s, recalls the few Turkish and the by now citizens of Yugoslavia Republic they rescued in the snow in the mid '70s: "probably many more crossed to France in summer, but we do not have trace of those who just passed and were not found dead or in danger by us". Massimo, a doctor who used to volunteer in Soccorso Alpino in the Nineties remembers "in 1994 I and the other member of the rescue team found a Polish migrant who wanted to cross to France and who remained blocked in the snow at the refuge Sconforti. Like most of the migrants

I encountered, he was a bit worried that being rescued could also mean being captured by the Italian police". Migrants who lost the path had been found also on the French side of the border, as some locals remember: "back in 1990 – not sure which date exactly but it was around January, – I found in front of my house three men who, I realised, were completely disoriented and not equipped to walk in the snow. So, I took them to my place: they were Rumanian citizens, who were trying to reach Lyon, without being spotted by the French police".[27] Many migrants got lost while they were hiking from Bardonecchia to Modane mostly when they crossed via the dangerous La Rochelle Valley: "indeed, unlike today, they did not have phones at that time, and therefore, they were not updated about the most feasible routes, they just followed the rail tracks". Yet, the fleeting presence of those migrants was not noted in Bardonecchia, nor was it considered "a problem", as they did not actually stay – they just transited through – and even if some of them might have spent some hours or days in the city, given that they are not "black" they were in the spotlight.[28] Today, like in the past, migrants are scared and keen at the same time of being rescued, since they are worried that being found and saved might entails being identified by the police and blocked or returned to Italy. As F. T. a migrant from Sudan who make it to Briancon and remained in the refuge *Tous Migrants* for few days stressed to me, it is difficult to discern between policemen or citizens who might report migrants' presence to the police and people you can trust and who are there to help you.

Such a brief genealogy of mountain rescue and migration shows how civic mobilisation might end up in generating unpredictable encounters between citizens and those who are racialised as 'migrants'. Those encounters and the routinised practice of saving migrants and citizens in danger, have contributed to shape the collective memory of the longstanding and, at the same time, fleeting, migrants' presence in those valleys. Nowadays, migrants who hike on the Alps to make it to France are often rescued by volunteers (*maurauders*) who patrol the area near the border. Some of among the volunteers are Alpine guides, some others are locals who decided to mobilise as 'even one single person who dies on the mountains is unacceptable to us'.[29] To what extent has this history of Alpine rescue, which is conceived as a collective duty, informed the current migrant solidarity networks?.[30] Actually, as S., a French Alpine guide and activist of the association *Tous Migrants* in Briancon, stressed, we cannot speak in consequential terms: 'the connections between past experiences and current mobilisations are not straightforward; but the mountain rescue tradition has definitively played a key role, since the first reason why locals mobilised in 2016 when the first "black migrants" showed up is because every mountain dweller knows that nobody can be left to die on the mountains. Then, starting from there, many locals decided to take a clear stand, by supporting noborders projects'. That is, solidarity towards migrants on the Alps had started (also) from rescue activities. A genealogy of mountain rescue foregrounds how the memory of struggle is reactivated in the current unfolding of mobile infrastructures of solidarity. Indeed, on the mountains, rescue and solidarity practices are strictly related to each other, and the very meaning of 'rescue' is expanded beyond the act of saving people who are in danger, as long as it also consists in giving refuge and providing a safe space to migrants on the move.

The binary opposition between migrants and citizens has been unsettled during mountain rescue operations as long as volunteers from Soccorso Alpino did not intervene to save migrants but, rather as part of the mountain humanitarian duty according to

which nobody should be left to die on the mountains. In so doing, the very fact that the people rescued were 'migrants' was initially superseded by other driving factors, such as the duty of saving people in distress and the shared idea in the valleys that the mountains should be a free space (Camanni 2016).

Relatedly, the mountain humanitarian duty to save anyone in distress, leads us to question the boundaries between solidarity and humanitarianism. It firstly highlights that humanitarianism is far from being a homogenous field and it rather encompasses also practices of support and rescue that, as in the case mentioned above, are not predicated upon a hierarchies of lives between rescuers and rescued persons. Secondly, it draws attention to the politicisation of (some) humanitarian interventions in support of migrants, as it is confirmed by the escalating criminalisation of migrant support networks.

In this regard, it is important to notice that rescue activities have been increasingly criminalised. Even if the Alpine border is less visibilised in the media than the maritime frontier, the cases of French or Italian citizens arrested for bringing support and rescuing migrants who get lost or who are in danger had been rife. For instance, in April 2018 four Alpine guides and activists have been arrested by the French authorities for escorting a group of twenty migrants from the Italian to the French side of the mountain. As one of them declared to the media in response to the accusation of smuggling 'It's part of our [Hautes-Alpes] partisan history and heritage to help out those in need. These mountains have always protected people'.[31] Therefore, as part of a genealogy of solidarity it is important to highlight that mountain rescue – which is perceived as a civic and collective duty – has recently become very politicised – and risky, for those who do it as activists and not as part of the official Alpine Rescue organisation.[32]

Conclusion

Migrant struggles and solidarity movements are subjected to an uneven political visibility: at times they get center stage in the media, other times they remain under the threshold of visibility. As this article has shown, even struggles and movements that partly remained under the radar have contributed to shape and sediment a collective memory of migrants' passages. Yet, far from constituting a stable and linear memory, the genealogy of solidarity and its political legacy – which is formed also by practices that are criminalised by state authorities – is highly scattered and exposed to erasure. Indeed, there is nothing like an exhaustive archive of solidarity practices, nor a written and linear memory of them.

The 'evictability' (Van Baar 2017) of migrant spaces and the temporariness of solidarity movements make hard tracing their genealogy: far from being a linear history, it is a fragmented and partial reconstruction, which requires combining archival material and oral histories. Moving beyond the physical evictability and the political erasure of migrants' spaces requires grasping the persistence of traces, many of which can be detected only through 'an encounter with power' and as something that is 'beside what is usually estimated as worthy of being recounted' (Foucault 1978, 161). Indeed, as I have shown by tracing a genealogy of mountain rescue, migrants' fleeting presence remain often out of any archive.

Thus, a spatial gaze on solidarity practices and struggles for movement, which looks at the connections and resonances across borders, needs to be intertwined with a genealogical perspective. Indeed, investigating how the collective memory of migrants' passages and rescue practices is nowadays reactivated is a key epistemic and political task: it enables exploring how knowledges and practices travelled over time and have informed current mobilisations. A 'radically open-ended politics of migrant presence' (De Genova 2010, 103) does not just happens 'here' and 'now'. Rather, it is the outcome of a longstanding and fragmented history of struggles which are frequently re-enacted in diverse forms. So, what is left of migrant spaces and presence after their eviction? How to conceptualise a 'provisional that lasts' (Abdallah 2006) in time ? What is left from the experiences of solidarity and the temporary transversal alliances between migrants and citizens?

If 'mobility creates the possibility of rights' and 'yet rights are always claimed in struggle, or through mobilization' (Aradau, Huysmans, and Squire 2010, 955), a genealogy of struggles foregrounds the political and social legacies of those mobilisations, and point to actual resonances in the present. The analytical purchase of tracing a genealogy of struggles for movement and of solidarity practices goes far beyond migration and concern the emergence of new socio-political spaces that migrants contributed to open up, through their struggles and presence. An intertwined genealogy of migrant struggles and solidarity movements sheds light on the transversal alliances that emerged between 'migrants' and 'citizens' – building on an understanding of solidarity conceived 'as a stake, as an outcome of a struggle that involves heterogenous subjects, histories, imaginaries and experiences' (Mezzadra 2020, 2).

Indeed, 'every individual runaways depends on collective networks' (Lucassen and Van Voss 2019, 7) and, the history of mountain runaways is highly intertwined linked up with a genealogy of rescue and solidarity practices. By gesturing towards a history of mountain runaways, this paper invites to look at current migrants' passages across the Alps beyond their volatile and often invisible presence. The traces of the struggles over mobility and the sedimented memory of solidarity practices across the Alps are constantly reactivated by 'migrants' in transit.

Notes

1. I conceive here collective memory as something which is 'never fixed, but it is constantly constructed and reconstructed in reference to the evolving needs of the present' (Dragović-Soso 2010, 30).
2. This is the case for instance of the 'illegal' expatriation of Italian citizens under the fascist laws.
3. According to Rediker 'We have usually considered protest and rebellion in national context or as geographically specific phenomena that could be compared but not connected. This is another way in which nationalism blinds us to the richness and power of history from below. Rare is the struggle that does not have a transnational origin, cause, or reverberation, so we need to look for commonalities and connections' (Rediker 2020).
4. In Europe there are sites which are 'disruptive of hierarchical borders of newcomers (recently arrived migrants and refugees) and locals (non-migrant) residents), which thereby foster more inclusionary ways of living together' (Rygiel and Baban 2019, 1069). However, this is harder in places where migrants are just in transit.

5. The *Gilets Noir* movement that started in Paris and then spread across France in late 2018. This movement was formed mainly by illegalised migrant workers. They declared to be 'a movement, and not a collective' and to mobilise in the spirit of the *sans-papiers* and, at the same time, they echo the *Glets Jaunes* movement.
6. Interview with the mayor of Bardonecchia, 22 November 2018.
7. *The Pathwa.y of Hope (1950)* is also the title of a famous movie by Pietro Germi that shows a group of Italians from Sicily who were crossing 'illegally' to France on the Alps, with the help of some locals.
8. Mussolini enforced border controls with France in 1927.
9. Restrictions to Italian emigrations were enforced by the Italian government under Mussolini, in particular since 1926 and then with the 1930 law to hamper anti-fascists from escaping. In the aftermath of the war Italy and France signed many agreements between 1945 and 1948 to regulate labour mobility to France through the National Office of Immigration.
10. The French newspapers *Journal de Barcelonnette* and *Courrier des Alpes* reported expulsion of Italian citizens. For instance, according to the Journal de Barcelonette, on 22 June 1902 'The French police had arrested and returned to Italy an Italian citizen'.
11. Interview with a citizen of Bardonecchia who has mobilised in support of the migrants in transit. December 2019, Bardonecchia.
12. Interview with a volunteer at the migrant refuge in Oulx, December 2019.
13. Push back operations at the border are not monitored **i**n an exhaustive way, mainly due to the partial lack of communication between Italian and French authorities. What it is possible to reconstruct from the information provided by the Italian Red Cross and by local activists, as well as by migrants' testimonies is that push back operations take place both at the border and after finding them miles away – for instance in the city of Briancon.
14. Lucassen and Heerma van Voss argue that 'the history of desertion must be connected to the blossoming field of migration history [...] migration and mobility as forms of resistance linked to forced labour, however, has a long history [...] running away as a form of migration' (Lucassen and Van Voss 2019, 15) and they invite us to find 'commonalities in the actions of runaways around the world' (17).
15. The shelter at Montgenevre was part of a broader network called 'Napoleon's shelters', as they were opened under Napoleon I. http://centrefederaldedocumentation.ffcam.fr/lesrefuges.html#des%20hostelleries.
16. The people who managed the shelters were often accused by the local authorities of hosting clandestine and criminals (Fontana 2012). It is interesting to notice a close parallelism with the criminalisation of solidarity that is at play today.
17. Expression used in some French newspapers to designate Italian workers who were crossing without the necessary documents.
18. Journal de Barcelonnette, 6 July 1902. Available at: https://www.mediatheques-ubaye.net/bib-numerique/view-album/id/955#/page/1.
19. Interview with Rainbow for Africa, Bardonecchia, March 2018.
20. There, migrants are given hospitality and warm clothes; then, they take the bus to Claviere early in the morning or walk there in the middle of the night, in order not to be detected by the French police that, however, constantly patrol the border.
21. https://tousmigrants.weebly.com/.The refuge was backed up by the municipality until July 2020, when a right-wing mayor was elected: from that moment on, the refuge has been under constant risk of eviction.
22. Interview with S. A local and activist from Bardonecchia.
23. https://www.milkywaydoc.com/?lang=en; as stated also by mountain guides, 'on the mountains, like at sea, we cannot live anyone in distress':https://www.la-croix.com/Journal/En-montagne-laisse-personne-detresse-2017-12-20-1100900797.
24. Interview with A., activist and mountain guide from Briancon, 15 July 2020.
25. Interview with C., a citizen of Bardonecchia and member of the Alpine Rescue section.

26. I accessed to these documents stored in the local archive of the Alpine Rescue section in Bardonecchia. The documents were handwritten in italian, so the translation is mine.
27. Interview with P. a French citizen who lives in the village of La Vachette, in the Claree valley. 15 July 2020.
28. Interview with Paolo, ex Head of Soccorso Alpino in Bardonecchia, 16 December 2019.
29. Interview with a volunteer from Bardonecchia, November 2019.
30. The group Guide Sans Frontieres is formed by Alpine guides that volunteer for rescuing and supporting migrants who try to cross to France.
31. www.france24.com/en/20181216-france-alps-migrants-mountains-activists-convicted-winter-deaths-far-right-protests-refugee.
32. Since they might be arrested and accused of facilitating migrants' passage to France. In Italy the mountain rescue is done both by state authorities (Guardia di Finanza) and by volunteers of the Alpine Rescue.

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Notes on contributor

Martina Tazzioli is Lecturer in Politics & Technology at Goldsmiths. She is the author ofThe Making of Migration. The biopoltics of mobility at Europe's borders (Sage, 2020),Spaces of Governmentality: Autonomous Migration and the Arab Uprisings (2015) and coauthorwith Glenda Garelli of Tunisia as a Revolutionised Space of Migration (2016). She isco-editor of Foucault and the History of our Present (2015) and Foucault and the Making ofSubjects (2016). She is on the editorial board of Radical Philosophy.

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