



UNIVERSITÀ  
DEGLI STUDI  
DI GENOVA



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Università degli Studi di Genova

Ph.D. State of Advancement Annual Report (2023/2024)

Department of Education Sciences

Curriculum: Migration and Multicultural Processes

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This report summarizes my Ph.D. research progress and doctoral training within the SolRoutes ERC project from February 2023 to January 2024. This range of time corresponds to the first year of my Ph.D. in the Curriculum *Migration and Intercultural processes*, with the School of Social Sciences, DisFor, University of Genoa.

The objective of my research is to explore the processes and forms of solidarity oriented towards activating routes for ‘unauthorized’ migrants in their border transgressions to, from and across the Belgian territory. Belgium, as a research location, is part of the larger framework of the SolRoutes ERC project. I intend to develop a doctoral thesis in line with the general framework of the project that is interested in the nexus between solidarity and route activation. This is to say exploring the various forms related to dwellings and movements as a manifestation of solidarity (Queirolo Palmas and Rahola, 2021). This exploration will unfold around different locations in Belgium where solidarity and control around it are intertwined. My research methodology is empirical and is to be oriented towards a comprehensive tradition, accentuated on qualitative methods such as ethnography, life stories and immersive postures within the different realities of solidarity in Belgium. One of the reasons for this choice is to go beyond the simple explanation that relies on external factors relating to migration control and humanitarian culture and opt for an internal understanding of the subjective experiences and material occurrences of solidarity oriented to support ‘unauthorized’ migrants in their dwellings and border transgression. I am therefore concerned with what I call *solidarity politics of the undocumented*. The 'undocumented' as being the individual lacking legal and institutional recognition yet actively participating in the social sphere to show support and disrupt various forms of exclusion from legal statuses and reception modalities intended for newcomers, asylum seekers, refugees, and people on the move.

### SolRoutes Training: deepening the state of reflection and experimenting the empirical assumptions

My doctoral training consisted of two dimensions, one theoretical and the other empirical:

#### Theoretical:

One of which was directed to strengthening the knowledge and the intellectual formation of the Ph.D. SolRoutes students in regards to the flagship and niche issues of the critical border and migration studies, with a strong emphasis on reflections interested in solidarity, autonomy of migration and the production of migratory routes. This training was both intra-SolRoutes and open-to-public seminars with the different actors interested in issues of migration and borders in the city of Genova and beyond. The variety of scholars who intervened in this training allowed direct interaction with the prominent scholars of this field. More than pair-to-pair knowledge dissemination, opportunities for networking and stimulating intentions for further scientific collaborations have taken place as well.

From February to June 2023 I have encountered academics, journalists, technicians and experts of the field (see the TimeSheet enclosed to the folder Passaggio). Each guest suggested one or more references to prepare and around which the discussion will be weaved.

#### Empirical:

SolRoutes training started with an experimental intention towards research methods. One main avenue to experiment was direct involvement on the field with actors concerned with solidarity to people on the move in different locations in Italy. Thanks to the networks already weaved by the researcher team throughout their research experiences, Ph.D. students were allowed access to territories and border zones where solidarity and border control is to be observed.

The logic was the following: a Ph.D. student along with a Post-Doctoral research will be assigned a specific location and they have to engage with the dynamics in place, and experiment the empirical methods to be later used once Ph.D. students are sent as Ethnographic Antenna in their respective research locations (for me and my colleague Post-Doc is Belgium). More than fostering relations of proximity among the couples of research, fieldwork transmissions were stimulated to circulate among all the members of the SolRoutes team.

I have volunteered along with my colleague at the border town of Ventimiglia for a period of 6 weeks, 1 week for each month of the training. The encounters with the collectives and the actors in Ventimiglia have later facilitated our access to other realities in Belgium. They also have helped to reconfigure our empirical methods and sensitivities to the realities of the field.

#### Conferences with paper presentation 2023/2024:

I. Oubad. “*Navigating the Margins of Intermediations: how to account for infra-political intermediaries in asylum contexts in Italy?*”. in the 9th International Ethnography and Qualitative Research Conference in Trento (8th June, 2023).

#### Publications:

Bousetta, H., Jamid, H., Oubad, I. (2024). The Institutional Channeling of Transnational Economic Mobilization in Three Moroccan Regions. In: Zapata-Barrero, R., Awad, I. (eds) Migrations in the Mediterranean. IMISCOE Research Series. Springer, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-42264-5\\_21](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-42264-5_21)

Oubad I., and Mouna., K. (forthcoming). “*Certifying Credibility: Trajectory of Sub-Saharan asylum seekers in Italy*” in *Fuori Luogo Rivista di Sociologia del Territorio, Turismo, Tecnologia*, Vol 15 No 1 (2024)

Oubad I., (forthcoming). “*Navigating the Margins of Intermediations: Infra-Political Intermediaries to asylum legal protection in Italy*”. in *Etnografia e Ricerca Qualitativa*.

Ongoing fieldwork antenna for SolRoutes and PhD Thesis UNIGE:

Ongoing work as antenna for Solroutes:

It's important to note that my research mobility to Belgium faced delays due to administrative bureaucracy related to obtaining a visa for Belgium, given my Moroccan nationality. Instead of commencing research activities in October 2023 as planned, I only began fieldwork in November. Upon my arrival in Belgium, I initiated contact with available networks and immersed myself in the dynamics of squatting and building occupation in solidarity with undocumented migrants in the city of Brussels. Through visits, participation in events and activities, and becoming a part of a collective within one of the three observed squats in Brussels (specifically, one belonging to *la voix des sans-papiers* in Ixelles, another housing a mix of documented and undocumented migrants along with Belgian citizens, and the third operated by a NoBorder collective), I gained insights into the collaborative dynamics and tensions among undocumented individuals, activists, organized groups, and local authorities engaged in building occupations. These experiences initiated understanding of factors that facilitated cooperation or triggered tensions and moments of division.

Presently, I am actively engaged with two collectives, Réseau ADES and AG NoBorder, both positioning themselves as autonomous organized groups dedicated to supporting undocumented individuals in Belgium, detained migrants in detention centers, and individuals in transit within and across Belgian borders. This involvement enables me to move beyond isolated events and immerse myself in the ongoing dynamics that shape actions of support and solidarity for undocumented migrants. Building on this foundation, I have established connections with dynamics led by migrants and forms of solidarity that operate on a peer-to-peer basis. I am currently tracking and conceptualizing these activities as the *solidarity politics of the undocumented*, where 'undocumented' refers to individuals lacking legal and institutional recognition yet actively participating in the social sphere to show support and disrupt various forms of exclusion from legal statuses and reception modalities intended for newcomers, asylum seekers, refugees, and people on the move.

Along with my ongoing ethnographic observation, thoughtful discussion has been conducted with people concerned. These have deepened the understanding of the intentions, opportunities and complexities surrounding squatting and collective actions.

For the past two months I managed to integrate and engage with diverse realities linked to squatting occupation in solidarity with undocumented people. On this line, I will develop my research activities for the 1st node of the ethnographic antenna in Belgium.

Ph.D. thesis for UniGe:

Through my fieldwork for the SolRoutes in Belgium and the network of researchers and activists activated through the SolRoutes network:

I am currently participating in multiple networks and collectives of activists around the issues of accommodation, squatting and solidarity to people arriving in Brussels. Taking part of these arrival infrastructures (Meeus et al, 2018) and dynamics of support to migrants allowed sight and direct contact with local activists' networks, and thus I have identified spaces of solidarity and control concerned with migrants' movements and dwellings. I am also carrying ethnographic notes through 'being there' as part of the dynamics in place. I have noticed complex forms of coalitions bringing both people on the move, undocumented people and groups of activists around solidarity.

Drawing on that, my doctoral research will be two folds: (1) to follow dynamics orchestrating occupations of buildings to provide shelters to 'undocumented' people. Considering occupied spaces/squats and spaces of encounters, they are indeed generative space. I will then (2) follow how these spaces circulate information and practical knowledge about routes deemed to allow intra-schengen circulation for people with intentions of movement.

For what concerns the first dimension (squatting), I have, up until now, identified 4 occupied buildings and in two of them I spend time with the people in place. This time of looseness allows space for discussion and ethnography about the above-mentioned research interest.

For the second dimension (movement and border transgression), I will follow solidarity actors along the routes of the French-Belgian coast. From Calais-Dunkirk to Bruges Nord and the Zeebrugge port. Along this route multiple points of passage are crafted to cross to the United Kingdom. Along the coast, contentious encounters between people on the move, border control agents and solidarity actors are one main aspect of this route. Through my engagement with solidarity networks active in these routes I will direct attention to the assemblages of information, knowledge, resources and facilitation shaping autonomous forms of dwelling and mobilities along this route.

These two dimensions will allow me to account for the infrastructures of arrival, of dwellings and of information activating routes across and around Belgium. Being a border country (surrounded by France, Germany, Netherlands, Luxembourg and the United Kingdom), Belgium is the field of my research. All in all, my doctoral research will be concerned with infrastructures shaping autonomous forms of dwelling and mobilities in Belgium and across its borders