SOLROUTES

Going to the fieldwork.

Critical reflections on methodologies and ethics

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"*It matters what ideas we use to think other ideas (with). It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories to conceive of anthropology (and ethnography as well) as the knowledge practice that studies relations with relations, that puts relations at risk with other relations, from unexpected other worlds*."

(Marilyn Strathern)

"*Science is an essentially anarchic enterprise: theoretical anarchism is more humanitarian and more likely to encourage progress than its law-and-order alternatives*."

(Paul Feyerabend)

Epistemology: the role of reflexivity and positionality

The choice of beginning this document with some reflections on ethic and epistemology is not by chance: concerns related to the researcher's positionality *vis-à-vis* the field and the participants, and the capacity to reflect on the effects of our work on those who take part in it are an integral component of the methodology of any research project. Besides, we believe that creative methods - such as those to be employed within this project - arise and develop in relation to a range of constructivist epistemological approaches, which enquiry the conditions of scientific knowledge production and the role of researchers (Giorgi, Pizzolati, and Vacchelli 2021).

The concept of reflexivity provides social researchers with a means to understand the way that elements such as gender, nationality, age, social class - to name a few - intersect with and produce social change in contemporary modernity (Ruspini 2018). First developed within feminist scholarship (Harding and Hintikka 1983; Harding and Norberg 2005), reflexivity is above all the capacity to dialogue with oneself and the world and represents an opportunity to act in the social reality (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). It is a process of awareness aimed at giving meaning to our actions, which are plural and rely on cultural forms (Weber 1966) and at stimulating new one. Through reflexive actions, it is possible to promote change (Nuzzaci 2011) to question the 'naturalness' of social phenomena and to contribute to unravelling the symbolic system that sustains collective living. The researcher 'travels' between cultures and in the frequent boundary crossings this position implies, habits of reflexivity are fostered.

The participant observation is the main research tool we are going to implement in this project and is engaged in numerous complex acts of interrogating the self at the same time as interrogating the other. In other words, ethnography involves the whole person: this is its distinguishing feature as a research method (Jordan 2001). Indeed, Longhurst defines reflexivity as a practice to examine our own 'embodied subjectivity' (Longhurst 2010). Contemporary ethnographic research calls for sustained and heightened self-reflexivity and demands that the researcher's self be foregrounded as a filter of everything that has been learned. The acknowledgement that age, gender, outsider status and lived experience of the researcher will open up some avenues of discovery and inhibit others has become axiomatic, and contemporary qualitative social scientists consider how researchers and informants negotiate a reality between themselves.

The researcher's value system influences, orients and shapes the work by reflecting one's own political positions and ethical orientations. Feminist research has developed the idea of positioning to make the research process more transparent from an ethical perspective, and to recognize the power relations that are inevitably inscribed in research relationships. Positionality is thus determined by where one stands in relation to 'the other'. More importantly, these positions can shift and may at different times outweigh the cultural identity we associate with insider or outsider status (Narayan 1993).

Indeed, more recent analyses have exposed the power-based dynamics inherent in any and all research and have suggested that power is something to not only be aware of, but to negotiate in the research process. Since the 1940s, indeed, social scientists have begun to challenge the traditionally hierarchical relationship between research and action, between those doing research and those being studied, thus replacing the extractive and Fordist research typical of the colonial model with a more flexible approach that can benefit the communities involved (Kindon, Pain, and Kesby 2007).

In particular, feminist and decolonial scholars are concerned with foregrounding women and minorities' experiences, with participants having an equal relationship with the researcher, and with the research experience being empowering and transformative (Lather 1991, Cotterill 1992, Reinharz 1992). This has been one of the main challenges and concerns of our project, as we have been and still are critically questioning the forms of research restitution that is possible to imagine with vulnerable subjects, with whom we cannot guarantee prolonged contact, or who may not find the outcomes of our research useful.

Participatory action research increasingly focuses on the political empowerment of people through participation in knowledge construction, as, for example, in the case of the theatre of the oppressed, and the different creative approaches that our project will try to develop. Here, the researcher is no longer supposed to be the one who extract knowledge and share it with the audience, but is intrinsically harnessed in its creation of knowledge, with participants being the colleagues equally in control (Merriam et al. 2001). Giorgi, Pizzolati and Vacchelli (2021) defines 'methodological reflexivity' as attention to the methods and approach employed during the research.

Every researcher struggles also with representing the 'truth' of their findings as well as allowing the 'voices' of their participants to be heard. Understanding and fairly representing participants' perspectives is a crucial ethical point. The creative practices adopted by the project also aim to integrate as much as possible values, beliefs, and imaginaries (such as the concept of solidarity and the plurality of meanings it can assume) that are indigenous to the people in question, creating dialogic counter-narratives and making them key aspects to the intervention.

This become utterly important while using creative methods such as the ones employed by the SOLROUTES project: in this case, adopting a reflexive approach means paying special attention to the implications of the epistemological choices that are made when deciding to undertake research using specific creative tools, and being aware that the knowledge produced through these techniques is always the outcome of the interaction between the researcher and participants' positions in a social, cultural and historical context (Giorgi, Pizzolati and Vacchelli 2021).

During the preliminary training of the SOLROUTES project, reflexivity has been constantly exercised through collective dialogues in the attempt of problematize the dynamics of power and position that every field research inevitably rises, with particular emphasis on the researcher/participant dichotomy. These reflections constantly permeated our first months of field research in Oulx, Ventimiglia, Saluzzo, Mazara del Vallo and Genoa. The collective discussions following each stay allowed us to critically examine, for example, the issue of the ongoing negotiation of roles and positions between academics and activists. We have been able to observe how many activists refuse to participate in a logic of value production in favour of external subjects (the academia, the researchers) and research tools considered reductive and schematizing. Concerns related to the access to the field, the relationships

with the participants and epistemic extractivism have been faced and debated too, highlighting the need for shared ethic guidelines and mutual in-depth reflections.

Public reflexive sociology

Our research approach moves in the wake of a public and activist social science (Burawoy 2005) which positions itself on the side of the subalterns and aims to contribute to their emancipatory processes. Our points of departure are Burawoy's two questions: how the external world we investigate enters into and shapes the practice of sociology - that is, the question of reflexive sociology - and how the practice of sociology enters and shapes the external world, or the question of public sociology (Burawoy 2005).

The public reflexive approach involves the explicit positioning and siding of the researcher, and their involvement in and with the situations and people they investigate with the goal of generating and bringing together reflexive knowledge on solidarity networks, people on the move, and other key actors. It recalls the new generation of social researchers and ethnographers, arisen since the early years of the Third Millennium, who embodies the reflexive turn of the ethnographic practice and advocates for a politicization of the social sciences: the so-called 'militant ethnographers' (Boni, Koensler, and Rossi 2020) or 'ethnographic activists' (Brotherton 2023), moved by a political tension and aimed at generating an effective and concrete change of the existing power dynamics. As Juris and Khasnabish (2013) outline based on his experience as an activist and researcher with the Movement for Global Resistance (MRG) in Barcelona, militant ethnography is not only an alternative research method but also a political praxis. This approach considers necessary to turn the research object into a subject and then give back part of the power of representation, and to challenge the positivist epistemology of distance - the science that finds its condition of truth in the distance between the studied object and the subject of enunciation - and to believe in a research tool that is also a common and innovative practice (Palmas 2021). In her study of everyday violence in a poor shanty town in northeastern Brazil, Nancy Scheper-Hughes describes how she was coaxed into political organizing by her Bahian informants and how this led her to call for a 'barefoot anthropology':

The more my companhieras gently but firmly pulled me away from the 'private' world of the wretched huts of the shantytown, where I felt most comfortable, and toward the 'public' world of the Municipio of Bom Jesus da Mata, into the marketplace, the mayor's office and the judge's chambers, the police station and the public morgue, the mills and the rural union meetings, the more my understandings of the community were enriched and theoretical horizons were expanded (1995, p. 411).

Moreover, while most of academic studies on solidarity and migration focuses on western States and organizations' perspective, SOLROUTES embraces Burawoy's (2005) invitation to provincialize our own sociology, to bring it down from the pedestal of universality and recognize its distinctive character and national power by incorporating and shedding light on the variety of non western, indigenous solidarity practices that take shape along the routes (Bauder and Juffs 2019).

Within the project, the public and reflexive dimension will be pursued thanks to the choice of collaborative and participatory ethnography (Lassiter 2005) and volunteering practices, reshaping the relationships between researchers, participants, and other actors through the cooperative production of texts, objects, and images along the routes. As Becker pointed out (1998), the usefulness of social research perceived by participants is one of the conditions to build trust, accessibility, involvement, and in-depth knowledge. The sensitivity of the research field – exposed to vulnerability, violence, uncertainty regarding legal status, criminalization, and surveillance – makes this type of ethnography the most capable of coping with such risks, assuming perceived and objective threats directly from the perspective of actors participating in the research. The 6 local Ethnographic Antannaes in crucial areas of transit in Europe at large act in this vein with the aim of a) generating and bringing together reflexive knowledge on the corridors/routes involving solidarity networks and migrants; and b) enacting a public sociology to amplify its outcomes.

Indeed, the purpose of the project proves to be both cognitive and transformative as it combines scientific soundness with a public and participatory sociological approach (Anderlini, Filippi and Giliberti 2022), and considers a dialogic and practical interaction with different audiences and actors as an important stage in the research process (Burawoy 2005). The effort of reporting on and back-translating targeting multiple publics in multiple ways is regarded as a key element in a continuous research process, not as a fixed

moment of ex-post dissemination of findings. As Latour wrote, sociology has a public responsibility to pay attention to vulnerable and precarious lives and to seek to establish the conditions that offer them a 'livable and breathable home' (Latour 2010, p. 488); to this end, the discipline has the capacity to 'develop strategic knowledge in the public practice of social science' (Back and Puwar 2012).

Live methods

A creative wave of social science has recently been crashing onto the shores of methodological tradition, casting free a flotilla of methods described as mobile, interactive, live, relational, and suggesting new methodological crossovers at the intersection of social research and creative practices (Vannini 2015).

In line with the idea of a sociology adequate to contemporary cultural productions, live methods (Back and Puwar 2012) will allow experiments with new forms in the production and representation of research data, collaborating with artists, developers, filmmakers, photographers, illustrators, and art curators. Working with such actors enables new modes of sociology to be developed and performed. Live methods involve immersion, time and 'unpredictable attentiveness,' allowing for a 'transformation of perspectives that moves slowly over time, between fieldwork sites and the academy' (Back and Puwar 2012). SOLROUTES conceptualizes routes as a lived-in social infrastructure produced by the nexus between solidarity networks and unauthorized movements, a space of dwelling, hospitality, and care; the multi-sited approach it adopts allows researchers to stay on, live on, and follow the route, rather than diving into a single cultural and social location. The novelty of this approach solicits consequently that sociological craft is extended into technical realms that require us to care about new skills and techniques.

This is an increasingly popular trend in the social sciences also in Italy (see the HOMInG project and Annalisa Frisina's works, 2021; 2016)). Part of the promise of live methods is the potential for simultaneity in research and the possibility of re-ordering the relationship between data gathering analysis and their circulation. Their development and diffusion within the social research have been fostered in large part by the growing awareness of the intertwining of the methodological and ethical dimensions of research with the emerging needs of inquiry that touches on aspects affecting the practices of daily life (Giorgi, Pizzolati

and Vacchelli 2021). Live methods seek to improve our capacities towards an engaged 'artful craftiness to the craft of sociological methods.' This can be done collaboratively in real time to produce a pluralization of observers, which opens up new possibilities for 'crowd sourced' or transactional data (Back and Puwar, 2012). Live methods share with participatory, and feminist approaches the attention to forms of reciprocity and balancing of the power differential, recognizing the importance of sharing, and treating participants as bearers of expert knowledge. In the research that rely on such methods, participants are given the opportunity to express their identities and experiences -and their representations of these identities and experiences - through a process of creation and reflection on what is created (a performance, a story, an artifact...). It is exactly through the power of art that the project will try to transform narrations and make people think through the simple redefinition and placement of a cultural object. Art will also help to overcome the difficulty of language barriers and to foster encounters and exchanges capable of being understood by all. Moreover, the figure of the artist, who no longer uses their own studio to produce works, but carries out work in the field, direct and in close relation to the context, highlights how the methods adopted for the conception of a work, follow more and more dynamics linked to the contingencies of the present, than to the idea of beauty. The acronym 'artivism', which merges the words artist and activist, perfectly evokes a new frontier of political art with a social background, aligned and marked by a civil commitment.

In the SOLROUTES project, the main research tool to implement this approach will be the Generative Narrative Workshop (GNW), a relational, generative and transformative space which will bring together languages and techniques from filmic and visual sociology (Queirolo Palmas and Stagi 2015), art-based research (Leavy 2018), and graphic ethnography (Ingold, 2016; Nocerino, 2016). By doing so, SOLROUTES aims to develop a deep relationship with solidarity actors and migrants in transit, generating prototypes for collaborative working practices across disciplines, and observing their representations, experiences, and practices while also enabling more traditional ways of doing research through interviews, life histories, and observation. It is an invitation to encourage a playfulness that undermines and interrogates prevailing research conventions (Back and Puwar 2012). Thus, in producing these crafts, Puwar and Sharma invite us to consider 'learning new strategies for telling society and for affecting and persuading audiences' (Puwar and Sharma 2012). The curation of public performances and exhibitions, for instance, involves morphing and becoming 'apprentices in the craft of curatorship through practice' (Puwar and Sharma 2012).

Within the research group, a lengthy process of ponderation on these methods and their use in our project has been carried out. In particular, there has been much discussion about how to make these moments of creation and reflection with participants truly participatory, and how to make them beneficial for those who take part in them. Another insight that emerged from one of the field research experiences is the distinction between *collaborating* with artists, and *making use of* the artistic techniques they provide. Hence the need to combine epistemological discourses at all stages of the research process is clear; regardless of the researcher's individual choices, live methods invite to deconstruct, explore, and reason around the regimes of visibility and invisibility in social research, of the power relations that are established among the different actors involved, and about the space that is given to marginalized or subaltern voices (Giorgi, Pizzolati and Vacchelli 2021). Some of the dilemmas that emerged in the research group's first months of work include: how to entice people to take part in these practices? What kind of restitution is possible? What are the forms of participatory moments that consider the individual characteristics of each individual participant? How to avoid falling into mere extractivism and, on the contrary, make these techniques beneficial for those who participate? How to preserve the participants' privacy and create a safe space?

Digital ethnography

Almost three decades ago, Appadurai noted that "Electronic mediation and mass migration mark the world of the present'' (1996, p. 4). The tools and devices for research craft are being extended by digital culture in a hyper-connected world, affording new possibilities to re-imagine observation and the generation of alternative forms of research data (Back and Puwar 2012). Ethnographic research has been invigorated and transformed over the past years with analyses of textual discourse in digital communication spaces (Kavanaugh 2020), with a stimulating growing body of literature on media, the mediated visualizations of borders, border crossing, and migration beginning to show (Bayramoğlu 2022). From web forums that provide to subcultural groups and facilitate the discussion of subaltern topics and causes, to online comment forums that allow readers to interact with mainstream (and alternative) news content, Web 2.0 has offered platforms to create and circulate counter-discourses and amplify subaltern groups voices, narratives and representations (Kavanaugh 2020); indeed Nancy Fraser refers to these spaces as subaltern counterpublics, that function

as "discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter-discourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (1990, p. 67). Thanks to the felt anonymity of Internet communication, the rapid expansion of digital technology has 'democratized' access to mass media (Rodman 2003), aided in the 'demarginalizing' of persons with stigmatized social identities (McKenna and Bargh 1998; Koch and Schockman 1998) and expanded their embodied networking opportunities (Kavanaugh and Maratea 2016).

The growing global adoption of information and communication technologies (ICTs) has dramatically altered a variety of migration dynamics (Leurs 2018). On the one hand, it includes an increasing reliance on digital technologies for top-down governmental border control, surveillance, and migration management by State authorities; on the other, smart phones, social media and applications are used by PoM as new channels to access resources and information, to communicate, entertain social relations and participate in political events. This rapid developments in migration that take place in conjunction with the spread of ICTs raise considerable theoretical, methodological, and ethical challenges (Leurs 2018) as well as opportunities for social research.

Moving from these premises, SOLROUTES will implement innovative forms of digital ethnography, defined as the study of the interactions, representations and spaces produced by actors through digital technologies (Murthy 2008; Pink et al. 2016), combining participant observation with qualitative 'digital methods' for data gathering. That is, basically, the use of ethnographic methods, originally designed for studying cultures in the physical world, to study cultures in virtual worlds (Boellstorff et al. 2012). This approach aims to reveal learnt and stratified practices, meanings and representations along corridors and routes, collecting through the digitalscape the experiences of actors at various times and in various locations, thus empowering ethnographers by permanently updating their work in the field. Through the flows of information and data along the routes, it is possible to analyze how digital technologies, devices, and interactions shape actors' practices (Jeandesboz 2017). Thus, this digital turn will allow to modulate their activities and maintain an active relationship with actors and key informants in the field during the whole research process, enabling a longitudinal coverage, even in case of forced removal from the field due, as instance, to critical events. Further, this enables the researchers to collect data (that will be secured and anonymized) throughout the whole research period following movements, interactions, and exchanges among participants within digital platforms both in public and private groups,

chats, and channels. The direct participation of researchers in the digital space will allow them to reflect on these forms of digital social relations, but also to self-reflect on their own influence on them (Markham and Baym 2009).

While scholars typically use digital ethnography either to investigate communities that only exist online or to gain access to social phenomena which are otherwise inaccessible, one of the distinctive ways in which SOLROUTES implements digital fieldwork is to observe participants during the journey as active creators of a shared knowledge able to shape mobilities and to bring authorship and agency in the production of the visuality of migration to the fore (Bayramoğlu 2022); one of the outcome might be, as instance, the construction of a counter visuality of migration (Mirzoeff 2011; Bayramoğlu 2022), what Foucault has termed a 'reverse discourse' (1978), or Judah Schept's 'counter-visual ethnography', which he describes as a methodological "commitment to see with historical acuity the relations of production and processes of representation that have structured the present empirical moment…and [which] mobilizes the unseen for the purposes of a right to see" (2014, pp. 216–17).

Another interesting and innovative path of research SOLROUTES has already embarked on concerns the analysis of digital infrastructure (i.e., Telegram channels and groups, social media such as Instagram and TikTok) used together by PoM and individuals offering paid services all along the routes to the EU. Indeed, though the use of the internet and social networks during migration is amply documented in the literature yet, fewer studies have tried to investigate the characteristics of these virtual spaces, often branding them as tools used by 'smugglers' to lure desperate victims (Latonero and Kift 2018). Social networks play a significant role in shaping the intentions to migrate, the route choice, the method, and destination country in a circular manner. In making their way to safe spaces, PoM rely not only on a physical but increasingly also digital infrastructure of global movement such as social media, mobile devices, and similar digitally networked technologies that comprise this infrastructure of 'digital passages': sociotechnical spaces of flows in which PoM, smugglers, governments, and corporations interact with each other and with new technologies (Latonero and Kift 2018). That said, the success of PoM in reaching their destinations increasingly relies on access to not only a safe physical but also digital infrastructure. This kind of virtual ethnography allows the researcher to be attentive to how a social media platform as a field site acts both as a 'culture' and a 'cultural artifact,' which

is "variously constructed by users with quite different interpretations of what it means for them" (Hine 2013, p. 138).

In our project, another launching pad for an innovative use of digital ethnography will be the GNW's environment: in this space, researchers will explore how the research participants and members of their trust networks interact with each other, both online and offline, along the corridors/routes, sharing information and experiences in the form of texts and pictures: traces of their passage and solidarity activities. Thanks to the GNWs, digital and non-digital fieldwork will be strictly interconnected since the physical presence in the field will be a crucial precondition for the proper unfolding of the digital ethnographic work. Access to the digital field will be granted by the knowledge and trust built between researchers and actors during GNWs.

The Generative Narrative Workshop (GNW)

In the research proposal we provided preliminary ideas about the GNW. Let us now take a step back in order to elaborate in a more accurate way on this research device.

Innovative research tools: the Generative Narrative Workshops (GNW)

Based on the previous research experience of the PI and his team in the Global South, and moving towards new experimentations on a broader scale, the **GNWs** bring together in person researchers, diverse types of artists, and a selected group of informants (max 10) to create narrative and story-telling environments (Gubrium and Holstein, 2009). The GNWs' composition embodies the nexus between solidarity networks and unauthorized movements. The making of **collaborative research objects**, such as short videos, photographic portfolios, maps, podcasts, and art pieces in which participants will impress their authorship, will be our way to engage in the act of exploring the following questions: "What is Europe?" "What is a journey?" "What does it mean to take care of someone/something?" "What is solidarity?." In so doing, SOLROUTES aims to develop a deep relationship with solidarity actors and migrants in transit, observing and debating their representations, experiences, and repertoires of action, giving room and resonance to unheard voices. Building on the trust developed in this collaborative fieldwork, a more traditional way of doing research through interviews, life histories, fieldnotes, and direct observation will also be enabled. The GNWs can be intense and short-term (3 intensive

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days as in the case of ECs) or more spread out over a longer period (one session a week for 3 months, as in the case of EAs). A GNW will be organized for each node mapped along corridors/routes. **Counter-mapping** (Campos-Delgado, 2018; Casas-Cortes et al., 2017) will be central to the GNWs, as it will enable to resignify places, actors, and practices along the routes, revealing other border spaces and experiences which can portray the subject's story and collect a common pool of knowledge on circulation opportunities. This practice will promote the visualization of social spaces (their typologies and topologies), the exploration of the shifting meanings and representations of Europe across the routes, ultimately building a connection between the acts of making (map/graph, sketch, drawing) and storytelling. (…)

The GNWs will constitute an empowering experience and a training and exchange environment where participants can appreciate the usefulness of the research for their individual trajectories, developing skills in the making of visual objects, storytelling and speaking out, expanding their knowledge of asylum and digital rights, and nurturing their social capital. The GNWs will enable the creation of a large data set to be transformed into collaborative research objects, widening their circulation, and fostering their back-translation effect among different audiences. Research assistants among migrants or solidarity actors, especially among those participating in the digital ethnography, as well as artists and other professionals, will be involved with short contracts and recruited thanks to local academic partners in each EA to guarantee the effectiveness of GNWs and the willingness to join in of research participants. Thanks to the mixed media material gathered, selected GNWs will generate the Special Features of the project.

Within this framework, GNW is conceived as an ethnographic method: drawing on, blending, and integrating the aforementioned research approaches; addressing the issues of reflexivity and positionality of researchers; aiming to construct a safe place of relation and narration, built in cooperation by researchers and research subjects. Along these lines, GNW can be considered as a collaborative environment enabling the rise of collective narrations. A place, or a virtual place, where positionalities and reflexivity of researchers and research subjects are put at stake and negotiated. Here, through a variety of participative, and expressive techniques – allowing a horizontal share of views, information, analyses, and stories – collective narrations take shape in a collaborative way. These collective narrations, raised

and gathered in the GNWs can be synthesized and/or transformed into 'cultural products' such as: documentary videos; art exhibits, songs, diaries, artifacts, etc. Consistently with a cooperative and reflexive approach, the same collective narratives, and the cultural objects themselves, are examined and discussed within the GNW. These 'cultural objects' can thus be used to construct public counter-narratives useful to research participants themselves, allowing them to share their points of view with a broader audience, and to circulate de-stigmatized views about migration and solidarity.

GNW as an open-source method

GNW is not a method that sticks strictly to a guideline. Neither there is only one way to make a GNW. Collective participation and common elaboration of narratives are required, but participation and cooperation techniques used in the making of GNWs can be different and must be adapted to participants' interests and attitudes. So, each GNW will entail different degrees of co-participation, as well as different challenges for researchers. Thereby, consistently with the idea of 'open source' each researcher using GNWs contributes to the development and the adaptation of the method to different research contexts.

GNW as a safe relational environment

In order to make a GNW, a high level of reciprocal trust and knowledge is needed. That's because participants should feel free to talk, interact and share their views without feeling to be judged, neither by researchers, nor by other participants. Hence, GNW requires a deep understanding and knowledge, gained over time, of participants' conditions and needs.

GNW as a plural space

GNWs are joined by researchers, research's subjects, and by research coworkers with a strong expertise in a specific expressive language (e.g.: artists, photographers, video-makers, songwriters, theatre directors, etc.). Research co-workers join GNW upon invitation, either by researchers, and by participants. The choice of the expressive language through which the 'cultural object' will be created, is a matter of discussion in the GNW.

GNW as a collective storytelling space

The GNW's aim is to facilitate the raise of a collective narrative, or counter-narrative, through the creation of a space enabling horizontal relationships and active participation. Yet, power and knowledge imbalances between researchers and participants cannot be entirely eliminated.

E.g.: While group discussion can be horizontal, the issues deemed valuable for the construction of the cultural object, are subject to researchers' power of veto and choice; for instance, about the public use of images produced in the GNW.

Hence, the GNW is not a neutral space; rather, it's a space criss-crossed by conflicts and negotiations, frictions, and forms of cooperation, driven by participants' and researchers' interests and positionalities. These frictions and negotiations are also a crucial moment of analysis and interpretation and contribute to the general findings of the research in each Node.

The collective character of narrations raised in the GNWs is meant, also, as a way to overcome individual perspectives, and to raise awareness on commonalities in participants' statuses and conditions.

GNW as a space of co-creation

Drawing on the University of Genoa Visual Sociology research group's experience in visual sociology and art-based research, GNW is conceived as a lab for the creation of 'cultural objects'. Different degrees of participation, and different time frames (from several months, up to several years), together with different possibilities and sensitivities, lead to different elaboration processes and outputs. Yet, for researchers 'making something' together with research subjects allow to forge a deeper relationship with them, raising spontaneous views, reflexivity, in-depth narrations, and emotive involvement.

In this perspective, the 'cultural object' is both the grounds to raise participation, and a GNW's output.

An example of a cultural object: The Jacket. Drawing with Fanon the French Italian border

The Jacket is the first cultural object produced in the frame of the ERC SOLROUTES project and it has been now published in Animazione Sociale (2023), the main journal of social workers in Italy; furthermore, being translated in different languages, the graphic novel is now in press as a free brochure in order to be spread across the several shelters that pinpoint the solidarity routes. The story narrated through this cultural object based on research embodies in some way one of the ideas of Marcus about multi-sited ethnography: to follow an object in order to grasp a social world in its everyday making.

The Jacket is an illustrated graphic novel created by a collective of researchers - sociologists, anthropologists, psychiatrists, educators, and poets - as one of the unplanned outcomes of an ethnographic fieldwork at the French-Italian border of Oulx-Briancon; the process of creation, started in 2022, has been concluded during, and also thanks, to the training activities of SOLROUTES researchers, in 2023. One key-actor in the graphic-novel creative process has been 'ON Borders', one of the main activists and researchers association operating in Val Susa, at the Massi shelter.

The Jacket aims to experiment an ethnographic writing able of broadening its audiences and expanding the research. The idea of the graphic novel did not come as a pre-defined output within a research project; rather, it's the outcome of a dialectical relationship between a multiplicity of activists and researchers working on the Italian French border. It's not an easy object to place within specific disciplinary fields; neither it is imagined grasping a hypothetical reader.

The key actors of this project are part of a wider network within which, for years, several research-action processes have been carried out on 'subaltern worlds'. This work is shaped by the solidarity processes and frictions occurring during the field work on the border; in the recursive attempt to find new ways to produce and communicate alternative imaginaries.

The attempts of migrants to cross the Italian-French border take shape with the contribution of multiple networks of solidarity contributing, also, through the supply of mountain technical clothing - that circulates continuously within a transnational space - making the border 'game' less deadly and dramatic for people on the move.

Through a transposition of Michelangelo Pistoletto's Venus of rags inside the Massi di Oulx Refuge (starting point of the crossing), the illustrator Stefano Greco suggested us to use the text of Black Skin, White Masks, by Franz Fanon, as a storytelling voice-over accompanying drawings.

The Jacket plays on the communicative immediacy of the graphic frame juxtaposing a text, situated in a specific historical period, yet in a deconstructed and reassembled form. With this assemblage of words and images, the relationship between the white and the black body develops into a menage à trois where the jacket - which pass from one to the other - also takes the floor, making itself the protagonist of the dreams of those who have no voice. As a consequence, the 11 plates that make up the Jacket do not stick to specific narrative forms and narratives oriented by the research project itself; rather, they float toward new directions of meaning, avoiding any simplistic dissemination action, and back translation gesture. As always, every object marked by an aesthetic and artistic intention is fulfilled only in the interaction with the viewer who immediately becomes its co-author. The ethnographic risk in this case concerns precisely the possible disorientation of the co-author away from those contents that in the effort of representation the original producers - we, as the research and writing collective - wanted to imprint. In this case, we wonder whether ethnographic research and writing misses its target or, on the contrary thanks to this openness, makes possible the avenue for an unexpected creation that might transcend it, discard it, deconstruct it, reimagine it. But is this not also a task for ethnographic research? Is it not a task of research to always contain a dimension of action aimed at transformation? Could this margin of exploration represent the space of a replication that would never be concluded or controlled? Would it leave the artifact in the temporality of new, as yet unknown actors? What scraps in the imaginary might this object open up once it returns to inhabit the closets of the thousand shelters through which the stories, and bodies, of a contemporary underground railroad pass challenging the necropolitics of fortress Europe, and its policies of flows governance?
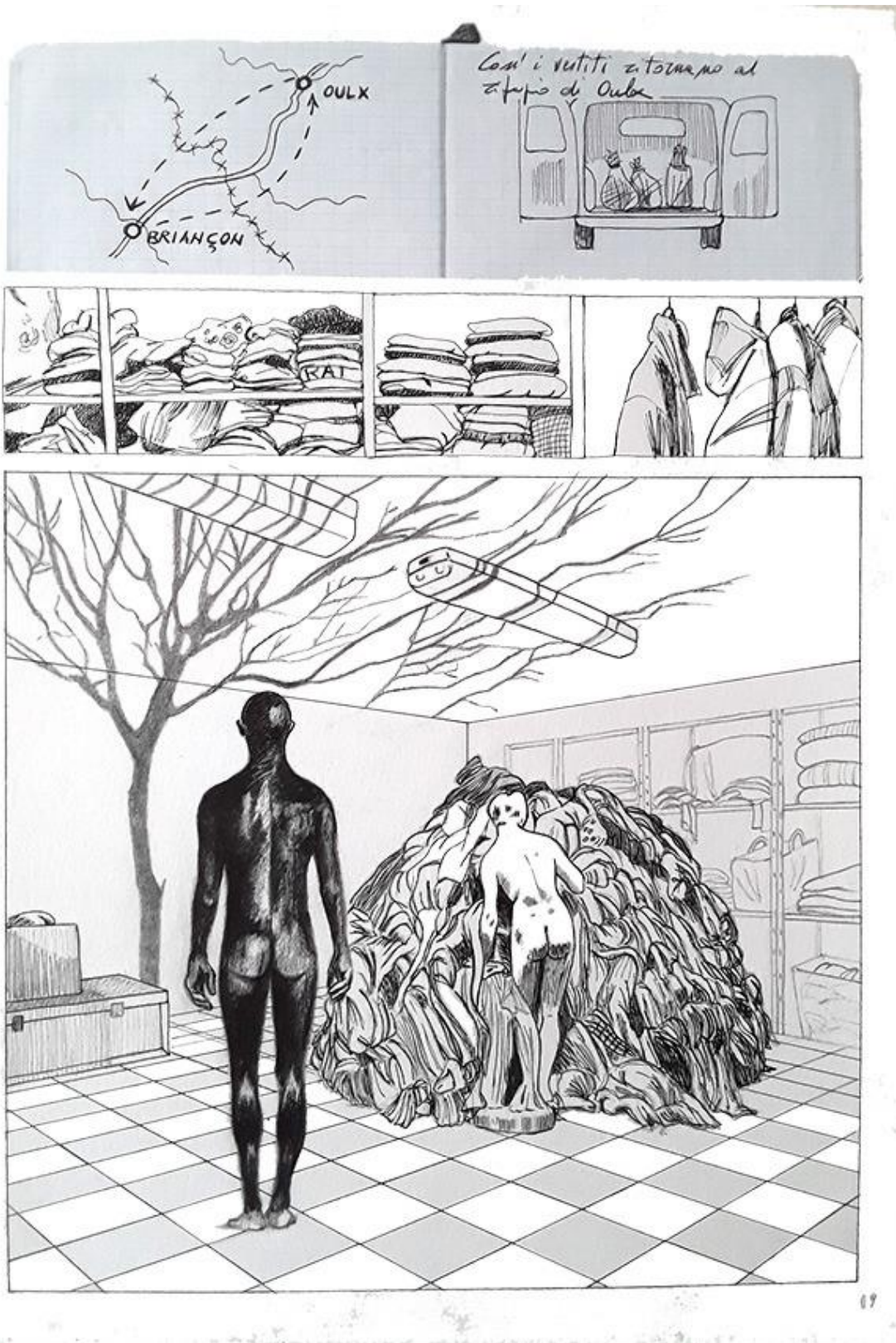
Image n. 1. The Jacket

Research techniques, inter-actions, and participation

Across the 50 crucial nodes of migratory and solidarity routes in Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin America, different kinds of research techniques will be performed, siding, expanding and building on GNWs as a space of encounters and voice. Those techniques will vary according to the contexts, the constraints, and the opportunities.

Field and audio notes will be used to record experiences and to reflect upon the encounters we will undergo. Moments of detachment and break from fieldwork and research will be useful to manage the intense and critical situations we will meet and to reflect on our actions and positioning. In this way the field diaries will be our tireless travelling companion that guarded the insights, contacts, and stories. We will use an online platform in order to store the material and make it accessible to other researchers of the team. This will allow the team to be constantly updated about other fields in an attempt to conduct research in a co-ordinated, comparative manner and to bring the identified themes into dialogue.

Life She/He Stories and Interviews. Life she/he stories will be conducted with people with whom relationships of trust and exchange are built. This in order to reduce misunderstandings on the purpose of the conversation and to make the narration as natural as possible. For instance, migrants of-ten find themselves having to tell their life stories in various, and more or less, institutional contexts. Examples of these are the commissions that have to assess asylum applications, police interrogations, interviews with NGOs carrying out dedicated services. In these contexts, the stories told have direct consequences on one's status, as for instance on obtaining documents, getting released from prison, or accessing specific services. The researchers attention therefore will be directed to mark a distinction with this type of situation prioritising the relationship and sharing the knowledge acquired.

Semi-structured qualitative interview will be conducted with a diverse range of actors including migrants, solidarity actors, local authorities, border guards among the others. This broad spectrum of actors will make it possible to approach the theme of solidarity from different perspectives and grasp its various facets and nuances. Moreover, given the multi-sited research, it will be possible to interview people in different locations trying to capture the connections and mutual understandings of each others.

In dialogues, space will be left to people to ask questions in order to make it a two- way conversation and to capture the interests, doubts, and issues that people want to explore more in depth. This information also serves as the basis for investigating topics of interest to the informants and for intercepting common discourses and desires circulating. Such two-way relationships will make it possible to become an informant yourself on certain solidarity issues (logistic, habits, legal, contacts) and in some ways return knowledge accumulated during the research project.

The use of the recorder will be carefully evaluated because it often creates fear and coldness in the interviewees compared to when we chat without it. Interviews will be conducted in English, French, Arabic, Farsi etc.. depending on the preference of the interviewees, the language skills of the researchers and the possibility of having a translator available. The language barrier could be a major obstacle especially in the ability to go deep and grasp the nuances of certain topics.

Volunteering and engaging in experiences of solidarity will be one of the key tools to access the fields in a participative manner and with the idea of knowing by doing. Getting to know, participate and support solidarity groups (activists, NGOs, churches, associations, networks) and people active in supporting migrants in order to build relationships we could rely on. This approach represents an invaluable resource as well as an opportunity to tighten relations within the solidarity networks and increase communication among transit places, and dedicated services as well as to meet people on the move and their needs. This will be done by making explicit our positioning and the research work we are doing in that specific location as well as sharing our expertise. To do this, it will be important to take the necessary time to become part of the group in which we decide to act and to avoid extractive modes but to put yourself at the service and in listening. Moreover, we have to be aware that adopting those participatory modes will bring with it various difficulties including burn-out and psychological consequences given the cruel environments in which migrants often find themselves.

During volunteering it will be also possible to share knowledge and information helpful to support illegalised people in the continuation of the journeys. Indeed, one of the most significant actions concerns logistical support and the sharing of key information in the various areas crossed by migratory routes. As we see these journeys often last for months or years, passing very different territories, often in a non-linear way and with abrupt changes

of plan. In those situations, direct contacts of local solidarity persons and groups could be very important in supporting the movement, sharing resources, or simply giving an account of the territory, its gateways, and risks. Indeed, due to the mobile nature of the migratory routes, the support network and its study must be spread across the territories and in constant communication in order to anticipate the needs and be effective.

Drifting is an action research approach, which combines practices of mobile and activist research traditions in which knowledge is constructed by researchers and participants while moving together through everyday environments. While navigating the field and engaging in discussion inspired by the participants' experiences the social reality is uncovered and constructed. As an activist research approach, drifting relies mainly on its feminist application and similar to what Guy Debord experimented in the situationist practice. In the present research, drifting has the potential of revealing what immigration policies mean in terms of the concrete everyday realities of undocumented migrants, as well as to identify possible cracks in which to subvert it.

Similar techniques called **'monitoring'** have been developed by activists at the French-Italian border. It consists of patrolling together with informants in certain areas or situations in order to grasp as much information as possible and understanding the dynamics that are taking place. It is the attempt of focusing on the everyday, on illegitimate practices and resistance to them. In this way, different perspectives and postures can confront and merge, giving rise to in-depth knowledge and practices. For instance, being present during episodes of police repression allowed activists to report abuses, take care of specific vulnerable needs, and intervene when it was possible. However, it is also true that, often, when white observers are present, the police have a different attitude towards migrants than when they are not seen.

In recent years the academic world has experienced increasing interest in **participatory mapping approaches** because of the possibilities to boost interactions, to use accessible and free-ranging visual methods in an individual or group setting. There is a long history of participatory mapping seeking to understand location-specific human values, conflicts and resistance, behaviour, preferences for land use and public projects among the others. The practice of using maps constitutes a critical site for understanding relations of power, inclusions, and exclusions and how those are negotiated and contested spatially. Indeed, mapping is particularly interesting because it allows participants to move from description

to depiction to theorising the reason for the ways in which they have represented features on the map through drawing and talking. In this way the process of questioning and reflection together on specific issues is performed using maps, pens, colours, and words either with individuals and groups. The creation of the map is then an integral part of the in-formation construction and collection, to be added to other research techniques (audio interviews, videos, written texts …), and must be analysed and understood considering the process implement-ed.

Mapping will be a useful tool in approaching the multi-sitedeness of the SOLROUTES project and the aim to map spaces and social practices distributed among multiple and often unpredictable locations. Moreover, counter-mapping will be used to unearth hidden practices and meaning, bringing together the experiences of actors at different times and in different locations, thus empowering ethnographers, and participants by permanently updating their work in the field.

Finally, **'migration and/or solidarity traces'** (different objects left intentionally or abandoned along migration and solidarity routes) will be used as an analytical starting point to study solidarity. Indeed, our research proposes an innovative perspective, based not only on the often-used oral testimony, but on artefacts, namely physical remnants of the journeys, solidarity initiatives and border crossings produced and left by people on the move. These artefacts can take the form of personal notes, pieces of information for other migrants, maps, drawings, poems, songs and so on. Scholars pointed out how these traces are often used by people on the move in order to exert agency and control in context characterised by exclusion and restrictive immigration laws. Most of the time, the walls of the shelters, immigration offices, and solidarity spaces are where artefacts are left, often in the form of drawings and writings. Indeed, looking at migration from the migrant perspectives is crucial in order to challenge EU border enforcement and narration, because it offers a unique entry point for understanding how borders and routes are experienced, handled and negotiated. More importantly, these traces are a powerful testimony and are essential in terms of migrant representation. For instance, an archive of contemporary migration and solidarity initiatives could be produced as collaborative forms of knowledge that may involve migrants, activists, academics, and anyone who is sympathetic.

Lessons from the field

SOLROUTES takes a creative and innovative approach by combining a set of different methodological perspectives and techniques, integrating them into a wider, trans-local, and transnational fieldwork. In this vein, SOLROUTES will set up 6 local **Ethnographic Antennae (EAs),** thanks to in-depth knowledge and in situ relations brought by **local academic partners**, in crucial areas of transit in Europe at large (**Morocco, Tunisia, Turkey, Belgium, French Guiana,** and **Mayotte**). Here researchers will meet during the fieldwork with the aim of: a) generating and bringing together reflexive knowledge on the corridors/routes involving solidarity networks and migrants; and b) enacting a public sociology to amplify its outcomes.

During the first 8 months of the project, the SOLROUTES team was involved in various research operations in various locations in order to test the tools, methodologies and approaches foreseen by the project, and to build a relationship of trust and reflexivity between the 'ethnographic couples' who will act from October onwards in the Antennae sites.

Specifically, fieldwork was carried out in the following 4 experimental nodes: Ventimiglia (Liguria), Oulx and Saluzzo (Piemonte) and Mazara del Vallo (Sicily). These four locations have distinctive characteristics as regards the relationship with unauthorized mobilities, the practices of solidarity towards and with people on the move, the forms of settling and the role of the labor markets. For example, Ventimiglia and Oulx constitute two main places of exit towards France, Saluzzo is a hub of circulation linked to migrants' agricultural work across Italy and partially Europe, while Mazara del Vallo is a well-known place of entry and settlement; moreover, it constitutes a major fishing port which has been connected for decades with Tunisia as regards the recruitment of seafarers crews and the development of cultural relations, economic exchanges and circulation between these two shores of the Mediterranean.

The fieldworks had to cope with the issue of access, the building of trust, the involvement of participants, the relationship between knowledge production and the mixed role of researcher as volunteers or activists. More generally, the participatory ethnography approach that underlies the SOLROUTES research device was permanently addressed by the necessity of a critical reflection; it happened during the different temporalities on fieldwork within the ethnographic couple, as well as in general meeting among all researchers. Thus,

the field training was aimed at verifying the difficulties and constraints, limits, and opportunities for such kind of ethnography.

An accurate analysis both on methods and on research findings of this phase is in progress and the corresponding Reports on the first 4 experimental Nodes of the project will be drawn up by the end of October.

In the original research proposal, we acknowledged the critical issue concerning participatory methods and we tries to imagine paths to mitigate it.

Yet, the field access and the participation of solidarity actors and migrants cannot be taken for granted and poses relevant challenges. SOLROUTES will address these through: 1) the active involvement of local academic partners specialized in migration studies with longstanding field knowledge; 2) the recruitment of local Ph.D. researchers and the activation of local research contracts to ensure a continuous 'mapping' of the field (actors, institutions and stakeholders); 3) the implementation of a collaborative participant observation strategy, siding the everyday activity of solidarity networks toward migrants in transit (Rozakou, 2019). In this way, researchers will have greater insight, from the "volunteer's position" (Elias, 1995), of how migrants and solidarity actors experience their own condition; 4) the legal and ethical training of researchers to mitigate the potential risks for actors involved in the field, thanks to specialized partnerships. The four aforementioned points will enable SOLROUTES to gain access to those areas - in many cases ethnically and socially segregated - where migrants on the move are often stuck; the participation will be fostered also thanks to the availability of time of informants, one of the conditions for collaborative methods.

Conditions 1, 2, and 4 have been fulfilled during the first 8 months of the project, setting a network of academic cooperation in each Antenna, recruiting appropriate candidates for PhDs and postdoc position, and providing them with an intensive scientific training including ethical and legal issues.

The first outcome of our exploratory research was about the importance of time. The research we developed in the four locations was organized around four period of 4/5 days each, with a significant activity of keeping connection with participants at distance. This temporality does not allow the possibility of developing successfully collaborative methods,

co-authorship of cultural object based on research, building of trust and enriching research relationships. As Ismail Oubad posits in his fieldwork diary:

> As I spend time with solidals in Ventimiglia, I gained sight into the fact that the suspicion on the existence of researchers in this border zone stems from the assumption that the latter are often seen to be extractive and voyeurs, approaching vulnerable people in moments of their struggle. To the solidals, researchers, if they are in the border zone for something, it is for the hunt of the experience of people on the move. (…) To mitigate this seemingly distance, I assumed participation as a way to legitimize my presence around the solidals. In fact, participation was not fully a deliberate choice: to be around the solidals in Ventimiglia can only happen through the primacy of "giving something to the territory. (…) Ranging from linguistic interpretation between solidals and people on the move in the info point, to the distribution of electricity strip, to border counter-monitoring and informing people on the move about the possible trails to cross the harsh border of Ventimiglia I tried to shape relevance around my presence with the solidals in such situations. (…) The ways in which I used to appear in the territory was in some sorts expeditive and punctual. So, what implications can transpire when our declared intentions contradict our practices? (…) Sensitivity, straightforwardness and matching intensions and practice are key to gaining and maintaining proximity to respondents we aim to following.

As Ivan Bonnin states in the case of Saluzzo, slow ethnography is a matter of knowledge production:

> Another element I want to emphasize is in fact that of temporality. I have found that the best dialogues have taken place over time, in the mode of a process, during the course of a mutual acquaintance made up of interruptions, long-distance communication, moments of sharing, common experiences. In my opinion, from the point of view of method, it is really important to have the time to conduct research with the right amount of slowness and not be subjected to the neo-liberal logic of accelerated productivity.

Similar reflections appear in the experience of other researchers in these exploratory fields for training and open important learnings for our future research. Coping with this kind of situations, all the team has become fully aware of the importance of appropriate temporalities

for collaborative ethnography. In the case of Antennae, this will not be a problematic issue because researchers, unlike their stays during the training, will be fully immersed on the ground for several months; but in the case of ethnographic Caravans, the SOLROUTES research device that aims to follow mobility (of volunteers and unauthorized migrants) through mobility of researchers, the temporalities of our activities must be carefully reconsidered. Permanencies of few days in distinct locations will not allow the avenue for collaborative projects. These are some operational suggestions in order to address this issue: a) to foster the dimensions of circularity, identifying places and situations already connected (as many border zones are), in order to promote among the participants a perception of the researcher as a subject who does not disappear from a space of relationships but who moves relentless within it; b) to integrate solidarity project focused on the mobility of volunteers and activists, as in the case of solidarity caravans, the movement of the civil fleet in the Mediterranean or mobile projects of social interventions around the Balkan routes; c) to reduce the participatory dimension of ethnography and imagine cultural objects more based on the involvement of invited artists; d) to emphasize the exchange and usefulness dimension of SOLROUTES activities by encouraging artistic and research interventions with a strong educational component; e) to amplify the remote work of preparation of Ethnographic Caravans in order to arrive to the research field with a well organized agenda of local contacts; f) to search for partnerships with local and trans-local actors in such a way that Ethnographic Caravan become a common project and a win-win cooperation between researchers and activists/volunteers/NGO's.

Temporality interacts with the objective and material conditions of potential participants, something that may be quite different in the case of volunteers, NGO's professional and people on the move. The case of Saluzzo, where a collaborative project called 'Cantastorie,' linked to oral narrative of agricultural workers is in progress thanks to the ERC research intervention, can be really useful to highlight this point. While it is true that many difficulties disappear and the exchange becomes more fluid once that the process is working, making the process work is not a given. In the following ethnographic notes, Ivan Bonnin, and all the team in Saluzzo, reflect upon their research acts or, better say, research desires. Flexibility and the ability to stay tuned with improvisation and changing emotional and factual landscape, become key issues:

> As far as my GNW project is concerned, there are two fronts to manage. On the one hand, it has been developed together with some local solidarity actors.

What I noticed was that no matter how enthusiastic they were about the project, so far, I have always been the one who had to drive the process of organizing. Not only coordinating it, but also pushing for it to go ahead. This was not exactly in the plans, my hope was that it could develop with more autonomy. In this way, the project has required a larger investment than expected, not so much in material resources as in time and psychophysical energy. In this regard, I think it is really important to calibrate the ambitions of the project and the available resources. An effective way to make things flow is to propose an activity – and be flexible enough to modify it during the process – that is in the chords of the people involved, without the required investment being perceived as an effort. For sure, as positive achievements, the project stimulated my personal relationship with participant solidarity actors and more importantly involved them in further relations with migrants (e.g., going to the park on Sundays), thus opening up new spaces of political possibility.

As far as migrants are concerned, the difficulties in this case were of a different kind. What is evident is that the realization of an art project is not a priority for workers in a vulnerable condition or fatigued by a heavy workload. This must always be borne in mind. One of the fundamental issues, in addition to those mentioned above, concerns privacy. Privacy to be understood not in an individualistic sense, as the personal right to anonymity, but rather as a collective practice of opacity actively pursued by the migrant subject. You have to be respectful of it, and at the same time not blocked by it. For sure it is by no means easy to communicate the emancipatory intention of the project and research, nor the political sense.

So going beyond rigidity and fixed ideas about the matter of a collaborative research project is a challenge that requires commitment, multiple tactics, time to deepen mutual understanding and build trust. It may seem trivial, but even here the temporal factor is crucial. Moreover, we believe that any project of this kind must be adapted and modified according to the discoveries made during its development. There is no successful blueprint. It is unthinkable to remain faithful to the initial plan, our actions must be changeable and mutable, able to 'feel' the situation, delve into the existing contradictions, experience conflict, and grasp the inputs received implicitly. Sometimes, this may mean scaling back some of your intentions. At other times, it may mean letting go of one idea and trying out a new one. Or you may even have to go deeper into a single aspect.

A second line of critical reflection revolves around the setting of the team involved in fieldwork. The various research experiences carried out as part of the starting training of researchers have strongly emphasized the importance of the collective dimension of research practices. Beyond the intellectual and scientific stimulation it generates and the fact that it challenges the mythical idea of solitary research, this collective dimension raises a certain number of challenges and issues that need to be taken into account, both in terms of the different trajectories of the people involved, but also in the perspective of successfully completing a research project as ambitious as SOLROUTES. First of all, it seems that we need to distinguish (this may seem naive, but it has proved to be central) that 'collective research fieldwork' does not necessarily mean 'collective research.' So, while the fieldwork was conducted simultaneously, the issues driving it were, although complementary, fundamentally different, due to both disciplinary (sociology and geography, etc.) and personal reasons. Since training has been a collective research fieldwork, the ethnographic steps we are facing in the immediate future will be mainly a collective research, pushing for a more coherent approach. Michela Lovato describes in her fieldnotes the collective 'concern' she experimented:

> Since the beginning of our project in Genova, it is emphasized that we are a group doing research - thus the dimension of collectivity. Saluzzo was an opportunity to observe the functioning, and the dysfunction, of being a group doing research together. Ivan, Camille, and I are different people, with diverse backgrounds and diverse ways of thinking and setting things up – among the things I was able to observe was the way we related to each other. It was a process of continuous negotiation, in which choices and movements were discussed – same for post-fieldwork comments and observations. The relationship between us was then continually shaped by the context in which we did research - thus the people we met, the places we saw, the things we noticed. (…) a first reflection then is about how to give each other space, in a research group. How to listen to each other, how to communicate, how to balance each other's presence in the field. And how to balance each other's energies: the fatigue, the willing of doing things, the interest levels were different in everyone; choosing also meant negotiating about that, and again favoring positions and requiring steps back from others.

Nonetheless, to transform possible critical issues related to the 'collective factor' in opportunities, a permanent reflexivity is the tool to take care of and to posit at the center of the research device. By this way, the collective dimension can become an extremely helpful factor. If there is more than one researcher involved, if there is an ongoing dialogue, it is easier to overcome difficult moments and to grasp more nuances and making more proposals about workable solutions and interpretations of provisional findings. In this sense, ethnographic failures can act as crucial theoretical resource. In the frame of SOLROUTES project, both in the case of Antennae and Caravans, researchers will operate in a highly collective space. In the first case, postdoctoral researcher and the PI will assist PhD' students, through multiple field visits and their own research presence and activities; in the second case, postdoctoral researchers and the PI will jointly develop mobile research plans and they will act simultaneously in fieldwork. In both cases, experts, local scientific advisor, and artists will be part of the research landscape. Thus, reflexivity constitute itself also as matter of organization, in order to set and schedule specific moments of discussion before, during and after fieldwork.

This 'collective factor' triggers also multiple accesses to the field and evokes the different positionalities of the researchers. By these words, Nadia Chaouch refers to her experience in Mazara:

> During my fieldwork, the question of my positionality has arisen repeatedly. As a Tunisian, someone from Mahdia, just like most of them, I share the same traditions and dialect with them. I am a woman, just like them as well. These shared elements quickly allowed me to access their world and blurred the boundaries between us without much effort. However, as a researcher, I had to treat these women as individuals and not just sources of knowledge and information. At the same time, I felt they treated me as an expert, as an academic, and kept my qualifications in mind, which may influence their responses or behavior. They also treated me with pride, seeing in me the Tunisian who succeeded in life and pursued studies that not all of them had the chance to do. Nevertheless, I tried my best not to establish this boundary and to create a space of intersubjectivity by speaking their language and exchanging our experiences, letting them know that I come from a very modest family that made many sacrifices for me, just as they do for their children. The use of the expression "you are so humble" that I often receive as a comment actually

reflects the hierarchy created by the academic and social world. Every time, they find it a bit unusual to encounter someone who speaks their language without trying to appear superior.

Yet, proximity and distance act in a complex way and may favor or obstruct the production of ethnographic knowledge. Once more, reflexivity and plurality of scientific gazes and positionalities can reveal as valuable asset during the research. As Nadia proceeds in her reflection:

Being a woman on fieldwork can create an ambivalent position due to the unique challenges and advantages it presents. In certain contexts, like working with women, being a female researcher helped me gain easy access to their world as they may feel more comfortable opening up to someone who shares their gender. However, it is crucial to be aware of gender dynamics in the research setting, as they can impact access to certain groups or influence how participants respond to a female researcher. This was evident during my fieldwork in both Oulx and Mazara, and I often questioned whether the information people shared with me was related to my position as a woman or as a researcher. Cultural sensitivity is essential when working in diverse cultural settings, even if I share the same nationality or cultural background as the participants. I learned that having a shared identity does not automatically mean that I fully understand everything about their customs and norms. On the other hand, some of my interviewees mentioned that women prefer not to discuss family problems with someone close to them due to fear of ridicule or future use of the information against them. Instead, they may confide in someone less connected to their social circle to protect their privacy and dignity within the community. By opening up to a stranger, they feel a sense of anonymity and security, knowing that their personal issues will not become gossip among people they know. It allows them to express concerns without fear of judgment or criticism from close acquaintances.

Therefore, being an insider does not necessarily guarantee access to the deep conversation that concern people's lives; while belonging to a particular group or community might provide some insight and understanding of certain issues, it does not automatically grant full access to all discussions or make one aware of every aspect of this particular reality.

Ethnography is something embodied; we do ethnography with our body; and emotions play a key role in every kind of research activities. We cannot skip it, but it is worth to interpret the way we feel the field. Lülüfer Körükmez agglutinates her feelings doing observation and volunteering in a shelter for people on the move at the Italian French border of Oulx under the word of boredom:

> Boredom was the prevailing emotion in my days at the Massi shelter in Oulx. Sometimes it was so strong that I felt the urge to do things that I would never imagine doing myself during fieldwork. For example, I offered Rassa, my postdoctoral mate, to go out of the shelter and have our lunch at a restaurant a few times. Another time I went to bed at 4 o'clock in the afternoon, hoping to sleep until the next morning. During the fieldwork I had done before, I was occasionally bored, but I never felt the urge to flight. I would not imagine myself trying to escape from the location of fieldwork. What was different this time? Why was I so bored?

Boredom is a consequence of the difficulties of the researcher to access significant relationships in the field, of building their role and recognition within a social space. Lülüfer refers to this feeling as inducing a desire to escape:

> Every place has its own temporality when it comes to developing relations, but we could not fit into it. So, the language barrier was not the only reason for not being able to build communication. Since there was not enough interaction, I tried to get increasingly involved in the daily work in the shelter: delivering the clothes, washing, and folding the laundry, setting the tables, disturbing the food, etc. However, all these tasks usually take half an hour. An hour, tops. The rest of the time, most of the time in the shelter, we had to linger around and wait for the time to pass. So, it was frustrating and boring because I could not find my place there. I felt like an extra in the context. I was there, but with no clear function. I felt just like the one that I did not want to be: a useless researcher. I made a mistake by imagining the travelers being bored while waiting in the refuge. I did not ask them if they were bored. I was overwhelmed by the feeling of boredom, and I simply attributed my feelings to the others. Maybe, most probably, they were not experiencing the waithood as me. Probably not to succumb to ennui and despair, I simulated my feelings on travelers, which made

it possible to put the mistakes of fieldwork design and my mistakes as a researcher into the research context.

As Rassa Ghaffari states about her joint experience with Lülüfer at the shelter:

During my last stay, I described PoM's stay as a 'suspended time,' spent chatting with volunteers and staff or other travelers, downloading and studying maps, calling relatives and fiends and smoking cigarettes out in the sun.

This sense of suspension proved to be highly contagious: I started to think on how boredom can be read as a local expression of marginality and exclusion, as Stefano Pontiggia writes. Unlike the squats disseminated in the valley, Massi shelter can be compared to a kind of pit-stop: travelers stay here for 2 night maximum, this is a space of waiting without specific activities to do, and specially no collective activities. Encounters were fleeting, temporary, marked by uncertainty and transience. How interested they are to know us? How they saw this place? We did not really have the time to become familiar to gain the required confidence to collect their stories; we shared a cigarette and the sun and started conversations quickly, where are you from, where have you been, where are you going, and so on. This space of waithood was an empty one difficult to insert oneself in: we could only ask the permission to fill this space with them.

Extremely frustrating, this feeling led me to question the tools and especially the expectations with which I was trying to access this field; the inability to communicate with many PoMs due to language barriers, the lack of time (theirs, mine) or simply their lack of will to talk to me, have long led me to consider these fieldwork attempts as unsuccessful. (…) Speaking Persian helped me interact with several Afghans; on one occasion, a young Iranian man in reverse turned away from me, visibly upset at the idea of having a 'compatriot' in the shelter. Instead of viewing these episodes as disappointing failures, I began to look at them as food for thought on which to build my next approach to the field. Being conscious of these variables and their influence on the field and its participants allowed me to reframe my expectations and the burden I was suffering to emulate the 'perfect ethnographer.'

Nonetheless, the chancing shape of temporalities, and the feelings about waiting spread across the many subjects inhabiting a border social institution like the Massi shelter at Oulx, can also be seen as an opportunity to develop a knowledge grounded on collaborative ethnography. A vacuum time can enable the desire of useful encounters and the urge for action. There exists a wide body of literature which tackles the role of failure in ethnographic research and draw on the experiences to argue for a more sustained and in-depth conversation on the topic. The number of variables that can 'go wrong' is almost limitless: access to the field site or to the potential participants is denied; if we 'get in', our interlocutors do not show up or fail to meet our expectations; we struggle to build meaningful relationships; our findings are not original at all, but we manage them as groundbreaking anyway; we feel stressed, clueless, bored, and overwhelmed. Describing certain experiences as 'failure' might indeed be misleading due to its oft-assumed negative connotations. The significance of failure can differ, as it encompasses (un)avoidable mistakes, but also situations which appeared initially as negative, but turned out to be valuable learning opportunities. And since our works are framed within the neoliberal capitalistic academia (read between the lines: increased competitiveness, publication pressures, individualism, precarity and emphasis on 'research excellence') where is common to pit those who 'triumph over adversity,' against those who do not, failure is conventionally eschewed as the undesirable opposite of success.

In some way, our search for subversive and transgressive methods implies to assume failure as a learning experience. In this vein, the collapse of collaborative methods may represent a useful lesson about how to reframe the relation between the researchers and the researched, and, at the end, highlights the characteristics of a social space, its violence and the powers operating in it, despite any romantic view on it.

Preliminary suggestions towards the Ethnographic Caravans (ECs)

SOLROUTES methodological approach stems from the necessity to explore and interpret the multiple practices, meanings, and shifting locations of solidarity, which exceed the single and fixed site - the crucial *locus* of traditional ethnography (Stocking 1984). Solidarity networks undergo constant transformation depending on migrants' movements, which are

based on opportunities to get across. This means routes are constantly shifting. Therefore, a **multi-sited ethnography** becomes the most accurate and coherent option, allowing researchers to stay on, live on, and follow the route, rather than diving into a single cultural and social location. At the same time, as highlighted by Marcus (1995), the point is to focus on "chains, paths, threads, conjunctions or juxtapositions of locations". This multi-sited strategy is not defined in advance, but rather emerges from the research process as a result of mapping spaces and social practices distributed among multiple - and often unpredictable - locations. Within this frame, SOLROUTES can be conceived as an attempt to carry out a 'mobile ethnography' on frictions and global connections (Coleman and Von Hellermann 2011; Tsing 2005), since each node, as a research site, is shaped by processes which connect a multitude of other nodes around Europe at large. Thus, travelling will be a fundamental *modus operandi* (Clifford 1997). Adopting the language often used by migrants in their marches across borders and by solidarity groups, **Ethnographic Caravans (ECs)** will be our means to explore and interact along routes and their nodes from the fringes to the innermost areas of the EU, together with a digital ethnography that will accompany all the stages of the research. The Ethnographic Caravan device, grounded on Marcus's perspective, will expand it fruitfully putting together different paths: to "follow the people" (the actors of solidarity and migrants in transit along the corridors/routes), "follow the conflicts" (the frictions related to transit and border crossing), "follow the things" (the dissemination and reaction to the research objects collaboratively generated during the fieldwork), and "follow the meanings" (the shifting idea of solidarity).

During the first 8 months of the training path for social research, doctoral students and post-doc researchers focused on specific sites and on the possibilities and difficulties of accessing the field, building participatory paths, and imagining/creating Generative Narrative Workshops. Yet, no experimentation has taken place regarding the Ethnographic Caravans, whose first wave will take place in the early months of 2024. However, as we have seen, many reflections on the critical issues of participatory methods, and on the importance of a slow temporality, may also help us to rethink this research device.

The idea of the Caravan relies on the connection between spaces and social relationships and aims to deconstruct the idea of research as an activity 'anchored' in a specific space, or place, over a long period; it also mean to encourage the movement of researchers as a vector of a knowledge capable of following and interpreting other significant movements: of people, ideas, objects, conflicts, and practices. Yet, this dimension of movement can

generate frictions with the need of ethnographers to build dense relationships, as a condition for triggering shared, co-authorial narratives, grounded on several types of artistic languages.

A first element to take into consideration delves with the importance of generating the movement of research along paths already unified by knowledge, practices, stories, desires. In the case of people, an ethnographic Caravan can consist of accompanying a traveling group step by step, trying to support the processes of self-narration and reflexivity; or to travel backwards with subjects who have already completed the journey and have settled somewhere else, in order to rememorize the experience and the set of resources mobilized in order to accomplish it. Ethnographic Caravans can also accompany experiences, individual or organized, of volunteers and activists along the different nodes of the routes (as in the case of the various initiatives produced by solidarity movements in Europe), contributing by this way to the generation of a cultural production and a common knowledge about travelling condition for unauthorized migrants. In general, the research participants at the Antenna level constitute the first pool of possible participants for this type of involvement; for this reason, integrating Antennae and Caravans becomes a practical necessity for the implementation and effectiveness of SOLROUTES as a research project. The second element consists in overcoming the 'vertical' and 'linear' dimension of the journey to Europe. Decolonizing our gaze and our scientific habits also means building Ethnographic Caravans across the Global South. Travels and unauthorized circulations are very often erratic and aimed at the permanent search for opening news passages, or for economic opportunities making possible to continue the journey. Giving greater attention to understudied spaces of movement and forms of solidarities, such as those happening in non-European countries, also means to re-orient our movements as a researchers collective. In this sense, it seems particularly relevant to criss-cross with Ethnographic Caravans the circulation space that unites Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia, the one connecting the Maghreb countries with the Balkan route, as well as the corridor that links Senegal, Mauritania, Morocco, and the Canary Islands. This relocation of the Ethnographic Caravans will allow us to deepen our interpretations of solidarity addressing in an appropriate way the themes of Working Paper 1 ('Unsettling solidarities') and to downgrade and dis-inflate the pair 'political activism / humanitarianism' so relevant as regards the shape and the production of unauthorized mobility in Europe. A third element consists in deploying the Ethnographic Caravans on closer and interconnected area in order to allow researchers to move easily and often across the same places. An example could be represented by the circulatory space between

the Turkish coast, as a departure springboard, and the Greek islands where institutional hotspots and detention centres are located (Lesvos, Chios, Samos, Kos, Leros) and where multiple solidarity initiatives are concentrated. In this case, the dimension of the repeated circulation of the research group would allow the construction of less ephemeral social bonds and the construction of common artistic-creative projects between the two shores, also thanks to the fieldwork carried out at the Antenna level in Turkey.

In order to improve the experience, and test the Caravans with different techniques, maximising the research subjects involvement, we should focus on the relationships between Antennae and Caravans, trying to properly integrate the different research fields and locating them as close as possible, not only spatially but also in terms of content and relations. In this way, the Ethnographic Caravans would be an extension of the Antennae; consequently, the research activity would be more homogeneous and feasible, relying on and building on pre-existing social capital networks as a condition for applying collaborative and participatory methods; the GNWs themselves would arise from similar contexts where researchers are already recognized, have a good knowledge of the dynamics and the actors, or already established relations on which to rely.

As for the composition of the mobile research group, at the core of Ethnographic Caravans, the co-presence of two researchers and an invited artist is expected, as well as any other resource locally available. At the moment, an illustrator/graphic novelist and two directors specialized in social documentaries have been recruited as external professionals; other research and artistic activities related to photography and video-making will be carried out through internal resources of the SOLROUTES team.

Research plans, as well as the composition of the mobile research group, of the first three Caravans to be carried out at the beginning of '24 will be elaborated starting from October '23 and discussed within the SCERE during the first cross-comparison seminar at the end of NODES 1 in the 4 Antennae. Therefore, the first three Caravans will have an experimental value in order to test the possibility of developing collaborative methods and participatory ethnography within this type of research frame. In order to reflect on the dynamics and factors of transformation and to maintain and broaden the network of social capital acquired during the first wave, we cannot exclude repeating the second wave of Caravans on the same themes/spaces/circulations' areas.

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