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RESEARCH ARTICLE

DISTRUST AND STIGMATIZATION OF NGOS AND VOLUNTEERS AT THE TIME OF THE EUROPEAN MIGRANT “CRISIS”

Conflict and implications on social solidarity

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ABSTRACT: This paper deals with the recent episodes of stigmatization of solidarity in the context of the European migrant “crisis”. Securitarian measures frame as illegal not only migrants but also volunteers supporting them. Starting from the debate about “zero tolerance” policies, considered as a form of depoliticization of traditional politics, the research shows how NGOs and volunteers are becoming distrusted and conflictual, even if they long framed themselves as neutral and apolitical. An analysis of the recent emergency decrees and the decrease of trust in the Third sector, along with volunteers’ criminalization, reveals a changed picture for Third sector organizations. The Ventimiglia case study is representative of this changed context. The 11th June 2015 the French-Italian border has been closed; since then, civil society has been involved in supportive and conflictual actions about the migrants’ presence, while local politics tried to avoid political confrontation. In this situation, depoliticized politics has indirectly extended the target of its norms, stigmatizing not only migrants but also their supporters. We now deal with NGOs and volunteers conflictual and distrusted. Changes in the Third sector are helpful to consider the fragmentation and the politicization of solidarity.

KEYWORDS: Crime of solidarity; Depoliticization; Solidarity; Third sector; Zero tolerance.

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1. Introduction

Over recent years cases of stigmatization have involved volunteers and the Third sector organizations (TSOs), despite they used to be characterized by a positive prejudice. These episodes are related to issues discussed by public opinion, such as migration and security, and draw a new framework for certain TSOs, that now see themselves more conflictual than they used to be.

The European migrant “crisis” has had several consequences on NGOs and volunteers. In Europe several securitarian norms and measures are labelling solidarity behaviors and actions as deviant, especially when they benefit migrants.

Several episodes of stigmatization of volunteers, who were prosecuted for their actions in favor of migrants, were reported at the European borders (Fekete, Webber, Edmond-Pettitt 2017; Lunaria 2017; Maccanico, Hayes, Kenny, Barat 2018; Amnesty International 2017, 2019; Médecins sans frontières 2018a, 2018b). The southern borders of Europe, especially, witnessed activists being prosecuted by tribunals and the labelling of volunteers by police officers. Even such actions as the distribution of food and beverage to migrants have been banned, for the sake of order and public hygiene.

The “birth of the humanitarian border” (Walters 2011) in Europe shows “the emergence of a transnational discourse of compassionate border security that fuses humanitarian and militarised logics” (Little, Vaughan-Williams 2017, 535). The securitarian management of migration has the indirect consequence of a negative labelling of actors who used to be considered just as neutral ambassadors of international law, with a low impact on local politics. This stigmatization of NGOs emerged in a moment of increasing distrust towards the Third sector in the western world. Several authors, moreover, have begun questioning the role of NGOs, pointing out the darker sides of international cooperation (Marcon 2002; Polman 2009; Marelli 2011), the ambiguity of humanitarian government and the politics of compassion (Fassin 2012) and the instrumentalization of solidarity in communication (Chouliaraki 2013).

The Sea and Rescue operations (SAR) in favor of migrants in the Mediterranean Sea have been the object of a great debate in Europe (Milazzo 2018; Georgiou, Zabarovski 2016); this increased the conflict and connection between migration and NGOs. In 2013, the *Mare Nostrum* operation showed how the “humanitarian aspect in favour of migrants co-exists with the military logic of protection (of Europeans) against migrants” (Musarò 2017, 12) and thus make the Mediterranean a depoliticized border with a technocratic management of migration (*ibid.*, 24).

Then, the European decision to close the *Mare Nostrum* operation, considered too expensive, had an even greater impact on Southern countries and Italy in particular. The new SAR operation, called *Triton*, launched in 2014, based only on the voluntary contribution of European countries, could not be efficient as *Mare Nostrum*; therefore several NGOs and volunteers decided to give their spontaneous help. All Italian media dealt with this “crisis” and suspicions were aroused on the true motives of these humanitarian operations. In 2017 the Italian government proposed a *code of conduct* to regulate NGOs SAR operations; in summer 2018 the relation with NGOs plunged downwards with the closing of ports to the NGOs willing to dock in Italy with migrants on board. Also, the judiciary system is playing an important role in this issue, with NGOs being tried for their alleged relations with traffickers.

This suspicion is not one-sided, because it is the entire language around volunteering that has changed. The well-known Italian journalist Massimo Gramellini in an article entitled “Little Red Riding Hood” (2018), defined the reason to volunteer of a kidnapped young girl as an “urge for self-sacrifice”.

While stigmatizing strangers is not a new phenomenon, a stigma against volunteering and NGOs has only recently become widespread. The escalation of the stigmatization of migrants in recent years has been successfully described by Dal Lago (1999, 2000). This phenomenon has grown and developed consequently to the diffusion of “zero tolerance” policies (Wacquant 2009). Since Goffman’s definition of stigma (2003), different definitions have been elaborated. This fact has been an object of criticism, because its definition varies considering the discipline and the subject of research (Link, Phelan 2001). For the scope of this research the starting point is the stigmatization of migrants considered as “not-person” (Dal Lago 1999), necessarily treated differently from citizens. The stigmatization of NGOs and volunteers operates through a legislative targeting that extend the stigma to those who are supportive towards these “not-people”. Solidarity towards migrants thus becomes an illegal solidarity, while legal solidarity is the one addressed to proper citizens. This shows how “law has become a dominant technique in liberal ways of governing” (Basara 2015, 207).

This conflict in relation to NGOs and volunteers is the starting point for the research question of this paper. The objective of the research is to frame the stigmatization and distrust of volunteers and NGOs in the migration field as part of a larger phenomenon that crosses the Third sector and the concept (and practice) of solidarity.

The objective is not to study stigmatization *per se*, but rather to understand how solidarity is shaped within this changed context. This work is aimed at finding an answer to following questions: what role do depoliticized and securitarian policies play

in the growing conflict and distrust around NGOs and volunteers? How and why is the Third sector stigmatized and distrusted? How are these phenomena representative of a change in social solidarity?

In order to do so I will first consider the connection between a new development of securitarian politics and the renewed interest in the concept and practices of solidarity. The third and fourth section show methodology and results of the analysis of the general context and the case study of Ventimiglia; it is a border city between Italy and France, a humanitarian border, where emergency discourse enables both “zero tolerance” measures and various solidarity practices. In the conclusion section I will argue that depoliticized politics has indirectly extended the target of its norms, stigmatizing not only migrants but also their supporters. NGOs and volunteers are now conflictual and distrusted. Through the lenses of a changed Third sector, that is changing its solidarity drive towards a more hybridized nature, we may consider social fragmentation and the politicization of solidarity within a context that fosters securitarianism and national solidarity.

2. Solidarity and depoliticization

The theoretical framework of this paper considers the connection between a new development of securization and the renewed interest in the concept and practices of solidarity. The aim of this review is to consider the possible implication that can be assumed about how the stigmatization of volunteers and TS organizations might re-shape solidarity.

I want to argue that the reshaping of the concept and practices of solidarity is fed by changes that involve the Third sector and by the expansion of the target of securitarian politics from outcasts to social movements and NGOs.

I consider the Third sector as a unique subject because of its one defining characteristic: the solidarity aim (Donati, 1996), even though its lines are blurred and authors such as Moro (2014) even questioned the utility of defining the sector in itself. The solidarity drive makes the Third sector useful to make considerations on the transformation of social bonds and the shaping of social solidarity in contemporary western societies. This sector is also changing fast, challenging previous literature perspectives. Some considered it as a new opportunity different than state and market to address social problems after the economic crisis; others looked at it as a new political means of participation, to overcome the crisis of representative politics. In a way, solutions to political, economic and social problems

were sought out and found in social movements and TSOs. The roles of these two actors are rooted in the dichotomic nature of solidarity between integration and conflict, that Chouliaraki (2013, 10) defines as “solidarity as salvation” and “solidarity as revolution”. Solidarity, indeed, is considered not just in its integrative role but also in its conflictual one. Solidarity has always had a double nature; one apolitical and neutral and another political and conflictual.

This dichotomy has recently been challenged by different processes that show a transformation of the Third sector. The political and conflictual role of social movements now seems more relaxed, oriented towards the development of resilience strategies against the crisis (Mattoni, Vogiatzoglou 2014; Guidi, Andretta 2015; Kousis 2017); within a context where grass-root innovative and resilient strategies show an ambiguous nature with high risks of fragmentation (Alteri, Cirulli, Raffini 2019). Moreover, there is a progressive decrease of conflicted relations in the Third sector (Busso, Gargiulo 2017). This is also because of changes towards the hybridization of the Third sector, that is now marketized (Eikenberry, Kluver 2004), professional and bureaucratized (Salvini 2012). Both this relaxation of the Third sector’s political nature and its hybridization find support in the recent Italian Third Sector reform that, on different levels, opens the sector to the market and bureaucratize its activities.

On another perspective, considering NGOs, a general trend towards controlling civil society organizations is developing. While scholars started from studying low-middle income countries (Dupuy, Ron, Prakash 2016), the phenomenon is spreading in western society too, making religious organization and NGOs more conflictual. Their promotion of universal solidarity is leading them to be targeted as enemies of national solidarity. Politics is expressing practices of labelling of their volunteers and activists. Despite this, their members still do not identify in a political cause, but rather, they relate more closely with a humanitarian and non-controversial one. The expansion of the stigmatization of activists is particularly relevant because it now includes subjects that perceive themselves as being neutral and non-political.

We can see an extension of stigmatization from outcasts to social movements and now to NGOs and volunteers. In fact, a recent study of the criminalization of the protest of social movements and their activists (Chiaramonte, Senaldi 2018) shows how criminalization is more and more used by politics to (un)politically deal with conflictual actors. However, while social movements are generally critical of neoliberal politics, NGOs and non-conflictual TSOs are less hostile to it; they are often shaped and act within the very depoliticized environment created by neoliberal politics. Their solidarity claim calls upon an apolitical humanitarianism, as they do not seek conflict or political confrontation. Of course, also humanitarianism has undergone a profound reshaping,

assuming great relevance in a public debate governed by a morality from emotions on the one side (Fassin 2012) and becoming more and more intertwined with military and securitarian logic on the other (Musarò 2017). These changes seem to have left solidarity deprived of “grand narratives” (Chouliaraki 2013, 9), but open up to considerations about its politicization.

Politics deal with migration as a criminal or humanitarian issue, putting aside political confrontation. While criminal laws traditionally targeted outcasts, now this strategy involves social movements and TSOs. Depoliticization is not a new phenomenon, “as a governing strategy is the process of placing at one remove the political character of decision making” (Burnham 2001, 128); I consider thus the “zero tolerance” politics one of its expressions.

Securitarian politics imply the creation by law of two opposite groups. These two groups are at opposite sides of a juridical border, that creates concrete empirical effects. Indeed, it creates a division between the beneficiaries of a norm and its targets.

“Zero tolerance” thus presents two diametrically opposite faces, depending on whether one is the (black) target or the (white) beneficiary, that is, depending on which side one finds oneself of the caste barrier that the rise of the American penal state has the effect—if not the function—of shoring up. (*ibid.*, 26)

Nowadays, the evolution of “zero tolerance” policies from the ‘90s sees not only the stigmatization of outcasts, but also that of their supporters and it shows an expansion of the target of the depoliticized norms. Following the logic of humanitarian securitarianism, solidarity towards migrants is considered to put national cohesion at risk; so, in the name of national solidarity and security these norms hit also those “beneficiaries” who are supportive of the targets and therefore lose their privilege.

This kind of stigmatizing politics has not canceled the conflict; indeed, it has aroused instead, even in political subject that were more “neutral” just a few years ago. In fact, “eliminating the political nature of actions does not mean reducing the need for regulation but producing it in new ways” (de Nardis 2017, 347).

This article will deal with the case of the border city of Ventimiglia. Indeed, cities are the place where “zero tolerance” policies are generally enforced. What happens when this kind of depoliticizations meets the necessity to deal with the migration crisis? The usual strategy in depoliticized cities is to call for more “decorum” and “public hygiene” and punish everyone who is deemed not to comply with these standards (Pisanello 2017).

Using this new decorum aesthetic, the metropolis can be administered without dealing with economic-political issues that tear apart the social tissue (Pisanello 2017, 15. My translation)

Security and immigration are often declined in terms of issues for tourism and commerce. In fact, the replacing of politics with economics ends up in many decisions which deal with incentives and prizes for good entrepreneurial initiative, rather than actual political decisions. Results of this depoliticization are well-studied phenomena such as the entrepreneurial management of cities (Harvey 1989) and the gentrification of city centers. The transformation of cities thus corresponds to a regeneration of the center and an expansion of outskirts, where marginalities are rejected.

Which are the possible implications of the expansion of this politics to NGOs and volunteers? First, depoliticization may move conflict from traditional politics to civil society level; targeting not just outcast but also their supporters may be part of a process of politicization of Third sector actors who used to be considered apolitical. This should help to consider how solidarity may play a fragmentation role. Growing distrust and spread of partial solidarities are signals of fragmentation and reshaping of solidarity; in this context the Third sector may either be a driver of re-politicization or fall again in an apolitical, or even marketized, humanitarianism.

3. Research design

The research is designed in order to represent the European and Italian context and then introduce the case study of Ventimiglia.

For the general context, several documents have been used: laws, organization reports and surveys on Italian public opinion on the Third sector. After a brief analysis of the recent security decrees, I will summarize several NGOs reports about the stigmatization of volunteers involved in helping migrants, polls about citizens' trust in NGOs and TSOs, with a final confrontation with the analysis of the Carta di Roma report (2018) about the migration "crisis" in the press.

In order to analyze this general trend, I chose to adopt the case study analysis (Yin 1994). Case studies are considered a suitable research strategy when dealing with a contemporary phenomenon with little control of the events by the observer (*ibid.*, 8). A case study helps to answer questions about the processes of a phenomenon, how and why it happened. In this case, the chosen study is useful to answer questions about

how solidarity is shaping and which are the possible reasons for this: how did politics managed migration “crisis” in a border city? how are NGOs and volunteers in this context? How does this affect the practices and representation of solidarity?

So, this case study should help to observe the complexity of a macro-phenomenon within a representative context. Ventimiglia is a humanitarian border since it is representative of a “transnational discourse of compassionate border security that fuses humanitarian and militarized logics” (Little, Vaughan-Williams 2017, 535), where a permanent “crisis” enable “zero tolerance” measures along with grassroot practices of solidarity. It is a privileged place to represent the tension around solidarity and migrant issues among EU countries. Here humanitarian securization is a structure of a mediatized border that “work to simultaneously protect “us” from, and care for, mobile population” (Chouliaraki, Musarò 2017). Here, the frequent episodes of “criminalization of solidarity” (Maccanico et al. 2018) allow to understand how stigmatization of NGOs activities took shape.

The period chosen for the analysis is between June 2015 and February 2019. On 11th June 2015 the border with France closed and Ventimiglia faced the consequence of this event. Summer 2015 is significant not only for Ventimiglia, but for the whole of Europe: the Syrian refugees crisis had its effects in Europe too, Hungary started building its barrier at the border with Serbia, Europe launched the “hotspot approach” in its agenda on migration and there was the first big public opinion shock after the spreading of the photo of Alan Kurdi, a three-year-old Syrian boy who drowned on 2nd September 2015 in the Mediterranean Sea.

In case study analysis it is possible to consider all actors engaged in the process to observe. Local politics is an example of depoliticized administration, that we can refer to the French and Italian governments and the EU. As regards civil society level, in Ventimiglia there are strong networks of Italian and French associations, which originate from different “solidarity backgrounds” – harmonic and conflictual, both supportive of migrants; it also has a lively presence of neighborhood committees protesting against the permanence of migrants, groups that are also critical of administration and NGOs and express a need for national cohesion.

In a case study it is possible to evaluate a variety of evidences, fact that was crucial to develop the diachronic analysis of the events which took place in Ventimiglia. I dealt with public reports of different TSOs present in the frontier region, local newspapers (Nice Matin; Primocanale; Riviera 24; Sanremo News) with regular updates about the situation in the frontier (and seldom national newspaper articles interested in Ventimiglia events). Other reference points were ordinances and public declarations of the mayor regarding migrants and NGOs. Finally, I refer

also to my contacts and my personal visits to the frontier in November 2017 and June 2018, in occasion of observations activities of NGOs at the border (Anafé 2019).

4. Findings

4.1 General context: emergency decrees, distrust in NGOs and volunteers

Emergency legislation is not recent in Italy, especially as concerns migrants. Its roots may be found in the beginning of the “zero tolerance” policies. Several securitarian measures against migrants have been implemented since the end of the 1990s: in 1998 legislative decree nr 286, amended by law nr 189/2002, so called “Bossi-Fini”, and in 2009 the emergency decrees of the Berlusconi government with law nr 94, so called “security package”. I will focus on the latest decrees on migration, following the migration “crisis” after June 2015, issued by Ministers of the Interior Minniti and Salvini, representing left and right parties in the Italian parliament respectively.

The choice to use emergency decrees is *per se* symptom of a depoliticized measure, as it overrules the parliament’s democratic decision and deal with structural problems as contingencies. It represents the legislative power exercised out of urgency and not deliberation – therefore the reason why it does not depend on political orientation.

Minniti issued two decrees in 2017, on urban security and immigration. Decree Law nr 13/2017, implemented by law nr 46/2017, develops “urgent measures” regarding international protection and “illegal immigration”. It provides reform of administrative and judicial proceedings on international protection; one of the most criticized measures was the abolition of second degree of judgement for international protection requests. The second emergency decree is nr 14/2017 *Urgent measures on city security*. Here urban security is defined as a “public good linked to livability and decorum in the city”. The definition of urban security as a public good provides local administrators with strong legal instruments for the management of security in cities. One such instrument was introduced with the so called “DASPO urbano”. Originally “D.A.SPO.” are bans against taking part in sport events (*Divieto di Accedere alle manifestazioni SPORtive*), i.e. restrictive measures provided for people that are considered as a menace in public sport events owing to particularly violent behaviors. This measure was implemented within the urban context, with the new “urban DASPO”, to punish - by means of sanctions and expulsion measures - those holding conducts that may obstacle the access and the benefit from various public places such as stations, public transport means and several public spaces. On the grounds of this

new provision, several cities have defined their historical center as a place in which to implement the urban DASPO, hitting the outcast of the cities by sanctioning their presence in city centers as a menace to order and decorum.

The new Minister of the Interior Salvini followed the path designed by his predecessor and as the first formal act of his office issued a new emergency decree. Security Decree nr 113/2018, implemented by law nr 132 on 1st December 2018, interestingly considers three different subjects together: immigration, public security, and the prevention and fight against criminal organizations¹. Both ministers seem to work following public perception on migration, reinforcing the connection between the perception of security risks and the management of migration. An analysis of minister Minniti's speeches shows this connection between the rhetoric of order about migration and the will to follow public perception, even against data evidences (Gargiulo 2018)². Salvini Security Decree introduced stricter rules on immigration; more crimes committed by immigrants now lead to immediate expulsion and deletion of suspension of asylum request; there are limitation to free legal aid for migrants requesting humanitarian protection; longer detention time in expulsion centers; more funds available for expulsion procedures. SPRAR experiences, that provided for a territorial distribution of migrants in local communities wishing to host, have been restricted in favor of centralized detention structures. As to public security several norms deal with squatting and evictions. The police have been given new instruments to maintain public order: the decree launched the experimentation of taser and expanded the resort to "DASPO", following previous Minniti's provisions.

While politicians chose emergency decrees to deal with structural problems, moving the subject into a depoliticized arena, civil society organizations showed increasing opposition to this trend, mobilizing to promote solidarity towards migrants. The securitarian trend, however, does not only concern migrants and outcast. In the last 10 years several organizations denounced the government's tendency to issue punitive laws towards them.

¹ The 15th June 2019 another security decree, nr 53/2019, has been issued. It deals again with migration issues and public security and will be probably converted into law within 60 days from its entry into force.

² About this issue the former Italian Minister of the Interior Minniti declared that "security is a perception" and not statistic. See Repubblica.it, Revised July 14, 2019. (https://www.repubblica.it/politica/2017/05/10/news/minniti_e_la_sfida_della_sicurezza_difendo_chi_ha_paura_ma_a_sparare_sia_solo_lo_stato_e_sui_migranti_via_alle_ispezioni_-165063118/).

Amnesty International wrote a couple of reports about this attitude change: *Human rights defenders under threat – a shrinking space for civil society* (2017) and *Laws designed to silence: the global crackdown on civil society organisations* (2019).

Over the last two years, almost 40 pieces of legislation have been either put in place or are in the pipeline restricting the activities, resources and autonomy of civil society organizations in all regions of the world [...]. This shows an alarming global trend that has surfaced over the last decade in which those in power have acquired sweeping powers to control, ban and criminalize certain activities in a discriminatory manner and without legitimate reasons, as well as to target those who oppose government policies or who defend marginalized groups. (2019, 37)

In 2018, Hungary approved the “Stop Soros” package, a reform that includes 9 different laws, including police and criminal dispositions and a law on asylum and border control, defining the crime of “facilitating illegal immigration”. Russia and several East European countries such as Belarus, Polonia, Romania and Ukraine have implemented more and more law restrictions for NGOs funding and accountability. In 2012 Russia issued a "foreign agent" law regarding nonprofit organizations; this law entails for organizations that receive foreign donations and engage in political activity – intended as generally influencing public opinion, to register as foreign agents. Of course, the labelling as foreign agents has a serious negative connotation.

The UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, in its report *Saving lives is not a crime* (2018), focused on “the criminalization and targeting of humanitarian services and actors arising from activities to fight terrorism and deter migration and from the outlawing or stigmatization of sexual and reproductive rights”.

As to western Europe, it is the migration “crisis”, starting from summer 2014, that changed the relations between TSOs and institutions into conflictual ones. Indeed, from that moment onwards the SAR operations were considered by Frontex (European Border and Coast Guard Agency) (2017) as a pull factor for the arrival of new migrants³. The end of *Mare Nostrum* in 2014, with the start of operation *Triton* in August, saw an intensification of the SAR operation by sea by several NGOs, filling the institutional void.

From that time on, several NGOs reports denounced a stigmatization of human rights activists and the diffusion of the “crime of solidarity” (Fekete et al. 2017; Lunaria

³ The first article that reported the concern about NGOs as pull factor is in D. Robinson, “EU border force flags concerns over charities’ interaction with migrant smugglers”, *Financial Times*, 15 December 2016; then reported in Frontex reports.

2017; Maccanico et al 2018; Amnesty International 2017, 2019; Médecins sans frontières 2018a, 2018b). That happened not just in the Mediterranean Sea but in every place that can be defined as humanitarian border, where the representation migrants as victims and threats is mirrored by humanitarian actions and securization at the border.

While NGOs feel more targeted by governments, they are also less trusted by public opinion. People are showing a decrease in trust in institutions in late modernity (Giddens 1994) and this trend also involve the Third sector. In 2018 the Eldeman Trust Barometer showed trust declining in NGOs in 14 out of 28 markets. While there is an increase of trust in most markets in 2019, Italy is the country that has lost most trust in recent years, going from 59 points in 2017 to 46 in 2018, and 44 in 2019.

The trend does not just cover NGOs and big solidarity multinationals, for it may seem easier to observe a growing distrust in big and distant organizations. Data shows that trust towards the Third sector is declining in general. The latest data on volunteering from Eurispes institute (2018) show a general trend of decline in trust, even against the general trend of little increase in institutional trust. An Ipsos analysis confirms the general trend of distrust as regards the nonprofit institutions in Italy⁴.

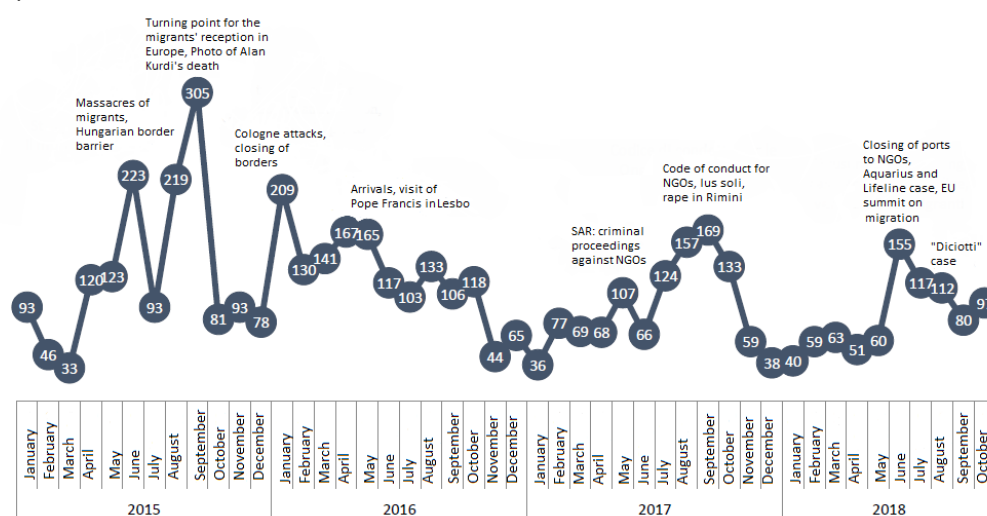
This strong distrust shows a more critical public opinion towards subjects that had long been perceived - and perceived themselves - as non-conflictual. Thus, the changed position of some TS organizations can be seen not only as a conflict with traditional institutions, but also a widening citizens' distrust. This growing conflict seems to be going along with the tendency to increase news on migrations. As we can see in figure 1, starting from 2015 more and more NGOs are linked to migration crisis in Italy.

The migration issue put at the center of public opinion those organizations that have long perceived themselves as non-conflictual. This new context requires TSOs to face their changed role, within a context that had already put them in a more critical perspective. This conflictual role is the result of the politicization of humanitarian issues, as opposed to securitarian depoliticized solutions of politics. Because of this fact TSOs, NGOs and volunteers have perceived themselves at risk in the last few years, in western countries too. Politics, that do not wish to deal

⁴Nando Pagnoncelli speech, *La rappresentanza all'epoca dell'incertezza e della sfiducia*, Malga Lunga, September 25, 2017. It reports a general crisis in institution, but non-profit institutions are the organizations with least trust, and it shows a constant decrease from February 2014 (71 points) till May 2017 (59 points).

politically nor with migration issue neither with civil society protests, condemn both migrants and their supporters through the device of illegality.

Figure 1. Trend of news about migration in the first pages of five Italian newspapers (1 January 2015 - 31 October 2018)⁵.



Source: Milazzo G. (a cura di) (2018), *Notizie di Chiusura. Sesto Rapporto Carta di Roma*, Associazione Carta di Roma, <https://www.cartadiroma.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Notizie-di-chiusura.pdf>, p. 16 (original in Italian, my translation).

4.2 The case of Ventimiglia

Ventimiglia has been under the spotlight since 11th June 2015, a turning point at the French-Italian border. Since then the city has become a reference point for solidarity activism in favor of migrants and security measures from Italian and French politics.

Even though the French-Italian frontier has been subjected since 2011 to some frontier controls from France, it is only starting from June 2015 that identity checks, residence and travel permit checks and controls on the movement of people have been implemented (ASGI 2015; Anafé 2019). At that date France closed its border as a

⁵ Note (figure 1). We can see how in 2017 and 2018 trend of news about migration are linked to news about NGOs SAR operations.

security measure following the G7 meeting in Bavaria, as did Austria and Germany. This decision had serious consequences in Ventimiglia. Since then a group of migrants and no borders associations stopped at the border and started their protests, as was spread by all Italian media. From that moment onwards the city was forced to divest the role of passive spectator of migrations towards France. After that, the regular freedom of circulation was never re-introduced at this border; several French decisions have maintained the internal border controls through various legislative reforms. Initially thanks to five reiterated *états d'urgence* disposed by President Hollande following the Paris attacks in November 2015, then with the 30th October 2017 antiterrorism law nr 1510 by President Macron, with a sort of normalization of the emergency conditions. Finally, with 10th September 2018 law nr 778 on asylum seekers. In this context many migrants continue to die in their efforts to pass the border⁶.

Ventimiglia is a small border city with 24000 inhabitants. The administration was guided from 2014 until May 2019 by a left majority guided by mayor Enrico Loculano. Complex dynamics here involve different Italian and French actors, not only solidarity groups pro-migrants, but also neighborhood organizations, migrants, police and prefects, the mayor of Ventimiglia and other politicians.

The first protests started with the closure of the border. A group of migrants and no border activists – of the *Presidio Permanente No Borders Ventimiglia*, took part in demonstrations that lasted all summer, from June to September. The local administration condemned their actions through several evictions motivated by health and hygienic risks.

In spring 2016, the growth in arrivals increased the migrants' presence; thus a provisional solution for migrants' reception was found in a transit center Ventimiglia station. This solution was not welcomed by citizens, who had hoped the center to be in a less central and visible area.

Some migrants started to move near river Roja, not far from the city center, in informal settlements. At the time, in the district area called Gianchette, Sant'Antonio Church became the coordination center for a group of volunteers that have been self-managing spontaneous hosting of migrants since 2016.

Don Rito Alvarez, a parish priest in Ventimiglia for 20 years, began to coordinate a group of up to 200 volunteers. "There were local Italians, but also people from France, the UK and the United States. The Red Cross from Monaco came, a group of Muslims

⁶Local newspapers, Primo canale (<https://www.primocanale.it/>) and Riviera24 (<https://www.riviera24.it/>) report periodically migrants' deaths at the border.

from Nice, Vietnamese volunteers, boy scouts from Monte Carlo. It was an extraordinary experience: so many different people helping people in need. We served up to 1,000 meals per day,” he says. (Oxfam 2018, 7)

In this period, several negotiations, also involving the diocese of Imperia, were aimed at finding a formal solution to overcome the self-managed center, but none was found. A popular petition started to gather signatures asking to move migrants out of Gianchette quarter⁷. So, in July 2016 the Italian Red Cross, in agreement with the Prefect of Imperia set up a transit camp 4km away from the city center. The deal was that in order to be hosted it was necessary to be identified; most people despite that did - and do - not wish to be identified since they do not want Italy to be their first country of arrival⁸. In addition to this, the distance from the city center makes the permanence in the center non-desirable for those who - the majority - see the stay in Ventimiglia as a temporary stop. Finally, the center has limited and promiscuous spaces, so that not everyone could, or would want to be hosted there. For all these reasons, many people remained in the informal settlement near river Roja. Only few women and children could still be hosted in Sant’Antonio Parish. Don Rito Alvarez was subjected to protests and threatening letters from Ventimiglia citizens because of this hospitality⁹.

In August the mayor signed an ordinance¹⁰ that prohibited the distribution of food and beverage to migrants. The ordinance was motivated by hygiene and health reasons. It would be repealed only on 22nd April 2017. The motivation was argued as “the verification of a factual change that could not be predicted at the time of its adoption”¹¹, but the repeal of the ordinance was probably a consequence of more political consideration. The arrest of three French citizens on 20th March 2017 due to the no-food ordinance, provoked a strong reaction from pro-migrants movements and associations. Also, national media got interested in the event and a big demonstration was to be held the Sunday following the repeal of the ordinance.

⁷<https://www.riviera24.it/2016/07/ventimiglia-parte-petizione-popolare-per-spostare-i-migranti-dalle-gianchette-229002/>.

⁸Based on the “Dublin III regulation”, Reg. nr 604/2013.

⁹https://genova.repubblica.it/cronaca/2018/05/11/news/ventimiglia_ancora_minacce_di_morte_a_don_rito-196113050/.

¹⁰Ordinance nr 129/2016, PROT. 28235, issued 11/08/2016 entitled “Ban against distributing and administering food and beverage in public areas on the part of non authorized people” (*Divieto di distribuzione e/o somministrazione di alimenti e bevande nelle aree pubbliche da parte di persone non autorizzate*).

¹¹Ordinance nr 85/2017, PROT. 14839, issued 22/04/2017.

In 2017, more and more people and organizations got coordinated to offer legal and material assistance to the 23000 migrants who had successfully passed the border (Oxfam 2018). These groups were not the only ones activated by the migrants' presence. Different neighborhood organizations multiplied (*Le Gianchette, Borgo Marina San Giuseppe, Giardini Mare*) along with related city committees such as "Dalla nostra parte" (On our side) and "Adesso Basta" (That's enough now)¹².

The committee "On our side" in May 2017 asked for the reinstatement of the no-food ordinance.

Dear Major, reinstate the ordinance that forbids the administration of food and beverage to migrants in the street, to put an end to this indecent and shameful show, the good of the city and the strangers themselves.¹³

The reason invoked was, again, the risk for "heavy health and hygienic risk for citizens". The various committees insisted on making sure the only place eligible to host migrants would be Roja park, 4km away from the center. They did not want a new reception center in their neighborhoods. This request was accepted and the capacity of the Red Cross center in Roja park was partially increased, while no alternative was accomplished. The construction of a center for unaccompanied children was interrupted on 9th august 2017 due to the protest of several citizens (AIDA, 99); a committee of San Giuseppe neighborhood organized a petition against the building of this center, and many shops exhibited this petition for the public to sign. Another anti-migrant demonstration was held in November 2017 for the expulsion of every migrant, with heavy protests also against the mayor and the municipal council¹⁴.

In August also the experience in Gianchette parish was ended by the prefect of Imperia, and the families left out were moved to the Red Cross center. AIDA (Asylum Information Database) reports that on 11th December 2017 the center hosted 24 unaccompanied children together with 426 adults, 9 single women and 30 families. ASGI and other NGOs sent an official letter to the Prefecture of Imperia in December 2017, urging "an end to these unlawful practices and the preparation of the

¹²<http://www.sanremonews.it/2017/08/12/leggi-notizia/argomenti/cronaca/articolo/ventimiglia-in-300-alla-manifestazione-contro-i-migranti-il-pubblico-invoca-le-dimissioni-del-sind.html>.

¹³<http://www.ilgiornale.it/news/cronache/migranti-rabbia-dei-cittadini-ventimiglia-rischio-sanitario-1399754.html>; <https://www.riviera24.it/2017/05/migranti-a-ventimiglia-comitato-dalla-nostra-parte-ripristinare-lordinanza-di-divieto-di-somministrazione-dei-cibi-e-bevande-254743/>.

¹⁴<https://www.nicematin.com/faits-de-societe/une-manifestation-anti-migrants-a-eu-lieu-ce-samedi-a-ventimille-183002>.

necessary measures for these children to be accommodated and placed in appropriate reception centers” (ibidem).

The case of Delia’s “Hobbit” bar is representative of tension between a part of Ventimiglia citizenship and TSOs. This bar had become a place of reception for migrants since June 2015 and with time it equipped to offer practical help to any person who asked for it. This kind of solidarity provoked strong reactions from those citizens who did not appreciate it. They began to avoid the bar and the bar owner received insults and menaces. This citizens’ hostility at the same time enhanced solidarity from associations and no borders groups, that on 13th September 2018 also created a fund-raising campaign to support the bar on [gofundme.com](https://www.gofundme.com/solidarieta-per-delia)¹⁵. The fund raising reached almost 40.000 € in February 2019.

Since November 2017 a French-Italian inter-associative group has started monitoring actions at the border to check police behavior and potential violation of asylum seekers’ rights¹⁶. The observations take place where the police and military presence is higher, i.e. in the train stations near the border (Ventimiglia and Menton-Garavan) and near Bridge San Ludovico where the police (PAF) carry out their border controls. In February 2018 this group of associations together with French and Italian lawyers started a judicial act at Nice tribunal against the refoulement of 20 unaccompanied minors. The judge recognized the unlawfulness of the practice for 19 case out of 20 (one was recognized as an adult)¹⁷. The monitoring of the associations then enlarged its target of observation considering other border cities among those more affected by migrants’ passages: Briançon, Claviere and Bardonecchia, and mountain border cities in general.

One activist of this observation group, Martine Landry, a volunteer for Amnesty International France and Anafé, is under proceedings. The accusation is that of favoring illegal immigration. The woman helped two minors, who had just passed the borders, by calling the French police to send them to the social services. She was absolved in first degree of judgement in July 2018, but the prosecutor has appealed the sentence. The case of Martine is not a *unicum*, other people have been prosecuted for their acts

¹⁵<https://www.gofundme.com/solidarieta-per-delia>.

¹⁶French associations: Anafé, ADDE (Avocats pour la défense des droits des étrangers), La Cimade, Médecins du Monde, Médecins sans frontières, Secours Catholique Caritas France, AdN (Association pour la Démocratie à Nice), Citoyens Solidaires 06, DTC-Défends ta citoyenneté, LDH Nice, Pastorale des migrants du diocèse de Nice, Roya Citoyenne, Syndicat des Avocats de France. Italian associations: Amnesty International Liguria, ASGI (Associazione Studi Giuridici sull’Immigrazione), Caritas, Intemelia OdV, Diaconia Valdese, Intersos, OXFAM Italie, Terre des Hommes Italie, WeWorld Onlus.

¹⁷<https://www.asgi.it/allontamento-espulsione/frontiera-francia-italia-diritto-asilo-protezione-minori-stranieri/>.

of solidarity: for example Cedric Herrou, a French shepherd who hosts migrants at his home in Val Roja; Pierre Alain Mannoni, a researcher at the University of Nice, who helped a group of migrants pass the border; recently also the Alpine border saw this kind of judicial cases, with the case of the seven condemns in Briançon¹⁸. One important turning point for these French judiciary events was the absolution of Herrou by the French Constitutional Court in the name of the principle of *fraternité* July 2018¹⁹.

In April 2018 the informal settlement near the river was evicted²⁰. As in the case eviction, and previous ordinances, the action was motivated by health and hygienic reasons. Starting from that moment, migrants' groups are being dispersed in the territory and are certainly less visible now. After the eviction precarious conditions aggravated. Save the Children reports that female minors are forced to prostitute in order to pay the toll to pass the border, to eat or to sleep²¹. Médecins sans frontières (2018) reports migrants living in weak health and hygienic conditions – despite all measures taken for sanitary reasons.

Of course, not only NGOs and religious organizations worked to help migrants but also no borders groups, left collectives, mutual help organizations. Other than *Presidio Permanente No Border*, one big organization at the Ventimiglia border is *Project 20k*. It was born in spring 2016 thanks to some youths from Bergamo who had been at the border in summer 2015. After that, they held some public meetings in Bergamo and Milano at different spaces and decided to actively engage in favor of migrants.

From July 2016 they organized an operative camp for the stable presence of some solidarity activists in Ventimiglia. The role of the center was to give material support, information, observation and public communication through the *infopoint Eufemia* and the legal counter *Aid for all*²². The project was promoted by *Project 20k* in collaboration with *Melting Pot Europe Project* and the association *Popoli in Arte*. The center was meant as a free space where migrants could recharge their phones,

¹⁸http://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/cronaca/2018/12/13/no-border-condannati-per-corteo-claviere_1e858887-962f-4963-a32a-7f43bbde8d05.html.

¹⁹Decision nr 2018-717/718 QPC, 6 July 2018,
https://www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr/decision/2018/2018717_718QPC.htm.

²⁰With major ordinance nr 54, 13 April 2018.

On the eviction: <https://www.avvenire.it/attualita/pagine/ventimiglia-sgombero>.

²¹<https://www.primocanale.it/notizie/ventimiglia-il-dramma-delle-bambine-migranti-prostitute-per-pagare-i-passeur-200139.html>

²²<http://www.sanremonews.it/2017/07/15/leggi-notizia/argomenti/altre-notizie/articolo/ventimiglia-presentato-eufemia-info-and-legal-point-al-quartiere-delle-gianchette-off.html>

access the internet and find multilingual information about services in the city and international protection in Italy and Europe. The center closed in December 2018 due to non-renewal of the lease contract, a fact that the organizations think must be motivated by political reasons. *Project 20k* claims that more than 60 measures of restriction of movements have been issued against solidarity activists at the border and report an increase in violent practices on the part of the French police since the issue of Salvini's decree in November 2018.

Associations have also organized various demonstrations against the local and European governance on migration. The latest major demonstration held in Ventimiglia is the event "Ventimiglia, città aperta" (Ventimiglia, an open city), organized by *Project 20k* with other different organizations supportive of migrants on 14th July 2018. This event saw the presence of around 2500 people coming from the north and center of Italy and numerous organizations. The days before the manifestation mayor Ioculano and bishop Suetta had invited the organizers to move the demonstration to France, suggesting that they should consider that country as the one truly responsible for the emergency at the border. Mayor Ioculano and the President of the region, Giovanni Toti, besides expressed their contrariety to the manifestation considering the fundamental importance of the date for transalpine tourism. The mayor released this emblematic declaration:

We oppose to this manifestation nor for its content or for its message – but for the inconveniences it will bring to our city. To us the 14th of July is a very important date under touristic and commercial profile. The manifestation would cause inconveniences, tension and difficulties²³.

The mayor's rhetoric on the need to protect commerce and touristic opportunities for the city, by guaranteeing public order and hygiene never refers to migrants or volunteers explicitly, neither in his public speaking, nor in his administrative measures. These decisions are thus conceived as deprived of political nature. The tourist promotion is reinforced by a project that wants to transform the city into a "technology and security jewel" by summer 2019. The project is in partnership with the Principality of Monaco, which provides 7 million € for the maintenance of the city²⁴.

²³Link at the video <https://www.primocanale.it/notizie/corteo-no-borders-a-ventimiglia-il-14-luglio-ioculano-chiederemo-che-non-sia-autorizzato--199425.html> (my translation).

²⁴<https://www.riviera24.it/2018/01/ventimiglia-un-gioiello-di-tecnologia-e-sicurezza-ecco-il-video-promozionale-del-porto-di-cala-del-forte-276674/>.

Local politics thus recur to emergency discourses to justify “zero tolerance” measures formally meant for the promotion of tourism and commerce. This is reinforced by the militarization of the spaces and the responsibility of major decisions shifted at a national and European level.

The mayor on one hand hinders solidarity groups and migrants with securitarian measures, but still does not take an official position against volunteers or migrants. Actually, several times the mayor showed support to volunteers and NGOs and was present at some events organized by them. This attitude finds its emblematic representation in occasion of the inauguration of the installation of Michelangelo Pistoletto’s work “Third Paradise”, at the presence of the mayor and army²⁵. The installation is situated at the border near bridge Saint Ludovic and is meant to be a symbolic representation of solidarity intercultural dialogue to overcome tension at the border. This, and other Pistoletto’s installations in Ventimiglia, such as the temporary installation of the Venus of the Rags in Sant’Antonio Church, shows what Mazzara (2019, 5) calls the “aesthetic potential of the migratory experience”, that may be part of a “re-signifying process” that aims to subvert the logic of de-humanization and securitization and create a counter-narrative (ibidem, 111).

Ventimiglia shows that depoliticization does not delete conflict, that, instead can be seen at different level of civil society. I described how some citizens of Ventimiglia organized in committees to hinder the settlements of migrants in their neighborhoods, while other citizens and local and international associations started material and legal solidarity towards migrants, with different visions of solidarity.

While some organizations, such as *Progetto 20k* and *no borders* movements are comfortable framing themselves in a conflictual role, NGOs and religious organization deplore conflict between Italy and France and appeal to the two government to exhibit solidarity rather than competition in refolement procedures and human rights violation. These organizations avoid conflict in their statements and seek legitimacy in international and European legislation. They follow a solidarity tradition that purposely avoid conflict, but in this new context find themselves within a new framework. With the other organizations they faced different dynamics of stigmatization. Today, historically low-conflict actors such as NGOs volunteers or the Red Cross can no longer fit the humanitarian and apolitical nature in which they used to identify. In this context no distinction is made between volunteers and *passeurs*, humanitarian and criminal aid being put at the same level by politics. Seldom, and with difficulties, it is in the court rooms that differences

²⁵<https://www.lastampa.it/2017/04/13/societa/il-terzo-paradiso-abbatte-le-frontiere-vNiVZ3NUCbhLyhrNW3BTP/premium.html>.

between solidarity (or *fraternité*) and crime are still recognized, but this seems more of a vestige of post-war constitutional reforms.

5. Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to understand how concept and practices of solidarity are re-shaped in a context of stigmatization and distrust of the Third sector and volunteers.

The first question was about the role of depoliticized and securitarian policies. Stigmatization is the consequence of “zero tolerance” measures that extend their target from migrants to their supporters.

The spectacle of the border that accompanies illegality production on migrants (de Genova, 2013) extend to solidarity citizens. (Giliberti 2017, 175. My translation)

Labelling someone as criminal is a technique of governments to avoid political decisions. But it is still a way to govern and it still has consequences in the context where it is enforced. So, the choice to criminalize NGOs and volunteers question their apolitical nature. Both politics and a part of public opinion consider practices of solidarity toward migrants controversial and not to be approved without questions: humanitarianism is losing its apolitical nature.

But how has this stigmatization occurred? Following the second question put at in the beginning of this work, it is not just a matter of law targeting NGOs. The “migration crisis” unveiled another question concerning the Third sector: the growing distrust in solidarity actors. Public opinion is starting to wonder what is the real motivation for NGOs and volunteers to act, since the solidarity aim is no longer taken for granted. It is relevant here to point out that the 2002/90/CE European directive defining the facilitation of unauthorized entry, transit and residence, specifies that the crime can exist only if the action is done “for profit” reasons. Considered that, humanitarian operations should be guarantee beyond doubt. Of course, they are not. That is no surprise, if we consider that it is also happening because the no-profitness of NGOs and volunteering is questioned, and so it is their solidarity. This puts conflict around solidarity within a context of the Third sector transformation. It is also a signal of independence of the Third sector from state and market, that, despite general consideration of its lack of conflict (Busso, Gargiulo 2017), find a new space in the political arena.

Finally, how do these phenomena affect social solidarity? Solidarity is going beyond the dichotomy between integration and conflict. In other words:

Even though humanitarianism has long been suspended between apolitical benevolence, in the solidarity of salvation, and radical militantism, in the solidarity of revolution, I have argued that it is today becoming more politicized than ever. (Chouliaraki 2013, 24)

To start questioning the nature of solidarity and TSOs means on the one side distrust and stigmatization and on the other politicization of humanitarian issues. The consequence of the conflict in the Third sector generates a combination of political and disruptive effect on social solidarity. The re-introduction in the debate and in the political and public arena of the migration issue shows an overcoming of depoliticized politics by civil society organizations. This conflict, however, has disruptive consequences in the practice of solidarity, which is then both stigmatized and limited. Moreover, solidarity dynamics seems to be promoted at group level but still cannot find a solution in the Italian and European political arena. This dynamic accelerates the process of growing distrust toward TSOs; their role of solidarity actors is questioned along with the very concept of solidarity.

Solidarity cannot, as a universal idea, define the borders of its action. [...] but in this feeling of empathy and reciprocity, it is not in contrast with partial solidarities, declined as plurals, and built on the basis of generational or neighborhood affinities [...] solidarity today has the tendency to become a factor of exclusion (Blais 2012, 372-373. My translation)

The State, that in the last fifty years promoted the growth of the Third sector - also due to its retreat, if continues in the abdication from its political and regulative role may provoke a severe disruptive effect.

The retreat of welfare state has questioned the path that had led from a solidarity between workers to national cohesion (Paci 2008). Welfare and migration "crises" have tested European and national solidarities. If first reactions have involved the stigmatization of migrants, now it seems that this phenomenon could be a starting point of stigmatization of solidarity, going over the migrant issue and covering different sectors of solidarity, as we may see from recent episodes of a stigma being put on volunteering *per se*; this may represent an element of social fragmentation and general distrust.

In the end, considering a “bad” narrative and the deconstructive practices of solidarity (Cobbe 2014) is necessary, because in these elements of fragmentation we can find seeds of a re-politicization of the Third sector and solidarity as well.

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