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# The Ariège 'Refuge': Advantage and Diversity of a Host Topography

William Berthomière and Christophe Imbert

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## Introduction

- 1 In returning almost 30 years later to his thesis on the Ariège Pyrenees, Michel Chevalier (1985) rejected an exclusion of the foothills from the latter, 'given the multiple links that exist between the Pyrenean mountains proper and the pre-Pyrenean foreland' (p. 16). Indubitably, the French department of Ariège is made up of a great diversity of living environments, more or less strongly connected to the mountains: the north at the edges of the Toulouse urban area, the Foix-Pamiers urban axis, the Saint-Girons basin where the piedmont and mountain valleys converge, the foothill and mid-mountain villages revitalized to great or lesser degrees by the arrival of new populations (Cognard, 2010), the perched hamlets of the Plantaurel, and the mid- and high-mountain valleys home to somewhat 'marginal' lifestyles (Mialocq, 2020).
- 2 As diverse as these Ariège areas are, they have all developed and maintained a special connection with the notion of refuge and mountain hospitality, summed up in the following words of Cristina Del Biaggio and Charles Heller: 'In the mountains as in the sea, we leave no one in distress!'.<sup>1</sup> Even as far away from the border ridges as the village of Mas d'Azil,<sup>2</sup> a strong link persists between mountains and refugees in the memories of the inhabitants, rooted in family histories of Maquis or refugees of *La Retirada*, of which there remain only a few direct witnesses.
- 3 This view is today still strong and expressed with vigour in Ariège, at a time when many politicians instead portray Europe as a 'besieged fortress' and have made repeated calls to block the borders and 'close the mountains' (Berthomière, 2017; Le Maquis, 2017; Lendaro, 2018; Del Biaggio, 2019). Mountain valleys, such as foothills area of the Mas d'Azil commune, have recently welcomed neo-rural populations, who are

today at the centre of an engagement in support of exiles<sup>3</sup> (Berthomière and Imbert, 2020). In this way, a memory of the tragic episodes that took place in the Pyrenean peaks during the 20th century (Figure 1) is reactivated by new inhabitants seeking to inscribe their political action within the latter (Stuppia, 2016).

Figure 1: Commemorative plaque in memory of the Ariège couriers (Oust, Ariège)



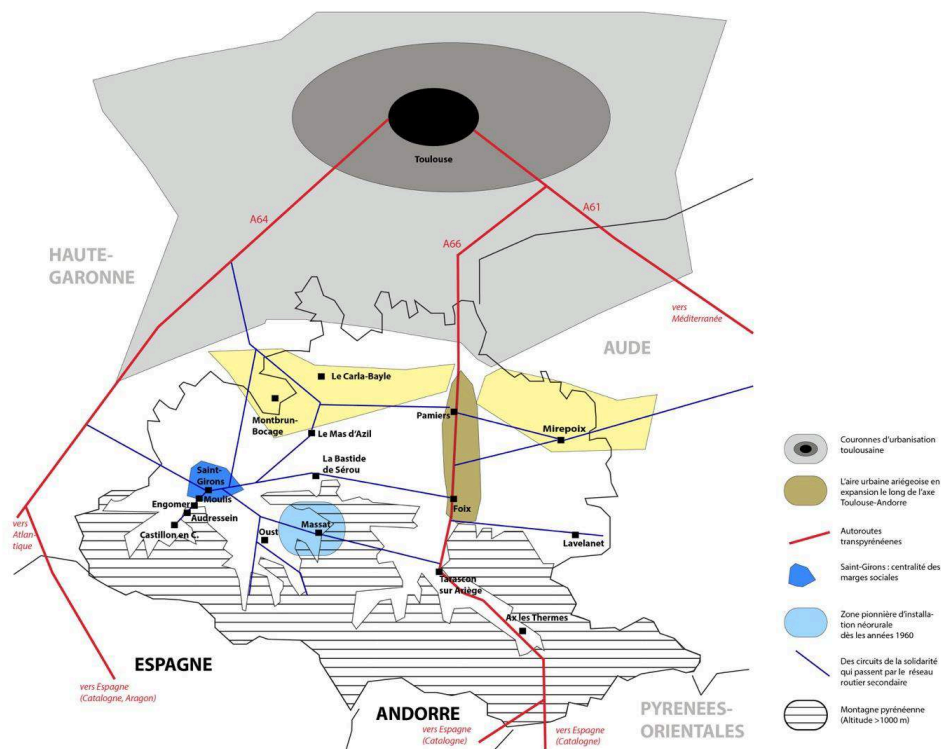
Authors' photograph, November 2019

- 4 Beginning from this observation, our work<sup>4</sup> aims to show a complex territoriality that, depending on the spaces considered, produces singular and distinct forms of mobilization, inherited from past migration histories and social networks linking mountains, valleys, piedmont towns and the Toulouse conurbation (Pouzenc and Barthe-Baldellon, 2003). Compared to the Alpine situation (Giliberti, 2018) and other border areas (Guenebeaud, 2015; Casella Colombeau, 2019), the Ariège Pyrenees are distinct in that the exile question is largely separate from that of border crossing. Most of these exiles have passed through reception centres for asylum seekers (CADA) in the surrounding villages and towns (i.e. Carla-Bayle or Foix) or have arrived directly from Toulouse. Although threatened by expulsion, they find themselves in foothill and mountain territories thanks to shelter offered by active support and inter-knowledge networks between the Toulouse conurbation and Ariège villages, or through local initiatives undertaken by associations or collectives, strongly (re)mobilised since 2015.
- 5 Indeed, local mobilisations – which have made it possible to set up places of refuge for exiles – have evolved between 2015 and 2020 towards an original organisation that, we argue, extends to the whole of the department. Our investigation shows that, on the one hand, initiatives for sheltering asylum seekers<sup>5</sup> are shaped by specific local contexts and, on the other hand, these initiatives are linked to one another and rendered complementary thanks to a set of key actors, characterised by a great

diversity in the forms of capital they are able to activate (e.g. yoga teacher, business executive, farmer, etc.). While this evolution has in part been achieved thanks to co-affiliation ties shared by certain members belonging to multiple associations and collectives (Pette et Eloire, 2016), the question remains as to the extent to which the latter is also based on the socio-spatial organisation of the territory.

- 6 We explore this issue through field research conducted on activists since September 2017 in Ariège. The initial objective of the investigation being to evaluate the contribution of international migration to social change in rural France, with a particular focus on several spheres in which activists – many of whom are also newcomers to the area – are particularly involved. To this end, we attended five public meetings and general assemblies, and met eighteen members of three 'collectives' whose paths we reconstructed: an association based in a mountain valley in the Couserans with about thirty members; a collective in a piedmont village led by a dozen active members, but with more than a hundred sympathizers; an association based in the town of Pamiers, which brings together several dozen members residing throughout the department.
- 7 Specifically, we will see that the singularity of this complex organisation lies in the fact that the mountain offers, on the one hand, a space of refuge allowing for a distancing from forms of state oppression (Scott, 2013) and is, on the other hand, as in the words of Philippe Hanus on the Vercors mountain range, 'an inventive space, with interconnected massifs, whose inhabitants pool their skills' (2006:43). We identify four distinct refugee aid initiatives in Ariège, and show that beyond their strong specificities, they are enmeshed within a departmental network of solidarity actors.

Figure 2. Cartography of the Ariège spaces of refuge



Authors' own elaboration

## The urbanised foothills: Pamiers, a mobilisation 'outpost'

- 8 Shaped by the Pamiers-Foix axis, the Ariège piedmont area offers a strategic space for actors engaged in support of exiles. Its proximity to the urban resources of the conurbation of the Ariège valley – where associations and public bodies (i.e. prefecture, shelters, hotels, solidarity associations<sup>6</sup>) concerned by the refugee issue interact – has made it a mobilisation 'outpost'.
- 9 The situations of rejected asylum seekers are often characterized by a certain urgency, implying the rehousing of families threatened with expulsion and the provision of material and psychological assistance. The ability to capitalize on the accessibility and variety of resources in the Ariège piedmont area (e.g. food distribution, legal aid, available hotels and apartments, health facilities) lies in the strength of existing links within the associative sector and of established know-how, in part inherited from previous professional experiences (e.g. development of health policies in the fight against AIDS or drug addiction or financial and accounting management in the social and solidarity economy). Success in the creation of the 'One hundred for a roof' (*Cent pour un toit*)' accommodation solution in Pamiers embodies this social dynamic of solidarity, and Annie's activist and professional trajectory underlies its dynamism. When, in 2014, Annie, a native of Ariège who returned after concluding a career as a general physician in the Paris region, wished to express her solidarity with the exiled, she quickly perceived the need to articulate the competencies of the actors in place. After having participated in the work of the local branches of Réseau éducations sans frontières (RESF) and the Human Rights League of France (Ligue des droits de l'Homme - LDH), in 2018 she was able to bring together the associative fabric of solidarity and establish the 'One hundred for a roof' association under the patronage of the Ariège Emmaus. The latter brings together a diverse blend of people, from those close to the bishop of Pamiers whose engagement is inscribed in the Catholic faith, those of right-wing political persuasion, the mayor of Pamiers, who as a Jewish child was hidden and protected in the Ariège mountains, to the activists of a radical left, involved in the social and solidarity economy, such as the Monnaie 09 association. This diversity reinforces, in fact, the effectiveness of the activists' action insofar as the convergence of different support networks multiplies their capacity for action. Indeed, one group can work on food distribution, another on finding emergency shelter, and yet another on the legal defence of exiles. After more than a year and a half of operation, the 'One hundred for a roof' association is responsible for coordinating these associative actions, which today allow to offer accommodation to seven families who have been denied asylum.
- 10 The specificity of this urbanized piedmont space, underlined by Annie's trajectory is expressed – beyond the potentialities offered by the concentration of institutional and associative resources – in the structuring impact of the support system at the level of the different Ariège territories. This piedmont area is, in fact, the space where activists are closest to the decision-making chain of the asylum administration and from where it is possible to transmit information to the other collectives present across the department. In February 2020, this coordination function was clearly made visible following the expulsion of several families who had been denied asylum. In the

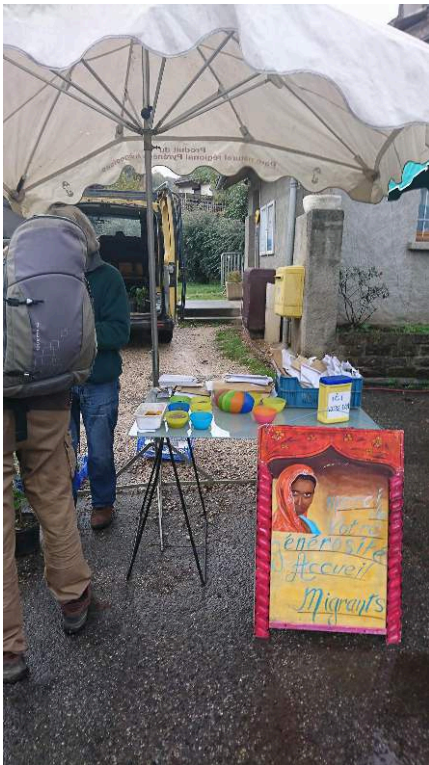
aftermath of this event, those engaged in support of exiles in Pamiers and Foix were able to mount a coordinated fight against the expulsions, bringing together in an unprecedented way more than forty associations, collectives, unions and representatives of political parties (see document in the appendix).

- 11 Finally, it should be emphasized that the quality of 'outpost' of the piedmont Ariège is equally due to it forming the hinterland of Toulouse, to which the metropolis can exfiltrate refugee families who will be relocated to other territories of the Ariège refuge.

## The neo-rurality hillsides: Carla-Bayle, mobilisation base camp

- 12 Embodied by the rocky outcrop of the commune of Carla-Bayle, these slopes form a 'base camp' for numerous inhabitants, many of them neo-rurals, engaged in exile aid activities. Not without historical roots (in particular the presence of native Pierre Bayle [1647-1706], a promoter of tolerance), mobilisation here is organized around a reception centre for asylum seekers, set up more than twenty years ago.
- 13 This space of hills and slopes has been and continues to be home to several well-structured collectives organized in support of refugee needs. A first level of organization is based on the quality of the relations that CADA management teams have managed to build over the years with residents who are both part of internationalist networks and involved in local exile integration initiatives. The creation of the Diversités association in 2014 is one of the most recent expressions of such social dynamics. An initiative of professionals with experience in accompanying asylum seekers, this group works to create social links between Ariège families and those awaiting refugee status.
- 14 These collectives, made up largely of retired school teachers who have been living in Ariège for varying lengths of time, are more politicised than their predecessors, base their action on the 'long' duration of the asylum procedure, and are thus able to quickly react in the event of a refusal to grant refugee status. Crucially, this second level of aid-mobilization in support of exiles, and even more towards those who have been denied asylum, is made possible by a topography that allows a rapid and discreet relocation of the people supported by the collectives.
- 15 Spread across hillsides and slopes that are extended and polarized by the Toulouse conurbation, the Foix-Pamiers axis, and the Ariège neo-rural territories of Volvestre and Plantaurel, these collectives readily find emergency accommodation for rejected asylum seekers at the CADA in the Carla-Bayle commune, but also occasionally in neighbouring CADAs (Cazères, Foix and Saverdun) or even that of Toulouse. This Ariège refuge economy is based both on the links forged with the outposts of Pamiers and Foix, and on interconnections formed through the sociability networks of village markets. For instance, the market of Montbrun-Bocage was once frequented by a circus artist who helped undocumented migrants from Toulouse find safety in the heart of the hills and isolated hamlets of the Haut Couserans.

Figure 3a. A call for solidarity donations for exiles at the Engomer market



Photograph by authors, November 2019

Figure 3b. Stand of the collective in support of exiles at the Montbrun-Bocage market



Photograph by Céline Gaille, May 2019

- 16 Everything is done by word of mouth, and weekly markets provide an opportunity to exchange information, make the collectives visible to those seeking support, and recruit new activists (see Figures 3a and 3b). The Montbrun-Bocage market, located



about fifty kilometres from Toulouse, has, in fact, such a large radius of attraction that included among its Ariège refuge activists are individuals living in the Toulouse conurbation, the hills between the valleys of the Arize and Lèze rivers, and the Comminges area.

- 17 Generally, this assistance mechanism draws its resources from the diversity and strength of the links forged within the various markets. Their frequenting presents an opportunity for many neo-rurals – a number of whom are in their thirties and share a common background of world travel (e.g. Latin America and South-East Asia) – to join the ranks of the collectives mobilised in support of exiles, albeit their actions remain more likely to be managed by the above-mentioned retirees. The case of Nicolas, a 34-year-old organic beekeeper, is exemplary. When setting up his farm in Plantaurel, Nicolas met Serge<sup>8</sup> at the Montbrun-Bocage market, which allowed him frame his local anchoring in continuity with his internationalist and humanist ideals. He has since regularly received asylum seekers from the CADA of Carla-Bayle, offering an escape from their daily life of waiting (Kobelinsky, 2010) and sharing with them his beekeeping activities (Figure 4). Such examples of engagement underline the singular character of this interstitial space, dotted by more or less remote hamlets, which connect movements of amenities, labour and forced migration. In this, the space of the Ariège refuge contributes to knowledge and diversification of the 'global countryside' model set forth in the pioneering work of Michaël Woods (2016).

Figure 4. An asylum applicant from the Carla-Bayle CADA accompanying Nicolas in his beekeeping activities



Photograph by Céline Gaille, March 2019

## Mountain suburb: the space of Biros and the making of a refuge

- 18 At the intersection of the first two examples, but much more locally anchored, the Acarm09 association gravitates mainly between Saint-Girons and the Biros valley. At the origin of its structure is a retired teacher who, in the 1990s, created an international solidarity association with a Mexican district. Around 2015, with the departure of the first exiles from Calais<sup>9</sup> and media coverage of the Syrian conflict, the association gained new momentum, attracting people in the Biros mountain valley, between Moulis and Audressein, less than 15 minutes from Saint-Girons. Members of the association rapidly organized to host families from the CADA of Carla-Bayle who had been refused asylum, most often in their own homes located in isolated hamlets above the valley. Since 2018, more stable forms of accommodation have been found, thanks to the purchase on the part of two members of a village house and an apartment in Saint-Girons which respectively house two Albanian and one Togolese family. More recently, the association has restored an old squat in a working-class suburb of the town, which it rents for an Angolan family.
- 19 While the association's activities vary according to demand, they have generally intensified. Locally based relations shape daily engagement. Awareness-raising activities are organised in Saint-Girons, with film screenings in the Max Linder cinema, exhibitions and meetings in the village pub, and the setting up of an information stand and cake sales at the Moulis Sunday market. The association primarily comprises former hippies of the post-1968 waves, together with recently arrived individuals committed to revitalising the valley (e.g. volunteers at the Engomer associative grocery store), and other activists of frequent (inter)national mobility, more oriented towards the networks of Saint-Girons and Toulouse. The members are characterized by great social diversity; among the retirees there are former nurses, psychologists, teachers and entrepreneurs; in the 40-60-year-old age group we find an accountant, a yoga teacher and an unemployed person; and among those under 40, a teacher, a doctoral student in biology and the founder of an association promoting land art.
- 20 This variety of backgrounds and generations, coming together for a same purpose, allows to multiply the means of action—from the founder, who is more than 80 years old, to new members just completing their studies. The association's relatively long existence means it has a stable financial base, thanks to continuity in most members' subscriptions. This resource and the arrival of new members have allowed the association to expand its activities to include further support of accommodated individuals (i.e. assistance with administrative procedures, French language classes, etc.). Specifically, such activities have been possible thanks to the skills, investment and networks of certain members.
- 21 For example, Marc, a retiree with a secondary residence in the Toulouse region, uses his respectability and entrepreneurial know-how to enhance the association's relations with the administration and help establish a comprehensive strategy for the reception of exiled families, including the professional integration of adults. The association also benefits from the contribution of Thierry, whose thirty-five years of work in the social and solidarity economy in Ariège make him a rich source of information (e.g. knowledge of other actors in the area of refugee reception in Ariège) and of useful ideas (e.g. organisation of events to raise funds). Members of the group also include those,

such as Quentin and Maria, with digital expertise, accustomed to social networks, online pools, slide shows and connected tools for collaborative project management.

- 22 Differently from the two previous examples, here the sphere of action is more local and mountainous. The town of Saint-Girons, while being further away from organisational decisions, has the advantage of less administrative control. That said, the association has reached a stage in its existence where it is more sensitive to the tightening of migration policies. Indeed, its members are somewhat divided between a humanist attitude of negotiation and a more politically marked stance of opposition. Like the situations experienced by many collectives and associations providing aid to asylum seekers, there have been moments of internal tension over the specific modalities of action, albeit the activists are all commonly energised by a desire to fight the inadequate reception of refugees (Del Biaggio et al., 2017).

## An incised valley: the Massat space, hotbed of the resistance

- 23 With the collective created in Massat to protest the expulsion order concerning the inhabitant Pierre Kilongo,<sup>10</sup> emerges yet another distinct initiative. Here, mountain isolation is much stronger than in Biros; the small village of Massat provides the geographical frame of reference. Nonetheless, solidarity action draws on the activist resources of other areas in the department—with the legal help of the departmental president of the Human Rights League of France and the logistical assistance of Acarm09, the collective was able to re-house a family living in isolation in the neighbouring commune of Port. In addition to being village-based, the collective's mobilization is political in a number of ways. In a commune of 700 inhabitants, of whom more than 43% voted for Jean-Luc Mélenchon<sup>11</sup> in the first round of the 2017 presidential election, the management of asylum is (beyond dramatic individual situations) an eminently political question with clear neo-colonial and class struggle underpinnings. The influence of the collective (which includes former trade unionists and activists of the French Communist Party) on local politics is further reflected by the unanimous municipal council vote in favour of a motion to support Pierre Kilongo. The group also asked the mayor to show his backing by participating in the administrative procedures and, notably, putting pressure on the prefecture.
- 24 Beyond this political aspect, Catherine, one of the leaders of the collective, told us that 'Pierre unified those around him' and that as far as she is concerned, she is now talking again to people with whom she was once angry. Indeed, this was a village mobilization that bonded inhabitants and temporarily suspended political lines of division, which in this valley setting have been expressed in interpersonal conflicts between Marxist trade unionists, anarchists, spiritualist humanists and 'collapsists'. If the latter are the least invested in Massat, Thierry, one of the pillars of Acarm09, advocates this movement, seeing in it one of the driving forces behind his activism in support of exiled families.
- 25 If there is a certain degree of pride in seeing their mobilization approach repeated in other villages, where protesting inhabitants accompany rejected asylum seekers all the way to the police station on the day they are required to present themselves, for these activists, mountain isolation is not sufficiently reassuring in the current repressive

context. Fearing that the obstinacy of the prefect, who is using all channels to render Pierre Kilongo's expulsion effective, will draw attention to the peaceful valley, the moment of spontaneous reaction seems to have given way, over the course of this legal battle, to a form of organisation that is more open to sharing experiences with other collectives.

## Establishment of an overall organisation

- 26 These local configurations of exile assistance are more akin to 'border refuges' than to 'border crossings' (Guenebeaud, 2015). That is, they more similarly resemble those observed in the marginal space of the Cévennes than those in border areas where the main challenge is to successfully pass through a very restrictive control system. In contrast, here the challenge lies in the long-term development of material and psychological conditions of reception. As Elise Martin (2016) suggests, the Cévennes valleys 'are more places of refuge, havens of peace where people come to rest after a long journey, and not places of arrival' (p.92). Martin describes how, in the Cévennes valleys, over the course of 2015 the local mountain collectives first improvised a transitional reception of exiles from the Calais area. Then, towards the end that year, they shifted to more sustainable forms of reception through the use of vacant village housing, lent by elected officials or private individuals. As in Ariège, aid workers have drawn on a collective memory of the tragic episodes of Protestantism or the Resistance.
- 27 Indeed, this mythical dimension of the refuge space is a resource mobilised by aid workers active in the exile reception system, and evokes anthropologies of 'societies against the State', as studied by Pierre Clastres (1974) in Latin America and James C. Scott (2013) in Asia. Here too, while the state is very much present, it is perceived as 'distant'. The interviewees believe, partly due to their own experiences, that the state is permissive towards lifestyles that do not always comply with laws on the production and use of narcotics, labour legislation or general urban planning rules. Some even see Ariège 'as full of small Zones to Defend' (*zone à défendre* or ZAD). However, as in many rural areas, the State is the prefecture and therefore the department. One of the strengths of these localized actions is that they are connected to the prefecture and the decentralized administrations through intermediary actors who play the role of legal advisor and informant. Without the latter, it would have been much more difficult to set up a sustainable reception system, which involves finding housing, schooling and stable material resources for daily needs.
- 28 In many cases, these actors offer complementary resources. Indeed, the individual trajectories of the members of the collectives studied here show, for some, a long-standing presence in the area, with residential paths in Ariège spread over several types of spaces, a relational capital accumulated over time and a long history of working together to organize and rapidly circulate information on local actions and public authority decisions. Others are relatively young, and have, for the most part, come to Ariège after having travelled extensively; they are often bearers of a social capital and skills that enable them to mobilise human and material resources at a distance (e.g. the ability to organise online pools to buy housing). Still others, who have retired to the area or who have a second home in Ariège, use the skills and social respectability associated with their professions (doctor, business manager) to influence public institutions and coordinate initiatives to help exiles (rental projects or care

provision). Indubitably, the diversity of experiences and individual paths together with the variety of spaces enhances local activist groups' capacity for action.

- 29 Furthermore, the absence of a large city in Ariège and the largely village-based nature of the reception system help explain how information on decisions made by the prefecture and on CADA activities can quickly reach the collectives engaged in exile aid. The singularity of the Ariège social geography thus consists of the fact that one can both be very close to the decisions of the public authorities while simultaneously quite far from control mechanisms through a distancing enabled by both the topography and the social space of exile activism.
- 30 Our investigation shows that the Ariège Pyrenees form a refuge space through the diversity of its components: high and medium mountains, piedmont and small towns. After a period in which the material conditions of reception guided the action of local collectives, the issue of the physical protection of exiles has come to the forefront, particularly when a prefecture decided to tighten its expulsion policy. This evolution has had the effect of intensifying the links between local collectives within a departmental space of exchange.

## Conclusion. Sharing the same crisis unites and bonds

- 31 In response to uncertainty faced by both exiled families and the people mobilized in their favour, actors in this piedmont urban outpost have established a departmental coordination in opposition to the national asylum policy. Notwithstanding political heterogeneity, the Ariège refuge has rallied around the idea, as proclaimed by this coordination, that: 'Ariège has always been a land of hospitality and must remain so for new arrivals well as for the people of Ariège' (cf. appendix, press release).
- 32 In a context that is not free of xenophobic overtones, the analysis of registers and modes of action re-inscribes the mountain in a mobilising narrative, confirming its role as a refuge space. In the case of Ariège, it is the history of the exodus of Spanish Republicans, as well as that of European Jewish populations seeking to cross the Pyrenees that shape the convictions of some supporters. If a border crossing is not quite the reality here, the reminder of this historical dimension, regularly commemorated by the organisation of events (Freedom trails, the *Retirada*, etc.), seals the bond between the mountain space and the protection of exiles.
- 33 This historical feature of mountain resistance is also reflected in modalities of action that reject the exercise of a State policy that violates the very basis of their way of life, where solidarity towards people in peril cannot not be obstructed. In this respect, the cry of 'stop expulsions' that brings together some forty associations, trade unions and political parties (cf. appendix, press release) evokes the words of the mountain survivor and storyteller Mario Rigoni Stern in his reminder to younger generations to: 'Learn to say no to all those who want to offer you things that are against your conscience' (Rigoni Stern, 2018: 23).
- 34 The protagonists of this Ariège refuge are strongly aware of this heritage. Indeed, this awareness fosters solidarity with the inhabitants of other massifs who have 'the courage to say no' when faced with comparable situations, as exemplified by reference of our study participants to the inhabitants of the Roya valley or the Diois area (Lendaro, 2018).

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## APPENDIXES

### **Annex: Press release from the departmental coordination of exile advocacy groups**

Ariège says stop the expulsions.

Ariège has recently seen brutal, inhumane and undignified expulsions, notably of young school children and their parents.

We demand that France respects its international commitments in terms of the right to education, children's rights and human rights.

Ariège has always been a land of hospitality and must remain so for new arrivals as well as for the people of Ariège.

We, the signatories, call for an end to all expulsions across the department.

*List of signatory organizations:*

*Réseau Education Sans Frontières 09, Ligue des Droits de l'Homme 09, Association Couserannaise pour l'Accueil des Réfugié-es et des Migrant-es, Génération's Ariège, Parti Communiste Français 09, Bénédicte Taurine Députée 1ère circonscription, Michel Larive Député 2ème circonscription,*

SNUipp-FSU 09, Solidaires 09, La France Insoumise 09, Collectif soutien aux réfugiés 09, Comité contre les OQTF, Conseil Ariégeois des Parents d'Elèves, Fédération des Conseils de Parents d'Elèves 09, Collectif soutien de Massat, NPA 09, CIMADE 09, CGT 09, FSU 09, Coordination Volvestre pour le développement des solidarités, PEP 09, Action des Chrétiens pour l'Abolition de la Torture 09, Collectif de Montbrun Solidaire avec les Migrants, Amis de la Fondation pour la Mémoire de la Déportation 09, Monnaie 09, CCFD-Terre Solidaire, Parti Socialiste 09, Mouvement pour la paix 09, UNSA Education 09, ATTAC 09, SNES-FSU 09, SNEP-FSU 09, FO 09, EELV, la Confédération Paysanne, le Cercle Cœur Colibris Couserans.

## NOTES

1. See the interview of Cristina Del Biaggio and Charles Heller by Maïté Darnault, 'En montagne, comme en mer, la frontière est violente pour les migrants', *Libération*, 14/12/2017.

URL : [http://www.liberation.fr/debats/2017/12/14/charles-heller-et-cristina-del-biaggio-en-montagne-comme-en-mer-la-frontiere-est-violente-pour-les-m\\_1616731](http://www.liberation.fr/debats/2017/12/14/charles-heller-et-cristina-del-biaggio-en-montagne-comme-en-mer-la-frontiere-est-violente-pour-les-m_1616731) and 'Briançon: les professionnels et citoyens de la montagne se mobilisent pour les migrants ce week-end', *Montagnes Magazine*, 15/12/2017

URL : <http://www.montagnes-magazine.com/actus-briancon-les-professionnels-citoyens-montagne-mobilisent-les-migrants-week-end>

2. Plantaurel hillside village located 25 km north-east of Saint-Girons.

3. We have chosen to use the word 'exile' in that it seems to aptly describe the individual trajectories of those who have fled their countries to seek refugee status in France. In this article, the term 'exile' therefore includes individuals awaiting refugee status or who have been denied asylum.

4. This study forms part of the Camigri project (ANR and Nouvelle Aquitaine Region; <https://camigri.hypotheses.org/>) and is based on fieldwork underway since March 2018 in Ariège with refugee supporters active in towns and piedmont and mountain villages. With regard to methodology, all of the data used in this article come from life histories gathered from such individuals and from the regular (bi-monthly) monitoring of the activities of the associations and collectives that bring together their actions. All the names of the people we met have been changed.

5. As part of the asylum application procedure, if after the file has been examined by the French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons (Ofpra) the request is rejected, the exiled person may request a re-examination of the file. In the event of a further rejection by Ofpra, it is possible to refer the matter to the National Court of Asylum (CNDA). If the response is still negative from the CNDA, the person is considered to have lost the right to asylum. He/she may be subject to an Obligation to Leave French Territory (OQTF) issued by the French State.

6. Mainly the Red Cross, Emmaus, Secours Catholique, French Popular Relief and humanist activist networks (Amnesty International, LDH, RESF).

7. The 'One hundred for a roof' ('*Cent pour un toit*') scheme was initiated in Touraine by Emmaus, and is based on the principle of a monthly contribution on the part of one hundred people allowing to finance housing for individuals in precarious situations. Learning French and/or sending their children to school is a requirement aimed at ensuring the integration of those housed and favoring their eventual exit under good conditions. The initiative has spread well beyond Touraine, and is today found in various regions of France.

8. 70 year-old-retiree, former audiovisual technician in Toulouse and one of the main actors within the Montbrun-Bocage collective.



9. As part of the political management of the Calais camps and their evacuation starting in late 2015, the French government chose to disperse these exiles throughout France (with the exception of Ile-de-France and Corsica) and to place them in Reception and Orientation Centres (CAO) where they could apply for asylum.

10. Cf. 'Ariège: la vallée de Massat se mobilise contre l'expulsion de Pierre Kilongo et de ses enfants' <https://www.ladepeche.fr/2019/08/13/ariege-la-vallee-de-massat-se-mobilise-contre-lexpulsion-de-pierre-kilongo-et-de-ses-enfants,8359251.php>

11. Jean-Luc Mélenchon is a left-wing politician, founder of the movement *La France insoumise* (LFI).

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## ABSTRACTS

Alexander von Humboldt wrote that 'the arrangement of mountains... divide the surface of the earth into basins or vast cirques...and influence the range of cultures, habits, institutional forms and national hates' (Debarbieux, 2012, p.13). While this formulation may seem outdated, von Humboldt's reflection remarkably still resonates more than a century and a half later with recent events in mountainous areas affected by European migration policies and border control. Drawing on the life histories of refugee activists in the French department of Ariège, we reveal a complex territoriality that, depending on the spaces considered, produces singular and distinct forms of mobilisation, inherited from past migratory experiences, the engagement of neo-rurals and the social networks linking mountains, valleys, piedmont towns and the Toulouse conurbation. We highlight the uniqueness of the Ariège 'refuge', where mechanisms of migration control are relativised through a distancing enabled by both the topography and the social space of exile activism.

## INDEX

**Keywords:** Ariège, borders, hospitality, refuge, welcome, solidarity, refugees, neo-rurals

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