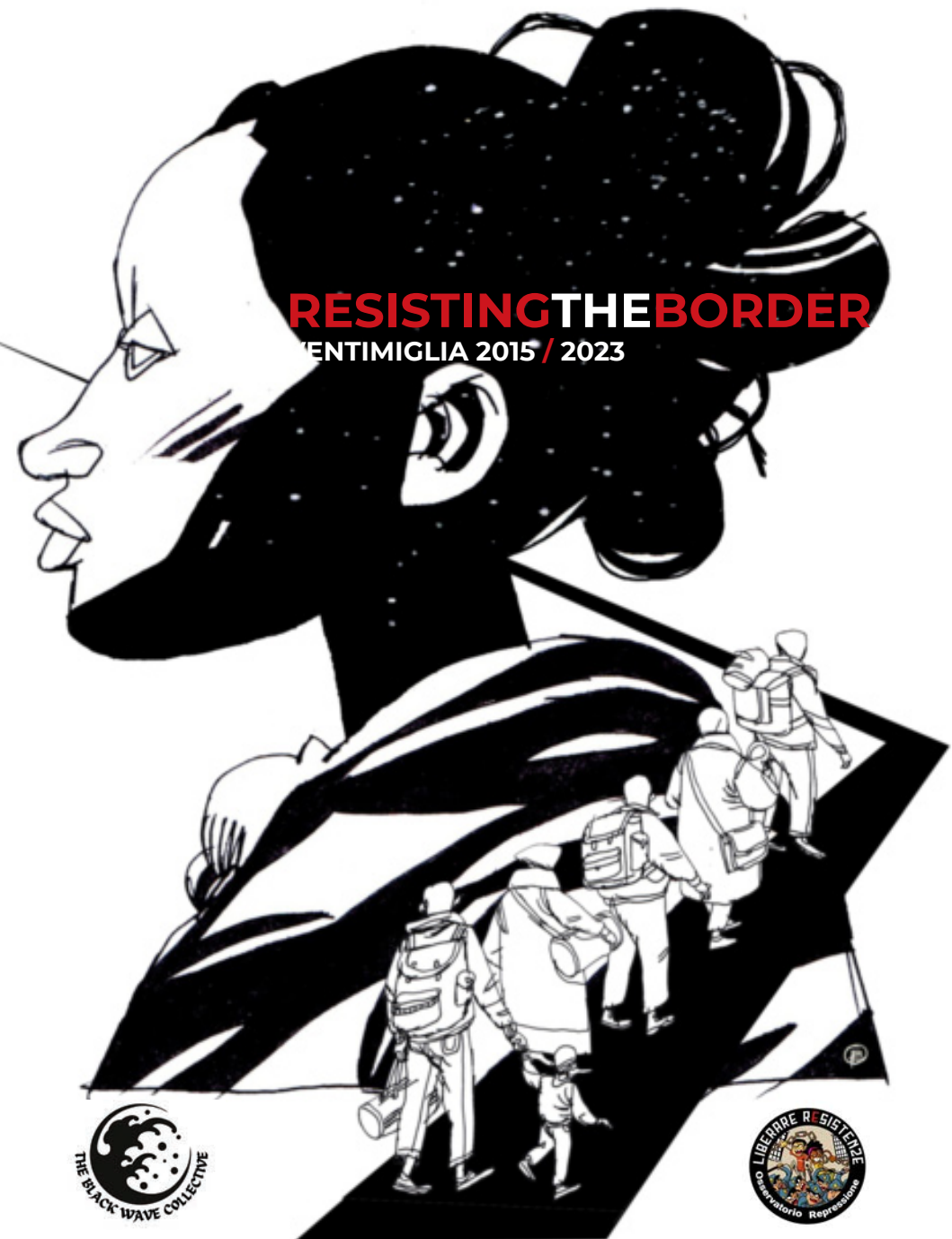


RESISTING THE BORDER

MENTIMIGLIA 2015 / 2023





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RESISTING**THE**BORDER

VENTIMIGLIA 2015 / 2023



**parole
sul confine**
storie e resistenze
da Ventimiglia e dintorni

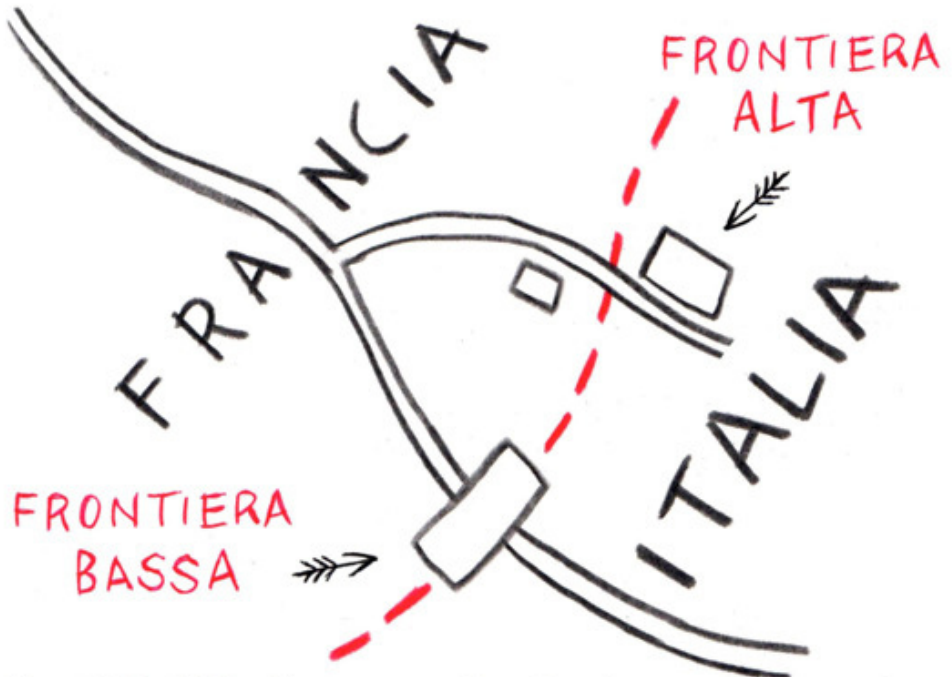
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RESISTING THE BORDER



THE NET THAT MARKS THE BOUNDARY ON THE PATH CALLED THE DEATH PASS.

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



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

THE BORDER BETWEEN VENTIMIGLIA AND MENTON LIES BETWEEN TWO BORDER CROSSINGS: AT THE TOP THE HISTORICAL BORDER ON THE AURELIA - PONTE SAN LUIGI - AND BELOW ON THE SEA - PONTE SAN LUDOVICO, AT BALZI ROSSI.

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CHECKPOINT AT THE FRENCH BORDER AT PONTE SAN LUDOVICO.

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ROAD SIGNS AT THE BORDER.

RESISTALCONFINE

[Edited by] parolesulconfine.com

Series Notebooks, no.2, June 2023

observatoriorepression.info

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AGAINST THE BORDER CLOSURE, BALZI ROSSI,
VENTIMIGLIA 2015.

We continue our journey among the humanity that yesterday, 14 June, the Greek authorities knowingly left to die in the Aegean sea, as did the Italian authorities for the massacre in Cutro, as happened in Lampedusa in October 2013, distant in time but vivid in memory, as are all the massacres of migrants at sea.

We will never know the number of those who drowned. And we will never know how many fail to take the risk of surviving the sea. The new desaparecidos.

With Resistance on the Border, thanks to the collective «Words on the Border», we recount the struggles of resistance and hope that since 2015 have occurred on the cliffs of Ventimiglia and along the paths of the border between Italy and France.



AGAINST THE BORDER CLOSURE, BALZI ROSSI, VENTIMIGLIA 2015.

THE VENTIMIGLIA BORDER

WORDS ABOUT THE BORDER.

The blog project Words on the Border was born in 2017 by a group of people in solidarity with the struggles against borders. They followed the events that happened in Ventimiglia in the summer of 2015. A political track that causes profound real consequences, the borders represent both a limit and a point of passage and encounter. Therefore, at the border, tough resistance and struggles develop, in which thousands of people stake their hopes and, even more often, their lives.

In June 2015, France closed its borders by suspending the Schengen agreements. Since then, it has not dismantled the massive apparatus of controls, continuing to carry out selections and round-ups based on racial discrimination criteria: a hunt for non-white people that goes more than twenty kilometres from the border. In 2015, there was widespread media coverage when migrant people occupied the Balzi Rossi rocks to protest against the border closure, claiming freedom of movement for themselves. The jamming of the Schengen system and the first knots in the Dublin system were only an initial moment of embarrassment and difficulty for Italian and European institutions. They quickly organised themselves, putting in place a series of devices to seal the gates of Europe and reclaim the countries affected by the migratory flux through a proliferation of norms, decrees, and ordinances, they built up what can be defined as a 'border regime'.

In Ventimiglia, as at the other entry points of the so-called Fortress Europe, the reactivation and multiplication of borders have transformed the territory into a highly militarised space, an increasingly fierce and refined laboratory of racial control and repression of dissent. The

migrant emergency of the first years in the border city soon evolved into a strategy aimed at preventing the self-determination of travellers and, simultaneously, at achieving their dissolution from the space of the public territory. If one were to draw on a map of the city the landmarks that, over time, have been set up for those arriving in Ventimiglia to cross the border, one would notice a progressive wave of ontological rejection of migrants, driven by the fury of evictions and bulldozers to move away from the heart of the city to seek increasingly precarious makeshift shelters in increasingly peripheral and hidden areas. The reception camp in the station square in the more distant Gianchette church, then the Red Cross camp between the motorway overpasses several kilometres from the centre. Then, not even that, dismantled in the summer of 2020.

Setting up a place dedicated to the reception of migrants causes a visual concentration of these people in the urban space, generating reactions and anxieties in the Ventimiglia population, even better if the migrants become invisible in the most hidden recesses of Ventimiglia's urban geography: in the truncated railway tracks, in the subways, in the thicket of bushes in the riverbed, in the abandoned warehouses in the suburbs. The important thing is that these people do not show themselves around and, above all that, it seems that the administration on duty is doing the least possible for them in terms of reception and the most in terms of repression. It is criminal management that feeds a political consensus that is increasingly oriented towards the gallows and the purge, adding to the risk of dying at the border crossing, that of not surviving because it is too difficult to resist the road in Ventimiglia.

THE POWER TO MAKE PEOPLE INVISIBLE

It is not just a question of it not paying, in terms of votes, to take responsibility for preparing a territorial plan that considers the presence and needs of migrants. There is a much deep-seated and more disturbing desire in the poisoned ball game played by institutions at both national and local levels: the constant and transversal attempt by political forces to make migrant people physically disappear from the city. Not because anyone still seriously thinks that migratory flows can be stopped or contained, but because they just must not be seen.

Far from the propagandistic proclamations of the city administra-

tion, first led by the PD and then by the centre-right, Ventimiglia has shown itself to be out of the rhetoric of 'good reception': raids, forced identifications, violence and deportations to hotspots in southern Italy in the past, now more and more directly to the CPR, as happened to Moussa Balde after he assaulted in Ventimiglia. For the men and women engaged in the practices of active solidarity and from below, there have been complaints, fines, lawsuits, defamation, searches and travel warrants. In the vacuum left by the destruction of the spaces self-managed by the migrants with the support of those activists, a series of realities, from the church to NGOs to various humanitarian associations, have been able to insert themselves, trying in vain to make the lives of those who arrive in Ventimiglia with a migration project a little less miserable and dangerous. Starting from the garrison occupied by the migrants at Balzi Rossi, where people organised themselves to cross the border, to the current sleeping quarters amidst truncated rails and hordes of human traffickers, there has been a long downward parabola that daily confirms the saying 'there is never an end to the worst'.

The old and now disused Italian customs offices have been reopened and refurbished. The mountains and paths leading into France littered with French Foreign Legion checkpoints. The violence, abuse and humiliation inflicted on migrants has increased on both sides of the border. The tightening of control measures and the overall escalation of the situation have caused an alarming number of people to be injured and killed attempting to cross the border since 2016.

And while a system of ghettoisation and segregation of people on the move rages, a media and institutional narrative aimed at criminalising and dehumanising migrant people is also pressing in. That is why we thought it was urgent to tell about the border and its actual consequences in the lives of those who cross the border space.

From the blog *Parole sul confine* (Words on the Border), we have tried to spread the stories and words of those who arrive, leave, return and live in Ventimiglia on a daily basis. Witnessing means collecting messages that would otherwise be lost, which means opening and defending free and independent information spaces to try to break another border: the media fence that keeps out the voices of those you want to silence.

Many of the testimonies and events mentioned in these pages collected in the blog's articles, both as editorial work and thanks to ex-

RESISTING THE BORDER

ternal contributions that have sent to us and whom, also on this occasion, we warmly invite to write and share



EVACUATION OF THE NO BORDER CAMP AT BALZI ROSSI, VENTIMIGLIA 2015.

THE WIND BLOWS AND CANNOT BE STOPPED

We think it is important to report here the testimony of a Sudanese migrant who, having arrived in Italy in 2015, stopped for a long time at the Ventimiglia border: the tale of the struggles, sufferings and injustices experienced by this young man is still dramatically topical and similar to the thousands of stories of hardship and resistance, that one can hear every day at the border. It is precisely for this reason, or rather, above all for this - or even, above all for this - that we want to re-listen to a voice that, although collected a few years ago, still speaks to us today of the struggles that migrants have to face: if in 2015 things were already hard, today they have only worsened. The survival conditions on the streets of Ventimiglia and the risks of crossing the border have worsened. The system for obtaining a residence permit has deteriorated, and the clogging up of waiting lists has gotten worse; even public opinion has become worse, which, if at the time it was still able to soften in front of the need for other human beings, today invokes the institutions' nastiness to erase people reduced to illegal bodies from the media and political discourse. At the end of March 2023, a group of Ventimiglia citizens thought it appropriate to take justice into their own hands by chasing a young African man through the streets of the city who had to throw himself off a wall onto the beach to escape lynching. If the present seems disturbing to us, the hope is that the past will help us understand how we got to this point and, therefore, what choices urgently need to be made to write a different future.

LAMPEDUSA JUNE 2015

I arrived in Lampedusa at the end of June 2015. Once landed, I went to the centre run by the Italian Red Cross. I was exhausted from the journey at sea. I didn't understand what was happening to me. In 2015, there were still no hotspots for migrants, so I was not fingerprinted immediately after landing. After five days, the police picked me up from the centre and took me to Agrigento to another centre, where I stayed another five days. I was very disoriented and did not understand why I could not go where I wanted. I was picked up again with other people. I remember that there were four buses ready for us. The police told us that the destination of those buses was different: one was going to Naples, one to Rome, another to Milan and the last one to Padua. On my bus there were 25 people: 10 Sudanese, 2 Nigerians, 3 Senegalese and 10 Bangladeshis; our destination was Padua. At that point I thought it was shit. I was sure that once we reached Europe, I would be free to go where I wanted. In this case, I thought I could join my cousin in England and ask for political asylum there.

FINGERPRINTS

They transferred me to Padua. When we arrived in Padua, we had to wait more than an hour to enter the police station. I was the first to enter, and at that time, there were only Pakistani mediators who knew a little Arabic, but the police did not want them to come in with me. I tried to speak English. I didn't know much about it at that time. The policeman didn't understand anything and answered by shouting at me in Italian. The only thing I understood was the word 'asylum' and their gesturing that referred to taking my fingerprints. That is why I refused. I didn't want to! I want to reach England and claim asylum there. The policeman verbally attacked me, and I reacted. As a result, three more policemen came and beat me on the wrists, but I resisted by hiding my hands. Then they took me by force and, holding me down, they managed to take my fingerprints.

I got out of there. Then I met an Arab mediator who asked me what had happened. I explained everything, but they had taken my fingerprints. A little later, the cops appeared again and gave me a train ticket for the CRI (Italian Red Cross) centre to go to Milan. When I arrived in Milan, I went to the centre. I don't know what that place was, but I understood that I could only stay there for five days and then either

leave or end up in a reception centre. But I didn't want to stay in Italy. I wanted to join my cousin in England, so after two days there, I decided to leave.

BALZI ROSSI SELF-MANAGED CAMP, VENTIMIGLIA JULY 2015

My uncle told me to take a train to Genoa and then to Ventimiglia, so we would pay a passeur together to go to France and reach England. I trusted him and went.

I arrived at the station and, first thing, I called my uncle. He told me he was inside the CRI centre where they were taking fingerprints. I decided I didn't want to have them taken any more. I was disoriented, didn't know where I was and didn't know how to cross the border. At the station, I met some comrades who explained where I was and gave me information. They explained that there was a camp self-managed by migrants and other comrades, so I decided to follow them and arrive with them at the Balzi Rossi camp. It was July 2015. I do not remember the exact dates.

I was exhausted, and for a few days, I wanted to rest to be more lucid. It was a camp with so many migrants and many comrades, where everyone helped with the management. There was a kitchen, toilets, showers, an infopoint and the warehouse with food and clothes. Everyone was free to do what they wanted, always respecting others. During the day, we had French or English classes given by our comrades. There were also assemblies and discussions. I settled in and immediately became part of the self-management of that camp and got on very well with both migrants and comrades.

I stayed there until it was evicted. That is until the end of September. There, I learned English and helped other migrants so they could cross the border. I got to know the comrades, who called themselves No Borders, and help them talk to the migrants.

THE CLEARING OF THE BALZI ROSSI

At the end of September, they cleared the camp. I was so sad because inside that place, I had found friends and comrades, and they had become my family. About 200 policemen arrived at 5 am and cleared us out.

We put ourselves on the rocks, close to the sea, so the police could not reach us.

There were about 100 people between migrants and comrades. We stayed on the rocks without eating and drinking until about 4 pm, after which the police decided to start taking people. After a while, the bishop arrived and tried to mediate, convincing us to go with the police to Ventimiglia so we could enter the CRI centre. We refused, so the police started to take us by force. The comrades were caught and taken straight to the police station. Some of them were given travel warrants on charges of social dangerousness. All others reported.

STAYING IN ITALY

I decided to stay in Italy because in Ventimiglia, with comrades helping migrants, I had found my place where I felt free. So, I applied for political asylum in Turin. I stayed for a week with my comrades. On 10 November 2015, I went to the police station and then left for Ventimiglia. At that time, however, migrants lived on the streets, especially at the station, and there was no longer a self-managed camp. I went to live at a comrade's house in the Ligurian hinterland. I often went to Ventimiglia to help migrants who arrived and knew nothing about the city. I would meet them not only at the station but also near the sea. Someone was inside the CRI centre. At that time, we often held assemblies to organise ourselves to find a more dignified solution. The comrades were with us.

SELF-MANAGED CAMP IN VIA TENDA

After several meetings between comrades and migrants, we managed to find a solution that was at least decent: we 'occupied' a piece of land under the flyover in Via Tenda. It wasn't the best, near the river and in the dirt, but we were indoors and stayed all together. A self-management situation arose. Everything was there: food, clothes, tents and blankets. We had to share blankets and tents because there were not enough for everyone. The camp sustained itself by donation, so we had to get

by. But, in the end, it wasn't bad. There were also several days of struggle and demonstrations against the border. The police did not leave us alone: they often passed by the camp and, looking at us from

afar, laughed and teased us as if we were animals. The cops often taunted the comrades. In the meantime, migrants continued to arrive, and the violence and torture of migrants continued, as did the psychological abuse of those who tried to show solidarity. Until one fine day came the order to evict the camp in Via Tenda for hygienic reasons. I asked myself: 'And where do we have to go? Can't they put in toilets and showers instead of evicting us?'. The comrades' answer was clear: 'They don't care that we live in decent conditions, care about destroying self-organisation'. And so it was.

EVICION OF THE CAMP IN VIA TENDA

On 29 March, we decided to leave before the riot police arrived. There were no conditions to resist an eviction that looked like it could be violent. We woke up very early to gather everything we needed to take away: tents, blankets, kitchen, food and more. We also cleaned up the area. In the meantime, the comrades were trying to handle the journalists who insisted on filming us while we did our thing. They demanded interviews. Some journalists were annoying.

We moved towards the beach: we were 400, in front of the eyes of journalists, TV and inhabitants of Ventimiglia. But what were we supposed to do? Where could we go? The eviction was a clear signal from the institutions: migrants and comrades were not welcome in the city. As soon as we arrived at the beach, I remember that the comrades received news and became very agitated; I immediately asked and understood why they were alarmed: early in the morning the next day, buses and police would arrive to take the migrants to southern Italy, to the hotspots, and arrest the comrades. We decided to try to take refuge in a church near the beach. The parish priest agreed to take us in after the comrades mediated and made him realise the situation. Many of us went in there, maybe 200, hiding like criminals. The comrades went around all night trying to recover those left on the streets. I stayed in the church and helped the migrants, explaining what was happening and calming them down. The next day, many cops and buses arrived, but they couldn't catch many people because they couldn't enter the church. That's why I think they got so angry then, in the evening, after they cleared the camp in Via Tenda, some policemen came into the church and took the comrades.

They took them to the police station, kept them there all night and gave them denunciations and travel orders. We were in the church, not scared but angry because they had taken our comrades. We decided to make a demonstration against the border. Afterwards, we all went back to another church.

THE OPENING OF CAMPO ROJA

From that moment on, everything changed in Ventimiglia: the Gianchette Church housed migrants, and the CRI centre near the station was closed to open a new one, isolated and far from everything in Roja Park. I continued to live in a nearby location but spent my days in Ventimiglia. After a short time in the old stables, we had recreated a camp near Parco Roja. But even there, it wasn't going well: the police often came to take away our kitchen and to pick up our comrades, to whom they gave more travel orders. They kept repressing the No Borders without any real motivation.

DRILLING THE BORDER UNDER A BLAZING SUN, A HEART ATTACK AND REPRESSION. VENTIMIGLIA AUGUST 2016

In August 2016, comrades organised a camp. Many people arrived from various parts of Italy and cities in Europe. The day before the began, we migrants decided to make a political demonstration against the border: we arrived at the border in 400, at Balzi Rossi and waited for the police to arrive precisely to focus on the problem at the frontier. The police arrived and prevented us from getting a drink: it was so hot. Some comrades tried to bring us water but were stopped and given the slip again! We stayed in the sun for many hours until the police, I didn't quite understand why, decided to charge us and push us towards France. You can imagine the result: 400 people broke through the border and entered France, occupying the beach at Menton. I went too through but turned back almost immediately. Some migrants managed not to get caught, and others went straight back to the Parc Roja, that is, to the CRI centre. The comrades were detained for many hours and given more waybills.

The next day, while about fifty of us were trying to say goodbye to the guys locked up in the CRI centre, we were charged by the police, who were very violent! They chased us with trucks, they beat us up,

and there were ten detentions and two arrests for doing nothing. One policeman from the mobile department in Genoa, a 53-year-old man, was crushed by a heart attack while getting out of a vehicle. Police and much of the media blamed the no borders even though they were peaceful and did not hurt anyone. In the meantime, the police had also entered the Freespot, where we kept clothes and food, washed and rested. It was a garage, and we paid rent regularly, but the police did not like it. They did a lot of searches, took comrades to the police station and had the place shut down. In the meantime, many comrades tried to reach Ventimiglia but, unfortunately, were caught and given a waybill immediately. I think we arrived at 60 waybills from 2015 to 2016.

The repression of comrades continued a massive repression.

I was so angry because the no borders were my family, my brothers and sisters, and I did not understand why the police were so aggressive. As time went by, I comprehended that for the Italian state/institutions, all the no borders are a problem. They are dangerous. I have always stayed with them. They are on the side of the migrants, on the side of the excluded, against injustice to everyone (black and white). Since I arrived in Ventimiglia and know the No Borders, I have understood that I want to help migrants and comrades.

THE ASYLUM APPLICATION

I applied for asylum in November 2015. I waited a year and a month, receiving no answer from Questura: every time I went to the appointment, they sent me back to another date without telling me why and without giving me any paper proving that I was an asylum seeker.

Since Italy would not answer me, after a year and a half, I decided to go to France and ask for asylum there. My idea was to get my papers on French soil and return to Ventimiglia completely legal to continue helping migrants.

In France, I continued to fight with my comrades. I went to Nice, Marseilles and many other places.

I applied for asylum in Grenoble, France. Initially, I lived in a house occupied by comrades for migrants, where the police had cut off our light and water for 20 days because they wanted to evict us. After three months, the house burnt down and, after the fire, the police ar-

rived and took us all to a gymnasium where we lived for 21 days. Those who had documents went to some flats in the mountains, while those who did not have documents had to stay in a hotel. There, there was not much freedom and did not favour self-determination. I refused to go inside the hotel and was hosted for a while by a friend. In all these months, I travelled around France a lot to visit friends I met in Ventimiglia, comrades and migrants.

I waited eight months for an answer from Italy because of the Dublin law.

THE DUBLIN REGULATION: HUMAN BEINGS AS PING PONG BALLS

The Dublin law states that migrants must apply for asylum in the first EU country where has been fingerprinted. In my case, it is Italy, as in many others. As I was fingerprinted in Italy, France had to wait for the Italian answer and figure out whether they should deport me to Italy or let me continue the asylum claim made in France in December 2016. In January 2017, they told me that I was a Dubliner (i.e. I had been fingerprinted in Italy) and that, in the meantime, I had to go and sign once a month at the prefecture to certify my presence on French territory. After three months, the Italian answer came: I had to return to Italy. So, I appealed with the help of a lawyer. The court gave me another 45 days, which I had to sign at the prefecture twice in one week. In the meantime, the answer to the appeal came back: I could not stay in France. One day, I went to sign, and the police arrested me. They took me to prison in Lyon, and the next day, I left at 11 am to go to the airport. I arrived at the airport escorted by the police and in handcuffs as if I were a criminal. They put me on the plane going to Italy; at 1.30 pm I arrived in Cagliari, but the Italian police told me I couldn't stay in Italy and they put me on another flight to Bastia, Corsica, then back to France; there the French police were annoyed because they had just decreed my expulsion from France, so they put me on another plane at 4.30 pm, and I arrived in Rome at 5.30 pm. In all these days, they gave me some pasta with tuna, some bread and a glass of water. I only ate twice in 3 days. The same for all three days, I had handcuffs, and they took them off when I arrived in Rome.

We were ten and waited to know what they had to do with us. I

had the asylum application documents in Italy, and the comrades helped me understand what I had to do. The lawyer told me they couldn't detain me but had to release me. That was not the case because, after a few hours that I was at the airport, the police left, locking us inside the small room they used to do the controls and telling us that we would sleep there. It was so cold because there was no air conditioning. I didn't have any clothes with me because I couldn't take anything in and couldn't ask for a blanket because they had left us alone. Later, a man opened the room, but we still couldn't leave the airport. Tourists and European people were going in and out, but we couldn't even go in to smoke a cigarette. I spent the night in there. The following morning, some policemen arrived, and I showed my C3 (the asylum application sheet). After a while, they gave me a ticket to Turin, where I had applied for asylum in 2015. It's funny that, after having threatened me so terribly during the deportation by denying me food and information and keeping me handcuffed, they then paid me a 92 euro ticket to go to Turin.

In my opinion, the fact that I then had to wait so long to be heard by the Commission that decides on residence permits is related to the fact that I lived for a year and a half in Ventimiglia and fought with the no borders people who have been criminalised and pointed at more than once as terrorists. They always make migrants who rebel against their conditions pay by waiting for the Commission, by detention in the CIEs or by expulsion from the territory.

RESISTING THE BORDER



DEMONSTRATION AGAINST BORDER CLOSURES.



SEEKING SHELTER ON THE BEACH DURING 'VIA TENDA' EVICTION, VENTIMIGLIA 2016.

EVEN IF YOU ARE ACQUITTED YOU ARE STILL INVOLVED

We know that migration today is considered an «emergency phenomenon». A noun – «phenomenon» – that encapsulates them as something that appears «outside the ordinary» and an adjective – «emergency» – that calls for its «exceptional» intervention (Agamben 2003, Dal Lago and Palidda 2010). Even though a state of emergency proclaimed to deal with a «sudden phenomenon» that tends to be dangerous or catastrophic, the actions are protracted in time and become procedures, expanding their sphere of influence and power over different spheres and sectors of life. It is also what happens in Ventimiglia, where *«individual subjectivities can thus be transformed into statistically homogeneous ‘populations’, individual ‘territories’ can be included in a hierarchical and militarized control, and, ultimately, biopolitical instances of life protection can be reversed into tanatopolitics, that is, in the return of the sovereign exercise of the right to give death to those who would claim to exceed their boundaries and biography or to claim to their territory functions differently from those assigned to them»*(Ant. Petrillo 2010 and 2018 in Social Cartographies). In an attempt to «govern some living people», nation-states have thus enunciated life-or-death judgments on an increasingly large part of the population. Be it the migrant ones forcibly detained in «reception» or detention devices, repatriated, seized on rescue ships, dead in the Mediterranean or Libyan detention camps or borders; be it that of precarious workers and female workers not only exploited and exploited by the logics of neoliberal capitalism but also affected by repression during protest initiatives for the working conditions in which they forced to work; both of inhabitants of

areas at high risk of disease, pollution or earthquakes and generally of health and environmental disasters; and of solidarity-minded, anti-fascist citizens and citizens opposed to the logics of domination and racist and sexist laws. Deconstructing the dominant discourses on the «migration phenomenon» means unveiling the techniques of governance that the neoliberal system has first experimented on that portion deemed insignificant of «noncitizens» and then acted it out undisturbed on those it recognizes or identifies as «citizens». One thinks of the Decree Law known as the Minniti Decree, among various novelties, introduces the Urban Daspo to remove undesirable subjects from «sensitive area». There are obvious similarities between the measure to remove any poor or dangerous person regardless of whether he/she is a citizen or not and the "removal" of indiscriminately regular or irregular foreign men and women from border areas such as Ventimiglia to hotspots in southern Italy or containers arranged in the border; similarities between the "foglio di via" (of fascist memory) given to so many European citizens during border struggles with that given to detained, rejected and confined migrants. Through the category of "social dangerousness," the security regime allows the implementation of complex discourses and practices through which it is possible to dislocate populations and territories according to specific hazard classes.

Within a discourse on degradation and decorum very dear to the public administration of Ventimiglia, on which we have already written an article entitled "Immigration: degradation is clean streets and humanity reduced to garbage" that associates immigration, marginality and criminality, we cannot fail to mention the latest strategy devised by the prefectural commissioner of Ventimiglia De Lucia, the current acting mayor after the fall of the Scullino administration. The prefect issued yet another "anti-bivouac" ordinance in late March 2023. The history of Ventimiglia's last few years is littered with ordinances against "degradation," think only of Mayor Ioculano's infamous one that forbade giving food to migrants by fining – those who broke it – with hefty penalties or the countless ordinances to clear encampments in the Roja River. In the latter case, the situation is paradigmatic of the process of criminalization to which migrant people are to be submitted: on the one hand, the prefecture of Imperia officially admits for the first time that a reception camp will not be reopened for people in

transit, thus condemning them to the street; on the other hand, and at the same time, Commissioner De Lucia issues a ban on sleeping and eating in the street, and recalling precisely the Minniti decree, promises Daspo and expulsions to those who will not comply with the ordinance and threatens expulsions and arrests in case of violation of the daspo.

Therefore, the punitive state's solution is to remove and, where possible, erase. In this drift, the use and abuse of algorithms is now as widespread as in marketing. One thinks of the systematic use of algorithms to assess the vulnerability levels of asylum seekers that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) uses for access to humanitarian corridors: a cross-referencing of data, emptied of any subjective content, that once entered into a computer will draw up the ranking of who to «let live and let die» and especially the conditions under which this will happen. Vulnerabilities disappear upon the arrival of migrant people in Ventimiglia who become dangerous enemies to contain, and the best way to do this and gain is to militarize the border or set up emergency transit centres. Indeed, even though the latest political beats of local institutions have chosen the path of physically removing people on the move from urban space, for years, the containers of the so-called campo Roja have functionally contributed to ghettoizing migrants on the one hand and enriching the border's military machine on the other.

In this order of discourse, another similarity between emergency management techniques in "reception" devices for migrants and devices for citizens displaced by natural disasters or catastrophes where the economic and humanitarian actors are the same, where the containers are the same, and where the same is the management practices of humanity becomes evident. That is what was seen after the L'Aquila earthquake, even earlier with the one in Irpinia (A. Petrillo, in Palidda, 2018), to cope with the situation of the Morandi Bridge collapse in Genoa, and with the transit camp in Ventimiglia run by the Italian Red Cross. The first among them is the existence of a catastrophic event, such as a war, an earthquake, a «misfortune» (as the collapse of the Morandi Bridge was defined) or a critical situation (such as the «migrant emergency in Ventimiglia»), which, however, is immediately depoliticized. It is to allow humanitarian intervention (i.e., the second key element) since it is «the only one capable of taking care of the victims». The last necessary factor is that it is far away, on

the fringes of social life, but also of life in general. Again, the "emergency" reception camp for migrant people in Ventimiglia, which opened between 2016 and 2020, adhered to the necessary characteristics of isolation and segregation.



WRITINGS IN THE STREET IN VENTIMIGLIA AGAINST BORDERS.

FROM THE RIGHT TO EMIGRATE TO THE CRIME OF EMIGRATING

If you cross Ventimiglia and stop to observe what is happening around you, you necessarily think about what turns 'our' right to emigrate into 'their' crime of emigrating. Least not until 'our' right to emigrate also becomes 'aiding and abetting', when it is done together, with people who do not seem to have that possibility, as the numerous accusations and trials for aiding and abetting that in recent years, have affected activists and solidarity-minded people who have helped people in difficulty in Ventimiglia, Trieste, Briançon and in general along the borders of access to Fortress Europe tell us. Various sources claim that the right to migrate was theorised by Western political philosophy at the origins of the modern age, with Thomas Hobbes in his studies on the right of nature for the preservation of the life that each human being has naturally, just by the fact of existing. History seems to finalise it, especially with the conquests of the New World and the need to define a clear line of demarcation between who usurps whom and, above all, who has the power to do so. At the administrative level, permission to leave the nation-state territory was, and still is, tied to the possession of a document for which there is, however, a 'casuistry' of impediments to the issue. To obtain a passport, like an identity card, is an impaired right because it is subject to the assessment of the competent authority. For example, the judiciary and/or the police can, in some circumstances, «assign to compulsory residence or prohibition of movement» – see 1Daspo'. The root of so-called illegal immigration is the policy of European states that have the power to decide who is allowed to exercise the right to move and who

is not. The zero point of emigration crime could be said to be the institution of the 'temporary stay centres' established by the Turco-Napolitano law no. 40 of 1998 and renamed 'identification and expulsion centres' by law no. 125 of 2008. Because with this law, for the first time since the racial laws of 1938, not a fact but a status was penalised. Jurists teach us that this happened in violation of all the basic principles of the rule of law in criminal matters: firstly of the principle of legality, by which one can only be punished for what one has done and not for what one is, for unlawful deeds and not for one's identity; secondly, the principle of equality, which excludes any discrimination «of personal and social conditions» and that of the (equal) dignity of persons; finally, the principles of offensiveness and guilt, given that the lack or even the loss of a residence permit following, for example, dismissal, is not at all harmful behaviour and less so is it attributable to the responsibility tout court of the immigrant person, whose only fault is to be a foreigner irregularly resident in Italy.

Many Italians know nothing about the reality that entering Europe regularly if you belong to certain countries, is almost impossible. Every year, a ranking of passports is drawn up, from the most powerful to the worthless. It is called the Henley Passport Index, and in the latest report of 2022, it appears that the most powerful passports are those of Japan – whose citizens have free access to 193 countries – followed by South Korea, Singapore, and the United Arab Emirates, closely trailed by European countries, including Italy, whose citizens have free access to 189 countries, not counting the Schengen area. Of course, not all citizens of the countries where we can travel enjoy the same free movement reciprocity. Persons holding a Nigerian passport, which we know is the most populated country in Africa, have free access to 45 countries, which is not even 20% of the world. The lowest places in the ranking belong to Somalia, Yemen, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, countries in conflict and where people live in prison.

Borders are not only between states and in territorial waters, but they also take the form of embassies, consulates, regulations, decrees, the restriction of human mobility, and even access to the Campo Roja in Ventimiglia where it was a badge, 'in exchange' for fingerprints, that allowed or denied access to water, food, a cot. Everything established to contain, regulate, manage and channel the 'migratory flows' has been functional to limit, rule, handle and canalise the principle of

denying freedom of movement. Just spend a day at the Ventimiglia border to notice how the migrants' journey can only take place through policies and spaces of 'non-freedom' where it is the state itself that affirms the principle of the non-existence of freedom. At most, it can be allowed, authorised, refused and, even where repressed, justified for 'security' to contain the 'outlaws'. Today, the possibilities for regularly entering Italy after authorisation by the competent authorities are for visits, business or tourism, study or training, work, and family reunions. The admissions for work reasons take place through the Decreto Flussi – an administrative act by which the government establishes each year how many (and also which) non-EU citizens may enter Italy for work reasons. And here is the threshold of the legitimacy of economic migration to Italy and which workers the frontier opens for basically labourers, «colf and 'badanti» [N.d.T. ladies providing care for elderly persons who are not fully or partially self-sufficient]. The «chosen ones» must often belong to nationalities defined a priori. One would think that the policy was to plan the growth of immigrants sans papier to use them as a reserve army in exploited labour. Most workers exploited in the fields or in the logistics sector scattered across Italy from north to south and from east to west are foreigners with documents for international protection and the like or political asylum seekers. The same can be said today for the presence at the Ventimiglia border: many foreigners have a recognised residence document but do not possess a passport to cross the boundary and are not allowed a European travel permit. Some have been doubted and rejected by other European countries, who are waiting to receive accommodation in reception centres for asylum seekers and refugees; others, on the other hand, are those who have crossed the border overland and come from the Balkan route. The article entitled 'Balkan Route. Jackals of Europe' recounts a trip of the Blog Words on the Border's editorial staff in November 2019 to Bosnia following the stories of people they met in Ventimiglia who travelled that route. Together with them, people who ask for political asylum, but the wait to enter reception is long because first «they must enter» those who survived the Mediterranean. The testimonies collected in Ventimiglia include young people who, tired of waiting, study how to return to southern Italy, throw themselves into the sea and pretend to be shipwreck survivors to enter the reception circuit.



STREET WRITING IN VENTIMIGLIA AGAINST BORDERS.

THE SCHENGEN PRINCIPLE OF FREE MOVEMENT

A SAFE SPACE BUT ONLY BECAUSE IT IS CLOSED

The Schengen area immediately presented itself in the European context as a place for the liberalisation of movement and the abolition of internal borders. We should have perhaps focused more on the emphasis placed on internal borders to grasp the discourse that obscured the need to build external borders. There is nothing secret: the Chamber of Deputies recounts how, during the 1980s, a debate started on the meaning of free movement of persons. The summary was that for some member states, the concept of free movement was to apply exclusively to European citizens. On the other hand, other member states wanted free movement for all, with the consequent abolition of border controls. Given the impossibility of reaching an agreement, France, Germany, Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, in 1985 agreed to create a border-free territory between them so-called Schengen area. The name comes from the Luxembourg city, where this agreement is signed. They were to adopt joint regulation on visas, the right of asylum and external border controls to allow the free movement of persons within the signatory countries without disturbing public order.

To reconcile freedom and security the Schengen Information System (SIS) was developed, a sophisticated database allowing the competent authorities of the Schengen States to exchange information on the identity of specific categories of persons and goods.

More than 30 years later, we observe how this space of freedom is an instrument for selective, restrictive and security practices. The "right" to move freely, which Italians and Europeans believe they pos-

sess as a universal right in several countries and the Schengen area, can be revoked or subjected to particular restrictions on individual citizens who no longer have a right to the document. We think of what happened at the border of Ventimiglia, Bardonecchia and Brenner. There, citizens were forbidden to cross the border: some received a «foglio di via» [N.d.T. a document prohibiting the return to the city indicated by this], others arrested, opening a political case on French police raids on Italian territory. An episode that found widespread media coverage precisely because the incident highlighted the contradictions and limitations of the concept of the Schengen area, revealing how precarious the very principle of free movement is. So, as we said, no surprise.

In *The Defence White Paper, the Transformation of the military-industrial Complex and Collaborations with the University*, Daniele Ratti, already in 2018, explained very well how government agendas had been working for years to use the various armed corps in the management of "internal warfare" against border activism, territorial and labour defence and today we see the effects of such investments. Before, these were experiments declared necessary because of the danger of terrorism, besides protecting European borders from invasion. These justified the quantitative and qualitative increase in the use of police and military force on the streets and frontiers. In Ventimiglia, it went so far as to set up a special brigade of Franco-Italian police inter-force guarding the station and the streets of the coastal town.

When the Schengen area was no longer enough to govern migratory flows, European states began to externalise borders by making agreements with dictatorships and financing them with so-called Memoranda of Understanding. Italy has been funding the Libyan coastguard since 2017: practically Italy is paying for the rejections of thousands of people, many of them minors, to countries considered unsafe. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation updated the list of safe countries of origin for applicants for international protection with the decree of 17 March 2023. According to Legislative Decree No. 25/2008, «a non-EU Member State may be considered a safe country of origin if, based on its legal system, the application of the law within a democratic system and the general political situation, it can prove that, on a general and consistent basis, there are no acts of persecution [...] nor torture or other forms of inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, nor danger due to in-

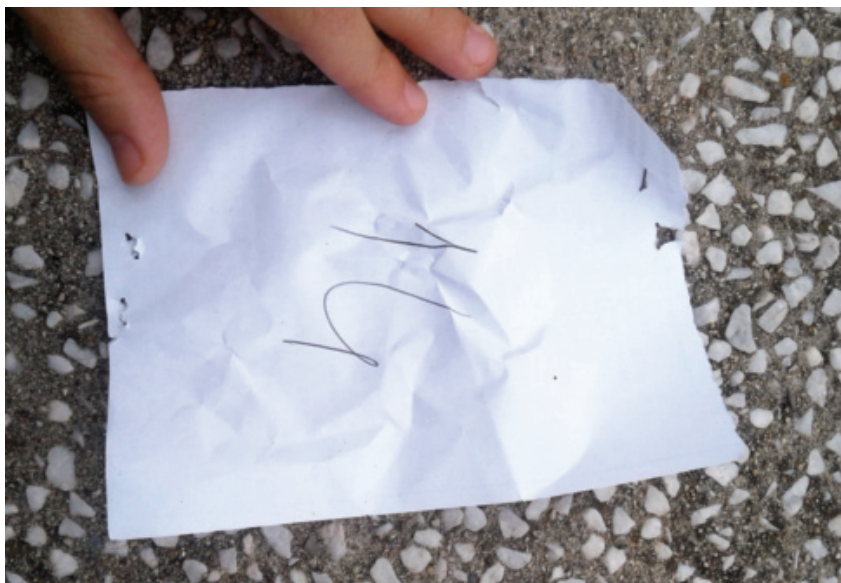
discriminate violence in situations of internal or international armed conflict. The designation of a country as a safe country of origin may be made by excluding parts of the territory or categories of persons».

A citizen of a country considered safe can still apply for and obtain international protection in Italy, with differences in the procedure compared to citizens of other countries. For example, the priority examination of the application and the possibility that it will have to declare it manifestly unfounded if the applicant does not invoke serious reasons for considering his/her stay in that country unsafe due to the particular situation. The updated list of safe countries – the reasons for which are not even known – includes Nigeria, Gambia and Côte d'Ivoire (as well as Georgia), with the latter being the main nationality from which people from the Mediterranean route have come in recent months. These policies are not only failing to govern migration flows. Besides causing death, they are fuelling economic dependency, corruption and the devastation of territories. The Zambian economist Dambisa Moyo has written several books, many of which have also been translated into Italian, on European neo-colonialist policies in Africa, among which *The Charity that Kills* and *The Madness of the West* are worth reading to understand what the externalisation of borders has caused in terms of human lives, the dispossession of resources, and the responsibility of the great European and world powers on the African continent.

RESISTING THE BORDER



MANIFESTAZIONE PER LA LIBERTÀ DI CIRCOLAZIONE.



PEOPLE SENT BACK FROM FRANCE TO VENTIMIGLIA ARE IDENTIFIED WITH A NUMBER, WHICH IS ALSO AFFIXED TO THE LUGGAGE TAKEN FROM THE PEOPLE WHILE DETAINED IN CONTAINERS AWAITING REJECTION.

IS THE GENEVA CONVENTION STILL VALID?

As of today, it is undeniable that the request for political asylum is the only legally recognised, albeit racialised, condition for those who 'land' voluntarily or involuntarily (because forced, trafficked or «Dublinated») on Italian territory. At a time when Western states have prepared a law that sets boundaries concerning what should be the right to mobility and does not provide regular entry channels (excluding the "armoured" humanitarian canals and those of labour flows), the person who emigrates tries to interpret and correspond to one of those categories of vulnerability provided for by the law, forcing him/her to take on that role to guarantee a minimum of legitimacy. Following this discourse, since the only possibility the migrant person has to try to get recognised as a rightful subject is to turn to the only currently legitimised device, i.e. political asylum, we have attempted to understand the condition that allows him to do so, namely the 1951 «Geneva Convention», written after the Second World War following the genocide of the Jews. The political framework in which the Geneva Convention has conceived appears highly flawed by a kind of ethno-centric universalism born basically to govern economic and political interests: the UN countries that met in Geneva to define the figure of the refugee focused on «white, male and anti-communist exile» (Chimni B.S, 1998). It is clear enough that today, the result of a negotiation is no longer so adherent to the different contexts of origin and survival of people who emigrate to Europe. It seems more that the various national and international legal systems need to keep the right of asylum, first and foremost the Geneva Convention, to confirm their

democratic and liberal façade so that they can act undisturbed in concluding agreements and protocols to develop extraterritorial policies that allow states to escape the control of the principle of equality, and governmental organisations – such as UNCHR and IOM – to justify their intervention within crisis areas where they institutionalise dangerous states of legal subordination and economic dependency (Agier, 2002). In discussing the refugee issue, Bauman denounces the presence of humanitarian workers who, while saving the consciences of Western populations, contribute to segregating refugees in spaces located on the margins of social life, leaving them, in his opinion, without any realistic prospect of integration within a new social body. Trying to unravel the games of 'true and false' that have contributed to generating categories, agreements, policies and interests, we should remember that the discursive construction that sees the economic migrant as opposed to the political refugee, and therefore not deserving of recognition according to the dictates of the Geneva Convention, is functional to the legitimisation of selective and restrictive policies in the governance of migration. Let us take as an example the data on the recognition of political asylum for Syrians, indisputable political refugees. In Italy, all Syrians received the highest form of protection, while in Germany, many testimonies tell of the recognition of subsidiary protection or the granting of a humanitarian protection title. In other words, the refugee could be considered an economic migrant in Germany and an 'asylum seeker' in Italy.

Migrants are well aware of these different practices and thus try to adopt diverse tactics to achieve their goals. Who knows the techniques of migration management better than they do? For example, regarding the role of UNHCR in Libya, since the autumn of 2021, a strong and equally forcibly repressed protest has arisen from migrant people imprisoned in Libya. They have created a very active collective on social media called Refugees in Libya, which is often blacked out because of the truthfulness of what they tell and denounce about the role of UNHCR. We think it is significant that more people know about their struggle and give voice to it.

For this reason is why we wonder whether the Geneva Convention is still valid in recognising the only form of protection to which people can turn, especially nowadays, given the conditions in which they are have to live. Apart from all moralising, one must ask oneself: is poverty a well-founded fear to set out on a journey? Is it not a condition

from which anyone would like to escape? Psychiatrist Summerfield wondered: 'But are we saying that not being able to feed our child is not a trauma? Poverty is a trauma not to be mentioned because if a refugee mentions economic factors among those that drove him to emigrate, his becomes an economic migration, not recognised among the persecutory elements of the Geneva Convention.



PAF (POLICE AUX FRONTIÈRES) OFFICES AT THE MENTON BORDER, WHERE MIGRANTS CAUGHT AT THE BORDER ARE DETAINED BEFORE BEING SENT BACK TO ITALY.

RESISTING THE BORDER



MIGRANTS IN THE DISTRIBUTION CAR PARK IN VIA TENDA.



PROTEST IN MENTON AGAINST BORDER CLOSURE.

AGAINST THE DUBLIN REGULATION

TAKING THE STONES OUT OF OUR SHOES
AND MARCHING AGAINST

In Ventimiglia, we witness «controlled mobility» for strategic purposes confirmed by the Dublin Regulation. Showing its true nature is indispensable to understanding the political direction Europe is taking about immigration, grasping its strategies and identifying the rhetoric on which it feeds.

Established in 1990 and entered into force in '97 for the first 12 signatory states, the Dublin Regulation aimed to harmonise asylum policies to ensure adequate refugee protection. The issue of state 'competence' did not arise because, let us remember, it was designed primarily for applicants for protection from Eastern European countries. Therefore, in 2003, it was amended by the Dublin II Regulation, which established the responsibility of the Member State to examine the asylum application of the applicant's first country of entry. It defines this: if a person applies for asylum in one EU country while illegally crossing the border to another country, he/she must return to the first State. To ensure efficient control, was set up the EURODAC, a Europe-wide database of fingerprints for those wishing to apply for asylum and those entering EU territory irregularly. Following the 'refugee crisis' of 2011 with the North African emergency and the war in Syria, the Dublin regulation saw a further evolution, becoming Dublin III. The general principle on which is based is that any asylum application must be examined by a single Member State, the one responsible: "responsibility for examining an application for international protection lies with the Member State, on whose territory was submitted the asylum application". ASGI points out how the fashionable

term «irregular entry» disappears – so the competence will apply to a much broader «casuistry» than the emergency arrivals/landings.

Fundamentally, one of the main objectives of the Dublin regulation is to prevent asylum seekers from «asylum shopping», i.e. making applications in more than one member state. All this is to reduce «secondary movements» of asylum seekers who try to arrive in a country other than the one where they are 'required' to make their application.

In the summer of 2015, during the occupation of the Balzi Rossi in Ventimiglia, the first migrants began to return. After French border barricading, they were bounced back to Ventimiglia because they had of Italian receipts or train tickets.

The European Commission, meanwhile, issued a letter of formal notice to Italy and Greece for their failure to identify themselves at the border and to 'encourage' the practice of redistributing refugees from Italy and Greece to the rest of Europe by September 2017. Italy adopted the proposal to the letter: overnight, things changed for all and sundry. Several times, we happened to hear stories and see signs of the use of force in the taking of fingerprints, as several times recounted by the solidarity doctors present in Ventimiglia. Specifically, when a migrant arrives by sea, he is identified and, regardless of his migration route, applies for political asylum to avoid being rejected and/or repatriated. Even when the asylum seeker applies for 'preference' over the country where he would like to seek asylum, he is still bound to a position of either 'reward' or 'concession' and not of choice. At that point, it becomes Italy's responsibility - this is what the Dublin regulation provides for. The migrant who decides to cross the border and try to continue his migration path reaches another European country where he applies for political asylum.

Assuming he succeeds in doing this, he will become «Dublin competent» – using legal language – if he/she makes his first asylum request in Italy. A special commission (in Rome: it takes about two years to resolve the competence of the individual applicant) decides the fate: the applicant must bring various pieces of evidence to prove that he/she has applied for political asylum in a country other than Italy. This procedure takes different amounts of time in different countries – it tends to take between one and three years. When the Commission «dissolves» the Dublin case, it can mean that the application is accepted. The person may continue to live in the country where he/she lives, sometimes for years, or be forced to leave it, usually with forced

accompaniment directly to the State of first application, which in our case is Italy.

WHAT HAPPENS IN PRACTICE?

The rejections of people from France to Ventimiglia, the so-called pushback, is a tried and unrelenting procedure that sees a permanent reverse flow 'back'. In 2022, on average, eighty rejections per day have been calculated, which means around thirty thousand re-admissions in a single year and on this precise stretch of the border alone. Re-admissions affect not only people who have just tried to cross the frontier and got caught by border controls but also those who were able to reach their destination in France a long time ago. People 'dubinate' precisely who, after years of waiting to apply for asylum in France because of fingerprints forcibly taken in Italy, is dumped at the Italian border.

Walking down the street, you can meet Zam again, an Afghan man of about 40 years old whom you met in 2015 during the months of occupation of Balzi Rossi. The Americans had promised him that they would take him to Europe if he helped them, but this was not the case. He crossed the Balkans to Ventimiglia before he organized to join his family in Germany. The Dublin system unfortunately pinched him: 'You were in Italy, go back to Italy'. After years, you see him in Ventimiglia, forced to leave Germany, holding the photo of his three-month-old son, an alcoholic, lost on the banks of the Roja. While waiting for the transfer of asylum seekers from the state where they apply to the country deemed competent (so-called Dublin transfer), the use of detention, the separation of families and the denial of a real possibility to appeal against transfers is unacceptable. The story of Margaret - holder of a residence permit for subsidiary protection - recounts the violence the regime experienced in various attempts to reunite with her 12-year-old daughter. During the rescue at sea, mother and daughter were placed on two different ships reaching different ports, and the search for each other and vice versa was in vain: both believed each other was dead. Only when the child, after months of vain requests, was able to prove that she had an older brother in Germany was she allowed to be moved. Margaret thus knew that her daughter was alive, but it took about a year for the bureaucracy to reunite them. She recounts with anger, pain and joy how she had arrived at the Austrian border to take back her child, whom they did

not want to entrust to her as she was now 'Germany's responsibility' according to the Dublin Regulation. This story has a happy ending: now they live together, but is it possible to accept that this is a 'Regulation' that decides people's fates? How many stories have happy endings?

Now, a reform of the Dublin regulation is under discussion to arrive at "IV". The proposal intends to define a list of safe countries willing to receive asylum seekers, establishing a ceiling of resettlement beneficiaries at the EU level, where, however, individual states would remain basically free to propose the extent of their participation. Excluded from all these assumptions are those who have 'attempted to enter the territory of the Member States irregularly in the five years preceding resettlement'. It clearly stated that "the obligation for the asylum seeker to apply in the state of first irregular entry or regular residence, under penalty of being transferred to the country of first entry and no possibility for the applicant to influence the choice of destination'. That is one of the many violations of the European and Italian systems in the management of 'migratory flows".

WOMEN IN TRANSIT IN VENTIMIGLIA

AMONG PASSEUR, MADAMS, ABUSER AND POLICE

For too many years now, we have been witnessing the consolidation of the trafficking and exploitation network of women in Ventimiglia, which has become over time intertwined with the local mafia. We first reported on this in September 2017 with the article entitled 'How trafficking was allowed to create the network of exploitation in Ventimiglia. Trafficking and the Mafia, Trafficking is Mafia', where we traced the stages and roles of organised crime running trafficking. We talked about the passeurs, the sponsors, the trolleys, the madame of how and by whom the women get recruited, and what the network of exploitation to which they go becomes. The article explains how to make women more aware and autonomous about their desire to migrate or to stop and rest, how to relate to them by trying to overcome, both physically and emotionally, the male encirclement in which they find themselves and in which we are too when we try to go beyond it. Today, in 2023, Ventimiglia is entirely run by traffickers, who act undisturbed. We had foreseen how this was going to happen: when action is taken on containment and not on prevention, and repression becomes a tool of governance to eliminate undesirables, when the perception of security becomes built on 'categories' that the state imposes as genuine, but which it constructs, we deliberately leave room for action to the mafias that inexplicably act undisturbed. We had witnessed the most creative and resilient self-manifestations of migrant people who, through garrisons, self-organisations and encampments, had been able to find spaces and times to think independently about their migration path. Even in the last solidarity garrison, which the collec-

tives active in the Ventimiglia area – Kesha Niya and 20K – had organised at the border of Ponte San Luigi at the rejections from France, it was possible to meet women with sons and daughters from different countries, who had met and gathered along the journey determined to maintain their autonomy. Although they were approached several times by groups of men, many of whom were known as passeurs, the women, feeling safe in that self-managed space with their female companions, pushed them away by understanding their goals and only related between women and with women.

Instead, in the various institutional places where people were more or less formally «housed», women were always at the mercy of males who trafficked them or would have trafficked them. In the years when Camp Roja was open, women told us that they did not sleep at night for fear of being raped, sold, or of not finding their younger sisters or daughters when they woke up.

The impossibility of having a space of social and political agility, added to the continuous deportations between 2016 and 2020 from the coastal city to hotspots in southern Italy, forced men and women to turn to traffickers who, like alligators, waited on the riverbank for their prey. Moving south exhausted the people on the journey from not only a psychological and physical standpoint, but also from a relational one, going on to destroy the alliances and friendships built along the journey. The economic aspect was also undermined, leading many of them to spend on trains and transportation back to the north all the savings they had set aside to independently manage their migration route to their destination, thus cyclically being stuck for weeks working in southern fields or forced into prostitution. The vulnerability and blackmailability of migrant people, combined with their inability to self-organize and choose their own travel strategies, allowed human trafficking to grow rapidly in those years. Meanwhile, the racket was able to gain much more agility and strength in intercepting mainly women to whom it «proposed» loans and trips to be repaid through prostitution and exploitation. Instead, in the various institutional places where people were more or less formally 'housed', women were always at the mercy of males who trafficked them or would have trafficked them. In the years when Camp Roja was open, women told us that they did not sleep at night for fear of being raped, sold, or not finding their younger sisters or daughters when they woke up.

The impossibility of having a space for social and political agility, added to the continuous deportations between 2016 and 2020 from the coastal city to the hotspots in southern Italy, forced men and women to turn to traffickers who, like alligators, waited on the riverbank for their prey. The journeys to the south exhausted the travellers, not only psychologically and emotionally, but also in terms of relationships, destroying the alliances and friendships built along the journey. The financial aspect was also affected: many of them spent on trains and transport to return to the North all the savings needed to get to their destination and were thus cyclically stuck for weeks working in the fields in the south of Italy or forced into prostitution. The vulnerability and blackmail of migrants, combined with their inability to organise themselves and choose their travel strategies, allowed human trafficking to increase rapidly in those years. In the meantime, the racket was able to gain much more agility and strength in intercepting mainly women to whom it 'proposed' loans and trips to repay through prostitution and exploitation. Trafficking has been fuelled in this way: by women who get sold and exploited, by men being deported to the south and by minors being sent back to Italy from France.

THE PLACES OF WOMEN TRAFFICKING IN VENTIMIGLIA

The passeurs and traffickers continue to act undisturbed under the eyes of the Italian and French military, who guard the 'sensitive' areas of Ventimiglia. The station is the primary recruitment site for women attempting to cross the border. Everything happens there, all the organised crime actors stationed there, even though the institutions repeatedly do their utmost in a propaganda media portrayal that sees the forces of law and order engaged in periodic raids and large-scale repulses of dead tracks. In the station, there is the smuggler, the passer, the madam, the controller and the police, many and all. While railwaymen and workers move between platforms, men in uniform station themselves assembled for the most on platform 3, where trains to and from France pass. The attitude between the Italian and French police seems highly uncooperative and, at times, almost hostile. The one busy directing traffic for those arriving on trains from France, the other busy controlling those about to go to France. But both are absolutely interchangeable in the methodology of racial profiling, in the choice of whom to control and in the aggressive and repressive man-

ner of their actions. The trains leaving for France are stationed for the time necessary to allow the police to carry out what they call controls and what have been described several times, even with video testimonies, as true aggressions (even by Striscia la notizia in a report in 2021: *Migrants beaten by the police on the train to Ventimiglia*). Track 3 is also the title of an article published in *Parole sul confine* in April 2021, where we described how – following the indications that an Italian policeman gave to the migrants as if he were a steward – racial and gender profiling was taking place. The policeman pointed out to the woman who had been let off the train a spot at the end of platform 3. Following that indication, we also came across several groups of mainly male migrants sitting on the truncated platforms at Ventimiglia station. Among them were some women: Nigerians with Nigerians, Somalis with Somalis, and so on along the tracks as if they were borders between countries. It is hard to write down what one witnesses because it hurts, but it is pretty clear that some of the women who reach Ventimiglia come by trafficking to be 'chosen' by the madams for sexual exploitation in Italy or France; some of them become prostitutes on the spot at low prices for migrants in transit, others in flats for indoor prostitution. Chatting with some of the women we met at Ventimiglia station before the traffickers intercepted them, we discovered that some of them had left the Cas (Naples, Bologna, Rome) where the racket was exploiting them. Therefore, they had entrusted themselves to other men who, through Facebook contacts, had directed them to Ventimiglia, claiming that it could be a safe place.

In recent months, following the installation of the new government, several repressive operations have been organised, as we said at the beginning, both at the station and in various areas of Ventimiglia: the apparent objective would be precisely to undermine the stronghold of human trafficking that proliferated in the streets of the border town to the point of controlling every aspect of migratory life that passes through it. If on the one hand, a spectacle involving raids and arrests for the benefit of the citizens of Ventimiglia, who are clamouring for 'security and decorum', and their French colleagues who are asking Italy to protect their border, on the other hand, the banal truth is that on this side of the frontier no one really cares to dismantle the trafficking networks. It does not suit the institutions, which otherwise the shadowy work of the smugglers would have to deal with an even more saturated city of stranded people, which explains why Italian

uniforms often turn away from the work of the smugglers. For the same reasons, it does not suit the majority of Ventimiglia's population either, whose hatred for migrants is only matched by a desire to see them all disappear as quickly as possible. Finally, it does not suit the local mafia, the powerful and equally entrenched Nrangheta, which intersects with foreign mafias and enriches itself with the lucrative business of exploiting migrants. These have no choice but to pay and entrust their hopes and salvation to the same people on whom their exploitation and abuse also depend.

«There is nothing left to say but only to show» – Benjamin noted of Baudelaire's Paris – «in the city in which all the fibres of European history gather, an infinite mass of objects, places and social figures emerge in which the future course of modernity unfolds mysteriously».



A WOMAN AGREES TO BE PHOTOGRAPHED WHILE PROTECTING HER FACE



INDICATIONS IN SOLIDAL SPACES AGAINST TRAFFICKERS, RACISM AND SEXISM.

WHY IS NECESSARY TO BREACH THE BORDER

Restrictive and securitarian policies against migrants started in Europe long before the rise of sovereignty and populism. These manifest themselves in racist laws, wall-building, police and armies deployed at the borders to containment camps and agreements between states. The closing of ports, or the obstructionism to rescues at sea, did not come with the Meloni government today or Salvini in 2018, but with the sinking of the Albanian ship "Kater i Rades" in 1997 under the Prodi government, which went down in history as 'the Good Friday Tragedy'. Already at the time, the question arose as to how far the state could extend its power to justify sinking to protect its borders (81 people died, almost half of whom it never found). Today, states legally and politically produce social and territorial differences through frontiers; these allow them to capitalise and exploit resources, constantly reinforcing the ideological image of a world composed of nations and affirming the idea of the necessary national security to which the people who live there or transit there must constantly, necessarily and exclusively submit (De Genova, Nicholas and Martina Tazzioli, eds, 2016). Nowadays, we only hear 'we are at war'. Yes, but we have been for a long time: a war against migrant people, against those who support them, against those supporting them, who are exploited, underpaid and mistreated, against those who do not enjoy the accumulation of resources and capital. A war that crosses Sub-Saharan Africa, Yemen, reaches Palestine, Syria and the Democratic Confederation of Rojava, passing through Libya, where open-air prisons are the testing ground for European military capacity. We

are at war in the Mediterranean, which has become a mass grave not because of a natural disaster but because of the laws of the men in power. We are at war in Europe, where walls and barbed wire kill. We are at war in Bardonecchia, Calais, Como, Brenner, Lesbos, Ventimiglia, Gap. We are at war in the hotspots where migrants are locked up, as well as in the CAS, CARA, and CPR. We are also at war in the urban daspo in our cities, in the ordinances that forbid giving food to migrants or homeless people. We are at war in Rosarno, Saluzzo, Riace, Lodi. It is the war of the dead and maimed at the labour of the 46 victims of the Morandi Bridge in Genoa. A war that strikes migrants, homosexuals, women, anti-fascists, students and schoolgirls, massacred by the police in demonstrations and hit by repression. A war that strikes those who strike, those who fight, those who make blocks in the streets to defend the right to work and life. A war against those who resist and get treated like bandits in the name of building ties with those who oppose racial, homophobic, and sexist laws. Those who fight against the precariousness of work and life, against the Nazi-fascist drift that is taking on familiar guises.

The 'rule of law', still defended by the privileged part of the population, no longer exists. "The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that 'the state of exception' in which we now live is the rule. The concept of history to which we arrive must be consistent with this," Benjamin said. Only by deconstructing the history we have come to know written by the Western white man is it possible to re-appropriate 'our own of history' by fighting and revealing how the state of exception in which we navigate is masquerading as the 'rule of law'.

VENTIMIGLIA: HOW MANY PEOPLE ARE KILLED BY THE BORDER?

On 6 February 2014, around two hundred migrants attempted to cross the Spanish border at Tarajal Beach in Morocco to reach Ceuta. The Spanish Guardia Civil responded by firing tear gas and rubber bullets at the people in the water: 15 people were killed on the Spanish side alone, and an unknown number were missing. In February 2020, six years after the massacre, activists from various countries and families of the dead and missing organised the first commemorative action in Oujda, Morocco. Thus, 6 February became the annual symbolic day of struggle against the militarisation of borders, for the freedom to migrate and in memory of all those who died and disappeared because of frontiers.

In 2023, people in solidarity active between Ventimiglia and Nice answered the call. On Monday, 6 February 2023, various associations and individuals from Italy and France joined in a procession to denounce border violence and remember the people who died there. The demonstration ended in Italy in the area of Ponte San Ludovico. On 12 April 2017, in the large flowerbed in front of the border, the Ventimiglia municipality installed the work *The Third Paradise* by Michelangelo Pistoletto. A work composed of fifty large boulders placed at regular intervals on the lawn, a few metres from the border, in a reproduction of the symbol of infinity, however, drawn with three circles. While the two circles of infinity would represent the opposition of differences (according to the artist's words, the masculine and the feminine, freedom and responsibility, the 'I and you', the two opposite sides of the border, precisely), the innovation of the third circle in the

centre would indicate the synthesis and balance that can be re-generated from the meeting of the antipodes and lead to the overcoming of divisions. On the day of the inauguration, Pistoletto stated: «People seem not to be able to survive without dying before they have to, hence the need to create a symbol that evokes life, that usher in the time of a new civilisation of life and not death».

Therefore, the meaning of the work 'The Third Paradise' sounds like a sinister mockery: in the opposition between the two sides of the border, between you and the I, rather than the possibility of encounter and life, intolerance and death get cultivated. The border area between Ventimiglia and Menton is not a Third Paradise of freedom and responsibility but a dystopian hell-space with a perennial increase in discrimination and disqualification for migrant people. Since 2015, 43 people have died documented on this border, but it is sure to be many more. With no illusions about a paradise to come, during the commemoration, people in solidarity set up a memorial right in the middle of this triple infinity to witness the injustices and violence that the border continues to cause. People placed commemorative stones, placards and candles: the aim was that at least every victim would have a photo or a data to be remembered and leave a mark in the collective memory.

So, the years pass on the border. The first victim in 2023 was on 9 January: a body burnt on the roof of a train, with no age, no name and no country, which inaugurated the next 12 months of bloodshed at the border. The last casualty in 2022 was an underage Afghan boy (who declared himself 19 years old to the Italian authorities to remain 'free' to travel): Ahmed Safi died on 7 November, run over on the last stretch of Italian motorway by two cars and a lorry while trying to reach France. Before him was Omar Elkhoulou, who died on 16 June from a gunshot fired by French police at the van in which he was travelling, hidden with other migrants. Two Sri Lankan men run over on a motorway in April 2022. Talukdar Mohammad burnt on a train. Ghiyath Aljondi drowned at sea. Khan Shahzad died in the street in Ventimiglia. Rachid and Moussa Balde, Omoregie Osak Osakpolor and Hassan Cochare, Abdelaziz Haider, Conteh Saikou, Milet Tafamariam...

How many people have died between Ventimiglia and France?
How many more will die?

The destruction of these lives is attributable to the political and mi-

litary management of the border and to the tight controls by uniforms of both flags. On the Italian side, we have the Guardia di Finanza, state police, local police, border police, *polfer*, carabinieri, army and private security at the station in Ventimiglia. On the French side, there are police nationale, police aux frontieres, gendarmerie, CRS, army and French Foreign Legion. In addition to the checkpoints deployed at the border crossings and along the paths, the multi-force devices tried and tested in recent years for the management of the border territory must add to the precarious and dangerous situation of migrants. The extraordinary inter-force controls of the Imperia prefecture organised every two months in a blaze of media overexposure. The Italian-French "squadra mista" or "brigade mixte" are mixed police corps of the two countries engaged in joint patrols in the two neighbouring cities. Raids, racial discrimination and round-ups, as well as weapons and surveillance technology, make crossing the border extremely dangerous in the absence of regular European travel documents.

People have burnt to death on the roofs of trains or suffocated while hiding in electrical compartments on board.

People have died run over by trains while walking along the tracks of the two railways that lead to France (the rails that run to Menton and the Côte d'Azur, or those that climb the Val Roja and cross a piece of French territory before returning to Italy at Cuneo). People die when they are run over by cars and trucks on the motorway as they walk to France, or they fall off cliffs trying to cross the border over mountain passes. Many people have tried to commit suicide: some have succeeded, and many meet a slower death, hiding for months or years on the road until they die. The number of people who died in the mountains is the most difficult to reconstruct. The same problem concerns the number of people who drowned because they were hit by cars and trucks on the motorway as they walked to reach France or they fell off cliffs trying to cross the border over the mountain passes. The mountains and the sea hide the bodies, erasing the traces of the murders from the frontier.

Perhaps it will never be possible to give a name to all the people who died in Ventimiglia. However, it is necessary to oppose the oblivion of conscience and memory. It is not only a matter of rejecting growing contemporary anaesthesia to the violence and intolerance that surrounds us: it is humanly healthy and just to restore dignity to every

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single life broken in the name of European 'security'. However, one must also ask about the bill for each of these deaths: each time a person injured by cliffs or electrocuted on trains ends up in an Italian or French hospital, some responsibilities ought to go undercover, uncertainties or total obscurity that need to be clarified.

People do not die alone: people are killed by the border regime.



COMMEMORATION FOR PEOPLE WHO DIED CROSSING THE BORDER.



II MEMORIAL FOR THE VICTIMS OF THE BORDER. VENTIMIGLIA, 2023.

BOUNDARY DISEASE

The health of travelling migrants is a fundamental issue: people on the move are often young and in good health and are a resource for families. They represent a resource for families. If they manage to arrive at their destination after journeys that scar bodies and minds, they will frequently encounter border disease: it starts with the lack of the so-called prerequisites of health, i.e. those conditions and resources that must necessarily exist to fulfil the fundamental right to live in health. These prerequisites are largely disregarded at the Ventimiglia border: having access to adequate housing, proper nutrition, drinking water, sanitation and an environment that, if not welcoming, is at least not hostile, are all conditions opposed by the various administrations that have succeeded one another in the border town, regardless of political colour.

It is a real political strategy theorised by some institutional actors, as demonstrated by the declarations of the mayor (2014/2019) of Ventimiglia Ioculano (PD) during a meeting with NGO workers: he declared that drinking water, food and medical care are pulling factors, i.e. services whose unconditional accessibility would favour the arrival and permanence of migrants in the territory. Since 2015, when France closed the border with Italy, the situation has not changed. Most migrants lived in the open on the beach, in former stables on river banks and car parks.

In our visits, epidemics of scabies, rash diseases, infections, especially of the upper respiratory or urinary tracts, gastrointestinal diseases and trauma are the consequences of these failures. In January

2023, at an informal encampment under the Via Tenda bridge, several people expressed their concern about a problem of oliguria (low daily urine output), a risky condition for kidney function due to the low intake of liquids (often only one small bottle of water per day). Public water access is in the city centre, a place exposed to repressive practices. Migrants are frowned upon in tourist-commercial areas. Moreover, the water of the Roja River is also contaminated by Coli bacteria, the source of significant gastroenteritis, so migrants must be careful not to use it.

Emblematic are the epidemics of scabies, a contagious cutaneous pathology due to an arachnid of the mite group that causes severe itching and superficial burrows on the skin: this is caused by promiscuity, sharing of clothes, sheets, and blankets, favoured by poor hygienic conditions. You can treat it with relatively expensive creams and, by replacing clothes and blankets, it becomes a real problem in border conditions. Another problem is poorly cared for skin lesions that lead to frequent bacterial infections that require antibiotics, making the situation even more complicated and dangerous.

Towards evening, we reach another area of the river, where young boys from Afghanistan can still find themselves. Many of them have lived in Italy and speak Italian very well. The migrants there are afraid to leave the river area. They fear that they will get taken away by the police, which is why they do not even go to the hospital and are in a worse situation than the others. We have bought more antibiotics, but they are not enough for everyone who needs them. Medication alone is not enough to truly improve these people's situation or even to cure them. The state in which they live makes it very difficult to heal even a mere skin infection. They cannot wash themselves or their clothes properly or sleep in suitable or clean places, and they continue to wash using only river water

(Report 21-22/10/2017 – Ferite Infette)

Exanthematous diseases are also a problem, both in the evolution of the disease in the individual and in its spread, particularly to fragile persons such as pregnant women, also because of possible consequences on the foetus. Institutional health interventions are neither regular nor coordinated between actors, and it is impossible to implement proper treatment strategies. The result is a chaotic situation in which different actions overlap one another to the extent that they become

pointless, if not harmful, and sometimes even ridiculous, if one were not dealing with the concrete suffering of other human beings. The story of a 30-year-old Sudanese boy is emblematic:

He does not speak English, so with the help of another compatriot, he shows us his very swollen right forearm. He says he had an undefined injection a few days earlier. He is so worried. We asked him who had done it and why, but there was no answer. We can tell from the location and the type of reaction that it was an intradermal tuberculin injection. We then ask the Caritas volunteers for an explanation. Anxiously, the Caritas volunteers explain how, sometime before, at a local hospital, one of their 'guests' had been diagnosed with tuberculosis. Following this, the Caritas volunteers asked the ASL to intervene as a preventive measure for guests and volunteers in the community. After much resistance, it seems that some ASL workers went to St. Anthony's parish and performed the intradermal tuberculin test on 12 men only without obtaining their informed consent, i.e. the much-hyped compulsory act for the implementation of any medical procedure involving the bodies of us 'white men' and (at least as serious), without the intradermal tuberculin test positivity then being checked. In other words, only some of those exposed to the possible infection underwent the test but remained unchecked afterwards. (...)Several men on Saturday morning (48 hours later) tested positive for intradermal testing, even markedly so, and were very upset by what was happening to their forearms. Equally upset were the Caritas volunteers, who had nothing explained to them.

(Taken from the report: *Malasanità internazionale*, on Effimera.org)

Ventimiglia is only one of the stages of a journey that may last a few months or several years and that we can consider, as a whole, as pathogenic. Often, the diseases originate elsewhere, perhaps with chronic characteristics (diabetes, hypertension, nephritic syndromes, etc.). However, it remains undeniable that they are aggravated in these places, e.g. by being forced to stay in a situation that hampers even the most basic procedures for preventing, managing and treating illnesses.

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INFORMAL CAMP UNDER THE VIA TENDA OVERPASS IN VENTIMIGLIA.



MEDICAL POST TO VISIT MIGRANTS LIVING ON THE STREETS.

BODIES AND VIOLENCE

The bodies of the travelling people are the maps of the route of their movement and bear the marks of the violence they have suffered. The first is the violence in the territories of departure with gunshot wounds, secondary osteomyelitis (bone infections from lack of care) and exuberant scars from cutting weapons. There is abundant evidence of violence in the transit territories, particularly in Libya, where it takes on the characteristics of real torture: signs of widespread burns, the results of fierce beating and severe ankylosis, i.e. untreated fractures of limbs with inadequate ossification that impair their function and require extensive orthopaedic surgery. Then, there are the scars of burns due to the mixture of diesel and salt water during sea voyages. In the course of our meetings, we have also collected stories of violence on arrival on European soil. In June 2016, we documented the violence carried out by the Italian police during the identification procedures at the border and the Ventimiglia police station. The Hot-spot approach launched by the then Minister of the Interior Alfano explicitly authorised a 'proportionate use of force' in the identification of migrants and the management of their movements and quickly resulted in violent practices witnessed by several accounts, such as the one below.

A 22-year-old boy tells us that, after spending a whole day imprisoned with six other people in an undefined facility at the border, without being able to eat or drink, he was taken by bus to Genoa airport and then by plane to Bari. There, for refusing to leave his fingerprints, he is left standing 24 hours from six o'clock in the afternoon, without the possibility of going to

the toilet, drinking and feeding himself. He has an ulcer on his left tibia and claims that a policeman allegedly kicked him on it. Following this, he reportedly asked to be taken to hospital and was denied. He says he also saw women and children there but did not know what treatment they received. Some also received electric shocks. He and other Sudanese listeners report that, as a mediator, there was sometimes a Syrian woman who, by the way, speaking a different Arabic was barely understandable.

(Effimera, I Racconti di Ventimiglia, di Lia, Antonio, Nicola, Roberto)

Violence by the French police on the other side of the border has never ceased, as reported by the Kesha Niya collective, which has been active for years on the frontier at Ventimiglia. Migrants are pulled off the train at Menton Garavan, the first stop on French soil. The police and gendarmerie use batons and pepper spray against anyone who tries to hide or resist. From the station, people are taken by van to the border of Ponte S. Ludovico, where, while awaiting readmission to Italy, they can spend up to 24 hours in a detention area without food, medical assistance, access to a lawyer or an interpreter. While in detention, people face physical and verbal violence. During some street visits in September 2022, a young North African migrant showed us a head wound caused by the French police. The man had told us that the police had repaired the cut by stapling it with a stitch gun: the report stated 'trauma with the partial scalp of the head'. He also suffered an injury to the extensor tendon of a finger on his right hand, also as a result of the violence he had suffered: the man needed a specialist examination. The doctor would later say that he would remain injured for the rest of his life; however, the path to that examination was a symbolic Dantesque circle in the health system in the province of Imperia. To obtain the visit, the foreigner must have an STP (foreigner temporarily present) document and a regional request for a visit with urgent/ and or essential characteristics. This path, already discriminatory in itself due to the fundamental lack of a family doctor, is further aggravated in the border territory. According to the directives of A.Li.sa (Azienda Sanitaria Ligure) *The STP code can be issued by ASLs, hospitals and IRCCSs.* So we went to the hospital in Bordighera with a medical request for an urgent visit to a hand surgery clinic. At the Bordighera hospital, however, they claimed that they do not issue STPs and go instead to Villa Olga in Ventimiglia. There was another journey, more kilometres, and another rejection. We received the an-

swer that the STP code is only issued to people not in good standing who 'intended' to be vaccinated for Covid 19 and to people of Ukrainian origin. After a few phone calls to the Public Relations Office and clarification with the health director of the Ventimiglia district, we had to return to the Bordighera emergency room, where the injured man finally received an STP. Another series of vicissitudes followed to obtain the hand examination.

None of this is unacceptable. Firstly, for those in need of care (a condition clearly enshrined in our vaunted constitution and regulated by regional indications): if the person we accompanied through language and bureaucratic barriers had been alone and had encountered tired, ill-informed and irritated staff, causing him to have to move for miles between hospitals, what would he have done? She would probably have given up, and her health would have deteriorated. Secondly, this procedure is highly detrimental to the relationship between local citizens and migrants: the practice according to which these mostly bureaucratic procedures are the responsibility of the emergency room medical staff and not of the administrative staff means clogging up the ER of the already undernourished hospital of Bordighera which is also becoming progressively privatised. The widespread, and we think intentional, perception and narrative leads to further blaming of migrants and not on the failures and responsibilities of those who manage public health. It is evident how the border situation is a paradigmatic laboratory of practices of "invisibilization", repression and limitation of rights that, with different intensities and forms, are spreading to all the people who inhabit this society.

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CONTAINERS WHERE THE MIGRANTS CAPTURED BY THE FRENCH POLICE.



AND A CAR PARK IN VIA TENDA IN VENTIMIGLIA AS A BED.

BETWEEN CONTRADICTIONS AND RESISTANCE LIES THE BORDER

As we finish writing this compendium on the history of migratory flows at the Ventimiglia border and the corruption of repression and oppression that this sows, sinister bells are ringing in the upper echelons of government and the administration of the border town: shipwrecks, new ad hoc crimes for 'smugglers', pompous migrant capture operations, the request of the prefect of Imperia who would like a CPR in Liguria in the wake of the government that wants one in every region. Even Ventimiglia's Confesercenti thinks it appropriate to remind the police to use the *daspo* soon to remove the migrants who make the city 'sad, ugly and dirty'. Yet nothing moves in Ventimiglia that those in charge do not want to: if human trafficking fattens, if people continue to die to cross the border, if women continue to get sold, and even if migrants continue to arrive in our country by illegal routes instead of being able to enter with visas in order, it is because that is the way they want it to be.

The valuable documentary work presented in Paolo Veziano's book *Ombre al Confine (Shadows at the Border)*, on the migration of the Jewish population in the aftermath of the racial laws in Italy, teaches us how already in 1938 Ventimiglia was both a mirage of salvation and an area of exploitation for those attempting to escape to France. Reading it, one discovers without too much surprise that the fascist Blackshirts stationed in Ventimiglia, unofficially encouraged by the Regime, improvised themselves as *passieurs* on the mountain paths, helping unwanted Jews to leave Italy. Or again, in defiance of the French guards before whom they simulated efficient border control, as night came, they winked and covered the backs (in exchange for just compensation) of those same boatmen who ferried fugitives by

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sea to the Côte d'Azur. Except then, during the day, to prosecute them and publicly point them out in the press as ruthless traffickers without morals. Yesterday, as today, nationally and locally, there is no point in trying to reconcile the accounts: it is only in the lacerating contradictions of the border that contradictions can be understood and, whenever possible, must be challenged. To conclude this work, we propose two contributions written by the Progetto 20k collective, which has been active on the border for many years and struggles between the folds of these contradictions, always seeking new ways to denounce and fight the frontier alongside those who suffer it.



PLAYING CARDS DISTRIBUTED BY THE TRAIN COMPANY FRANCE SNCF: THE FIGURES REPRESENT LIFE-THREATENING SITUATIONS FOR THOSE WHO TRY TO TO CROSS THE BORDER BY WALKING ON THE TRACKS OR CLIMBING ON TOP OF TRAINS.



MIGRANTS REJECTED IN ITALY WATCH MENTON FROM THE AURELIA HIGHWAY BEFORE RETURNING TO VENTIMIGLIA (NINE KILOMETRES ON FOOT)



UNDER THE VIA TENDA FLYOVER WAITING TO CROSS THE BORDER.

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WAITING FOR THE DISTRIBUTION OF FOOD IN A TENT STREET CAR PARK BY VOLUNTEER AND SOLIDARITY GROUPS.



A MOMENT OF DEMONSTRATION IN VENTIMIGLIA FOR FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT.

THE MESSY SWAY OF ACTIVE SOLIDARITY

PROJECT 20K'S CONTRIBUTION

To conclude this work we offer two contributions from the collective Project 20k, which, present for many years on the border, struggles between the folds of these contradictions, always seeking new ways to denounce and fight the border alongside those who suffer it.

The attempt to sketch a plausible image of the context surrounding the Ventimiglia-Menton border generates frustration, indicative of the reality involved. Indeed, the complexity of the territory forces us to place ourselves in a position of constant doubt and questioning of solidarity practices. What one day might have seemed an achievement, the next day may reappear as a problem with amplified dimensions. So, being in this grey, undefined zone, rather than offering a better perspective for observing phenomena, places us in the middle of that blurry image. As the "No Border" collective, we find our way into the empty spaces left by humanitarian agencies, always wondering what our role is and how to distinguish ourselves from mere "welfarism". Attempting to stand in the contradictions without getting used to them, recognising our privileges as activists with documents and trying to use them to support the paths of self-determination of people in transit. We have monitored police raids, including camp clearances and sweeping raids in public areas, recording the regular occurrence of an operation every fortnight.

On these occasions, makeshift shelters get demolished, and people keep moving from one spot to another, waiting for the next raid, always starting this struggle for survival all over again. The raids take place using patrols that forcibly stop and identify all non-white people in a given area, arresting those found to be undocumented. Those who have attempted to document these raids with video footage have not missed the officers' squad-like manner. Physical aggression, thre-

ats, unlawful seizure of phones, false reporting, and travel warrants. Separated by a car park, a few dozen metres from the sleeping quarters under the bridge, lies the Upupa space, a solidarity base opened by the 20k collective. It offers a friendly place in a hostile context, where one can find refreshment a few hours a day, share useful information and foster community dynamics between people on the move outside the circuits of the passer racket. The collective's activities are many and vary greatly depending on the people in the area, energy and resources available, trying to build a long-term project, but also totally influenced by daily events. Over the years, activities have changed on the wave of continuous experimentation. In 2018, the first Euphemia info point opened.

Unfortunately, following the non-renewal of the lease due to complaints from the neighbourhood, the activities moved to the Via Tenda car park. The coming together of activists and people on the move generates a space in perpetual redefinition. In weekly assemblies, priorities, needs, available resources, skills to be networked and critical issues of all kinds emerge. From material issues related to everyday life to possible activities to be organised in the info-point, to the attempt to protect oneself from the cyclical assault of journalists, to criticising the role of white solidarity people.

The difference between autonomous collectives and charitable institutions is perceived subjectively, according to individual backgrounds and the different types of relationships created between individuals. The work of deconstruction from the role of the white saviour is continuous, sometimes more internalised, sometimes even projected by those in a position of fragility seeking a foothold in the world. In recent months, with increasing frequency, a section of the neighbourhood united under the sacred condominium alliance has been making complaints against the Upupa centre, in their eyes, liable to attract migrants too close to their white cottages. The aim is the closure of the info-point, including through legal means and the eviction of the adjacent informal encampment. The dehumanisation wrought by institutions and the media shows its fruits. Human rights violations are constant. From the indiscriminate beatings on the mountain routes of the French Foreign Legion, which also recruits members of the Eastern European alt-right. The theft of personal belongings, the

confinement in containers at the high border, where people arrested in the afternoon are detained overnight before being turned back the following day, even in the case of pregnant women, very young children, or people with obvious physical ailments. Many ways of rejections violate European regulations. The most frequent case is the falsification of the age of minors indicated on the *refuse d'entrée*. It also happened that PAF patrols loaded minors into cars to leave them on the Italian side without producing any documents.

One particular case we encountered was a minor who was issued an OQTF (*Obligation de Quitter le Territoire Français*) at the high border, which consists of a prohibition to remain on national territory, usually issued following the commission of specific offences within the country. The dynamic was truly bizarre. Instead of receiving the more common *refuse d'entrée* and being held for rejection, he was handed the OQTF and shown the road to Menton, ordering him to turn back to reach the police station at the low border, where he got rejected.

After meeting this boy, we tried to reconstruct the facts and find a logical connection between these actions, which sometimes seem random and whimsical. However, one possibility is that by allowing him to reach Menton, they simulated that he was circulating inside the French state and that the OQTF came from outside the border area. This could be one of many repressive experiments trying to use the bureaucratic tools provided by the French legal system. It is difficult to contest this type of document: it may take a long time, perhaps long enough, to make it come of age. During border shift activities, i.e. the monitoring of rejections that take place at the high border, we met several migrants who had been forced to take psychotropic drugs in the previous hours.

The cases share some elements in common, but the reconstruction made is impartial and inaccurate precisely because it is based on dialogue with people with communication difficulties and few elements. These people had been in France for a long time, with open regularisation procedures (asylum application) or even protection recognition. These people had all suffered imprisonment for episodes of petty crime. At the end of their sentences, they went to a CRA (*Centre de Rétention Administrative*) to deport them to Italy as irregular immi-

grants. Upon hearing the news of their fate, all these people opposed repatriation, so once they became immobilised, a prison doctor administered the drug by injection. The effects of the drug were to induce them into a catatonic state. Fixed gaze, inability to speak, severe difficulty moving, loss of perception of basic physical stimuli, total lack of autonomy, including feeding themselves and taking care of their primary hygiene. These symptoms were observed for over a month and then waned for up to three months.

The mode of administration and the type of effects make one think of depot, usually used in the treatment of chronic schizophrenia monthly. But given the intensity, it could also be an enhanced cocktail. Given the sample collected, we can see that these are not isolated cases but procedures. To the misdeeds of the police, we must also add those of some French fascists, who alter the signs on mountain trails leading to France, leading to dangerous spots. Active solidarity is marked by a constant motion of progress and retreat in many respects, from logistics to political demands. So, the border device breaks and dismantles the development of solidarity practices, forcing us towards a constant restart.

INSIGHT INTO THE BORDER SITUATION TODAY

PROGETTO 20K'S CONTRIBUTION

Upon entering the municipal area, one gets greeted by the sign *Ventimiglia, a city under video surveillance*. The desire to conceal the fact that this is a border area is evident as one moves from the commercial area of the centre to the periphery, occupied by residential areas, warehouses, and car parks, all the way to the cemetery, where the services of charitable organisations concentrate. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, showers have stopped for sanitary reasons. The Diaconia Valdese night shelters were already limited to women and children. The male population, therefore, which is the majority among those in transit, is cut off from all support. For unaccompanied minors, on the other hand, there is a Save the Children structure. Minors rejected by France because they were mistakenly registered in Italy as being of age are offered legal support to follow the bureaucratic procedure to prove that they are minors. European law allows the right of movement for unaccompanied minors, which is why the police often falsify their age during initial identification. This procedure can take many months. For this type of situation, Save the Children offers a three-night stay in the dormitory, so many minors continue their attempt to cross the border after being rejected, despite the disadvantages that incorrectly registering as an adult implies. Furthermore, for those in France who attempt to prove during a trial that they are underage, there are very physically invasive procedures that follow racist parameters: genital palpation, muscle measurement and tissue analysis, evaluated according to European standards. At 7 p.m., the abovementioned

tioned night shelters close their entrances, so for those arriving in the city in the evening, perhaps even following deportation, this kind of protection is lacking. In a picture marked by emergency, no exception holds. At night, women run an enormous risk, either of being assaulted and abused or of ending up in the hands of traffickers and disappearing into those parallel migration channels that are even more invisible. The concentration of NGOs in the outskirts of the city is part of a project to marginalise migrants and maintain the status quo: on the one hand, white citizens can continue to consume and produce undisturbed, while on the other, the undocumented survive by the day, seeing their hopes for the future dwindle more and more; this without the basic subsistence needs guaranteed: meagre meals eaten in the street and blankets to avoid freezing to death by the dozens during the winter. Everything else is daily repression.

In the brushwood along the Roja River, under the motorway bridge in Via Tenda, between 50 and 150 people find shelter, varying from week to week according to the flow of the moment. Some are now semi-stable in the area, have applied for asylum in Italy or are trying to find their way around. The Via Tenda encampment has long been a reference point for people in transit, where they try to build a community, and is, therefore, perceived by many residents as a threat to decorum and social peace. The outrage at the discomfort symbolised by the rubbish in the areas surrounding the camps in the tent is far greater than that of seeing human beings forced into such conditions. The responsibility is naturally thrown squarely on the shoulders of those who suffer this ghettoisation, from whom one would expect corvettes to keep the public areas they pass through clear as if to show gratitude for the space they have received.

These attitudes, legitimised by years of racist media campaigns, come in particular from the less affluent stratum of Ventimiglia's population, located on the periphery, with few means of social affirmation and a great desire to place themselves at least one step above someone else. One of the components of the white population most in contact with the reflection of the border device on the urban geography, almost the only ones for whom it is impossible to turn away and remain indifferent. This climate is itself leading to the exacerbating of repressive thrusts, which in recent months have seen racist ver-

bal assaults on some residents of the area, increased patrols and checks on the migrant population, and also more attention paid to the network of activists established in the Valley. In fact, at the end of March, there was news of an anti-bivouac ordinance that provides for a ban on anyone camping in the street. It will be yet another blow to the lives of those who already have almost nothing to cling to. In case of a Daspo violation, there is a provision for arrest.

The ordinance refers to the Minniti decree, which, in the consolidated text of local government, gives the mayor the power to identify areas where there are situations of greater degradation and impose bans with sanctions. Since the closure of the border in 2015, this is certainly not the first time that the administration has acted as a champion of zero tolerance. Recently, the Court of Imperia condemned three solidarians to 9 months for aggravated resistance for the facts related to the eviction of the church of San Nicola in May 2016, when Ioculano's centre-left municipal council ordered a sweeping raid. The collaboration between the Italian and French police (PAF – police aux frontières) is intensifying despite the theatrics that in recent months in the media have represented a tug-of-war between Meloni and Macron. In reality, on a practical level, the two countries are aligned in managing the migration phenomenon, which becomes an area of experimentation in the methodic suspension of the rule of law. In the territory of Ventimiglia, one can encounter PAF patrols, even on the verge of making arrests.

Even the 'operation Pantograph', the last major raid organised in the city in March, highlights the spectacular nature of these operations, already from the name, inspired by that device that transmits electricity above the train and where in a desperate attempt to reach France sometimes migrants hide, running a very high risk: indeed, fact in January yet another person found death there. So, this operation against aiding and abetting illegal immigration covers itself with a veil of salvation for the victims at the border.

On this occasion, the Questura said it had made 13 arrests. The impression is that there is an attempt to inflate the numbers to legitimise the huge mobilisation and exalt the functionality of the security apparatus. Several migrants were randomly selected to appear before the press conference. Some, two of them minors, were released the

same day and taken to the high border for identification. Rather peculiar dynamics, perhaps because the police station was in turmoil for the press conference. The next day, these minors in question headed for France, presenting themselves at the border with a self-declaration specifying their age, a tool that is sometimes effective. As usual, everything seems to depend on chance, who is on duty, and the orders of the moment.



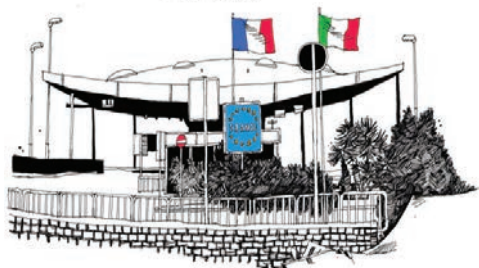
Emanuele Giacometti, La Bolla.

Self-production visible on parolesulconfine.com/labolla-un-racconto-del-presidio-solidale-dei-balzi-rossi/

The graphic journalism of Emanuele Giacometti recounts through illustrations the Ventimiglia border during the summer of 2015. With the support of activists and activists from across Europe, a group of migrants carried on for months a struggle against the closure of the border between Italy and France, giving life on the Balzi Rossi rocks to the No Borders garrison, an occupation that lasted one hundred days to claim the right to freedom of movement..

RESISTING THE BORDER

12 GIUGNO 2015 VENTIMIGLIA FRONTIERA BASSA:
DECINE DI MIGRANTI SI ACCALCANO SUL CONFINE
BLOCCATI DALLA POLIZIA FRANCESE.
IL TRATTATO DI SCHENGEN E' SOSPESO PER
IL G7 TENUTOSI DAL 6 ALL'8 GIUGNO IN
GERMANIA.



The refugees stranded in Ventimiglia are on the long wave of boat landings from Africa: they have no documents, so it is nothing new that they can't pass.

12 June 2015 Ventimiglia low border: dozens of migrants crowd the border blocked by French police.

The Schengen treaty suspended for the G7 held from 6 to 8 June in Germany.

I PROFUGHI BLOCCATI A VENTIMIGLIA SONO
L'ONDA LUNGA DEGLI SBARCHI DEI BARCONI
PROVENIENTI DALL'AFRICA:

NON HANNO DOCUMENTI, NON E' QUINDI UNA
NOVITA' CHE NON POSSANO PASSARE.



16 GLI SGOGLI COMINCIANO A SORGERE TENDE E TELI PER IPARARSI DAL SOLE E AVERE UN RIPARO LA NOTTE:



QUELLI CHE I MEDIA HANNO DEFINITO COME "I RESISTENTI DEGLI SGOGLI" COMINCIANO AD ORGANIZZARSI.

E' COSI' CHE NASCE IL PRESIDIO NO BORDER DI VENTIMIGLIA.



Tents and sheets begin to spring up on the rocks to shelter from the sunrise and to have shelter at night: those whom the media have described as «the resistance fighters of the rocks» begin to organise themselves. That is how the no border garrison in Ventimiglia.

I arrived in Ventimiglia a month after those days. The garrison is still there and has expanded to occupy even the «Pinetina» on the road leading to the border. Its inhabitants call the presidium «the bubble».

ARRIVO A VENTIMIGLIA UN MESE DOPO QUEI GIORNI. IL PRESIDIO E' ANCORA LI' E SI E' ALLARGATO OCCUPANDO ANCHE LA "PINETINA" SULLA STRADA CHE PORTA AL CONFINE. I SUOI ABITANTI CHIAMANO IL PRESIDIO "LA BOLLA".

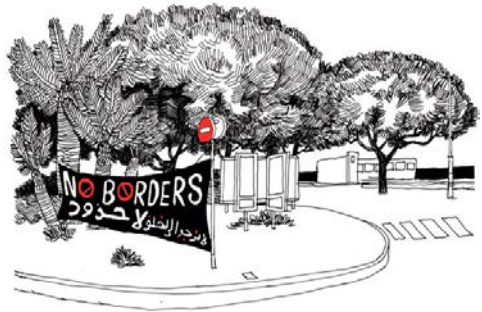


DENTRO LA BOLLA LE REGOLE DI QUESTA EUROPA NON ENTRANO.

"DA QUANDO SIAMO PARTITI QUESTO E' IL PRIMO POSTO DOVE NON CI VIENE DETTO, COMANDATO, COSA FARE! DECIDIAMO NOI !!..

PERCHE' LA BOLLA E' ALLO STESSO TEMPO UN PRESIDIO DI LOTTA E UN SOSTEGNO MATERIALE PER CHI MIGRA:

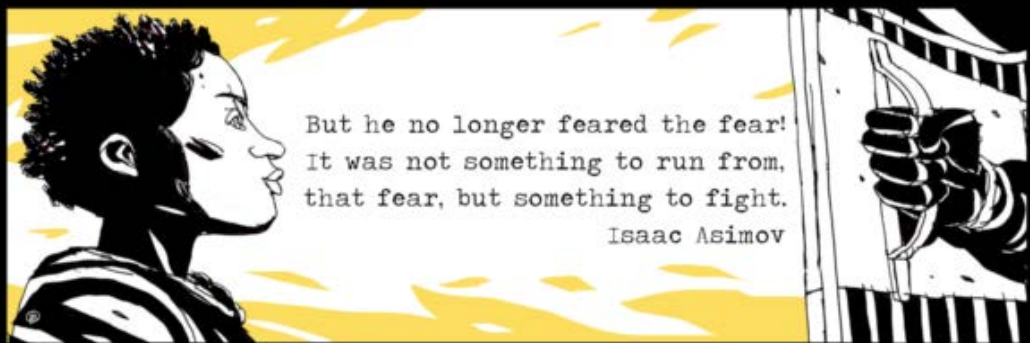
QUI SI TROVANO INFORMAZIONI LEGALI SULLE POLITICHE DI FRONTIERA...



Inside the bubble the rules of the Europe do not fit. «Since left, this is the first place where we don't get told, commanded, what to do: we decide».

Because the bubble and, at the same time, a presidium of struggle is a material support for those who migrate: here you can find legal information on border policies.





RESISTING THE BORDER

VENTIMIGLIA 2015 / 2023

In a border town like Ventimiglia, the full force of oppressive and repressive force of migration policies: persecution, enslavement, condemnation of isolation and marginalisation of migrants.

«Parole sul confine» («Words on the border» N.d.T.) arose to narrate the practices of resistance and of struggle against institutional violence and against all devices that deny the right to migrate and to a better life.