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Criminalization of Solidarity: a case study of the Riace Model

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Margherita Andreoli
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Members of the Examining Committee:

Dorothea Hilhorst
Zeynep Kasli

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Inquiries:

International Institute of Social Studies
P.O. Box 29776
2502 LT The Hague
The Netherlands

t: +31 70 426 0460
e: info@iss.nl
w: www.iss.nl
fb: <http://www.facebook.com/iss.nl>
twitter: [@issnl](https://twitter.com/issnl)

Location:

Kortenaerkade 12
2518 AX The Hague
The Netherlands

Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>v</i>
<i>List of Acronyms</i>	<i>vi</i>
<i>Abstract</i>	<i>vi</i>
<i>Relevance to Development Studies</i>	<i>vi</i>
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
1.1 The European Migration Crisis	1
1.2 The Italian political arena	2
1.3 Problem statement	3
1.4 Research questions and sub-questions	3
Chapter 2: Analytical and Theoretical frameworks	5
2.1 Analytical Framework	5
2.2 Theoretical Framework	5
2.2.1 Resilience Humanitarianism	5
2.2.2 Criminalization of solidarity	6
2.2.3 Multilevel governance	7
2.2.4 The Riace model	7
Chapter 3: Methodology	9
3.1 My positionality	9
3.2 Data collection	9
3.2.1 Fieldwork	9
3.2.2 Conducting semi-structured interviews	10
3.2.3 Ethical considerations	10
3.4 Limitation and obstacles	10
Chapter 4: The Riace Model	12
4.1 Riace before and after	12
4.2 How did the model work?	13
4.2.1 Sense of self-reliance	13
4.2.2 Sense of community	13
4.2.3 Sense of hospitality	14
4.3 Methods of migrant reception in Italy	14
4.3.1 The SPRAR	15
4.3.2 The CAS	15
4.4 Critiques to the Model	15
4.5 The Mafia and the Riace Model	16
Chapter 5: Criminalization of solidarity	17
5.1 The trial against Domenico Lucano	17
5.1.1 The outcome of the trial	17
5.1.2 The lawyers' opinion	17
5.2 Criminalization of Solidarity in the Riace case	18
5.2.1 Matteo Salvini's role	18
5.3 The outcome of Criminalization of Solidarity in Riace	20

Chapter 6: Riace and humanitarianism	21
6.1 Humanitarianism and the Riace model	21
5.2 Resilience in the Riace Model	
Chapter 7: Is Riace replicable?	24
7.1 The case of Camini	24
7.2 Replicating Riace	25
7.3 Is it a model?	25
Chapter 8: Conclusion	27
8.1 My critique to Riace	27
8.2 Final thoughts	27
8.3 Recommendations	28

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To Maddie that was there through every breakdown and so many smiles

Grazie di cuore

List of Acronyms

UN	United Nations
EU	European Union
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
SPRAR	Sistema di Protezione per Richiedenti Asilo e Rifugiati (System of protection for Asylum-seekers and refugees)
SAI	Sistema Accoglienza Integrazione (System of Hospitality and Integration)
CAS	Centri di Accoglienza Straordinaria (Centers of Extraordinary Hospitality)

Abstract

This study focuses on the Riace Model, a comprehensive hospitality program for refugees in the town of Riace in Southern Italy. Before the Model, Riace was becoming a “ghost town” because of emigration, but the hospitality program brought life back to this area, benefitting both the locals and the refugees. The aim of this study is to understand the Riace Model and the aftermath of Criminalization of Solidarity of the Model in view of local hosting strategies and to understand if the Model is replicable. This study also analyses the vicissitudes of the trial against Domenico Lucano, the former mayor of Riace and face of the Riace Model. This paper explains why the trial against Lucano is a case of Criminalization of Solidarity and looks at the aftermath of it for the town of Riace and the hospitality program. Through the support of data gained from interviews with key informants, this study finds that the Model can be explained through three senses, the sense of self-reliance, the sense of community and the sense of hospitality and it can be positioned into the larger literature on resilience humanitarianism. It also finds that the Model is replicable if certain recommendations are followed and that the Criminalization of Solidarity of the Riace Model has affected the town negatively, but it has not broken the hope of the people of Riace, and Riace will always be the “Città dell’Accoglienza” (the town of hospitality).

Relevance to Development Studies

This topic relevant to Development Studies because it is rooted in resilience humanitarianism that is connected to development thanks to the Humanitarian Development Nexus. The Riace Model has not been analysed from a humanitarian lens yet, and this research aims to do that and place it in the bigger context of Development Studies.

Keywords

The Riace Model; Criminalization of Solidarity; Resilience Humanitarianism; Migrant Reception

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 The European Migration Crisis

Historically speaking, Italy has been known to have strong emigration out of the country, especially after the unification in 1861 and after the end of the Second World War (Rotondi, 2018). Italy was not a place with many opportunities, indeed it was very poor before the economic boom in the '60s, so many people decided to emigrate and look for a better quality of life elsewhere. Most emigrants decided to settle in North or South America or Northern Europe (Rotondi, 2018). Immigration to Italy started in the 60s, but the numbers were still very low, indeed the first policies to regulate immigration were introduced in the 90s (Treccani, 2022). In 1991 Italy saw the first mass immigration to the country: after the fall of the communist regime in Albania, many Albanians decided to emigrate to Italy in search for a better life. Just on the 8th of August of 1991 more than 20.000 Albanians docked in the town of Brindisi in the South of Italy (Dondi, 2021). In between the end of the 90s and the start of the 2000s, multiple new laws regarding immigration were introduced, for instance, centres for identification were created and laws permitting immediate expulsion were introduced (Treccani, 2022). The 2000s saw an increase in migration from Eastern European countries, especially Poland and Romania. Steady increase in Italy's elderly population created high demand for live-in caretakers, a role most often undertaken by Eastern European women (Treccani, 2022).

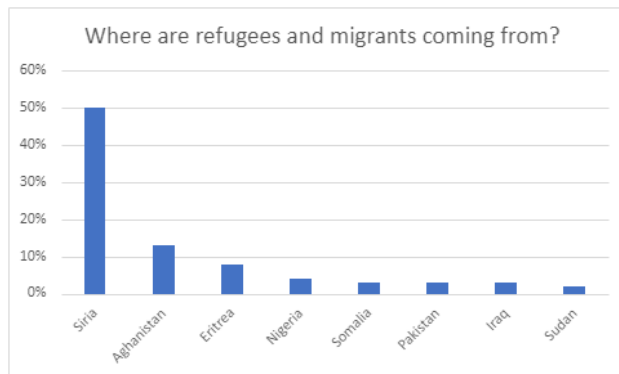


Figure 1

In 2013 a growing number of refugees and migrants started migrating towards Europe through the Mediterranean Sea to seek asylum and better opportunities in the European Union. This migration trend will later be recognized as the European Migration crisis, and it had its peak in between 2015 and 2016. In 2015 most of the refugees and migrants coming to Europe were coming from Syria (50 %), while 13% were from Afghanistan, 8% from Eritrea, 4% from Nigeria, 3% from Somalia, 3%

from Pakistan, 3% from Iraq and 2% from Sudan. Not all these people pass through Italy, but they all tried to enter Europe from southern countries like Italy, Greece, Malta or Spain (Kingsley, 2015). The people trying to reach Europe were either migrants or refugees, that are two terms that are often used interchangeably even though they are not the same thing. The UNHCR (2016) explains that refugees are “persons fleeing armed conflict or persecution” for which it is too dangerous to stay in their own countries. Refugee status grants these people protection under international law and should assure access to asylum seeking procedures in the host countries. Migrants on the other hand mainly move to improve their quality of life, not to escape persecution or death. Migrants can safely return to their home country, while this is not the case for refugees. Migrants are not protected by international law but must obey the national migration laws of the hosting country. Most people that have gone through the Mediterranean migration route to reach Europe are people coming from unsafe conflict areas, meaning that they fall under the category of refugees (UNHCR, 2016).

Migrants and refugees that arrive to Italy mainly depart from Libya. To get to Libya many of these people have to get smuggled across the borders and pay a significant amount

of money to do so. When they get to Libya, they are held in compounds until their families pay a ransom to free them. This process can happen multiple times within Libya before the migrants or refugees are able to board a boat that will be taken into the middle of the Mediterranean, out of Libyan Sea and into international water; at that point smugglers would abandon the boats full of migrants to their destiny (Kingsley, 2015). Often though, the Libyan Coastguard would stop the smuggles when they still are in the Libyan Sea and bring the migrants and refugees back into Libya, detaining them into camps in violation of basic human rights. As it is reported by Amnesty International (2022), migrants detained in Libya have limited access to food and water and are often object of torture and sexual abuse. Libya finances these camps and its coastguard through funds coming from European countries, Italy included, to secure the European borders and avoid migrants' reception (Amnesty International, 2022). If the smugglers can avoid the Libyan Coastguard, these boats full of migrants and refugees would be abandoned into the sea and they would try to reach the Italian shore, often they would be rescued by the Italian Coastguard or NGOs like Open Arms. Unfortunately, not all boats make it safely to shore and often they sink, bringing down the people they were carrying with them.

1.2 The Italian political arena

If migrants and refugees make it to Italy their journey to safety is not over yet. European and Italian policies on migration and securitization of borders bring yet another set of challenges to migrants embarking on this journey for a better life. The Italian government had closed their harbors repeatedly to refugees and NGOs trying to help them. For example, in June 2019 the Sea Watch 3, a ship captained by Carola Requete was denied the possibility of docking in the harbour of Lampedusa, an Italian island in the middle of the Mediterranean that is one of the parts of the EU closest to Africa. This happened because Requete was bringing to safety a group of migrants and the Italian interior minister at the time, Matteo Salvini, refused to let her dock until other EU countries would have agreed to take the migrants. After more than two weeks Requete decided to dock anyway because of exhaustion of her passengers and got arrested by Italian authorities. The Sea Watch 3 case got extensive international media coverage and public support and resolved with a court ruling stating that Requete did not do anything wrong and acted in the best interests of her passengers (Ziniti, 2020). What happened to Carola Requete can be defined as Criminalization of Solidarity, a concept that refers to the increased policing of people who help migrants, including through search and rescue operations, reception activities and the provision of food, housing, and services. In particular, people helping migrants, including lifeguards, journalists, priests, volunteers, and NGOs, have been portrayed and investigated as criminals (ReSOMA, 2020). The concept of Criminalization of Solidarity will be one of the main topics touched upon in this research paper and will be better analysed and discussed in Chapter 5.

Italy is one of the main countries of entrance for migrants and refugees in Europe and this has been a growing issue since the start of the migration crisis in 2013. Because of the Dublin Regulation, the first country of entry is the one where refugees must start their asylum application and they cannot leave until the process is finished. For example, through the interviews I conducted to support this research I found out that the asylum-seeking process in Italy can last up to three years, and during that time asylum seekers are stuck in Italy, without the chance to leave the country, even if their final destination was another country in Europe. Often migrants do not register in Italy and try to trans pass the border to Northern European countries, but they often get caught at the border and sent back.

The presence of migrants and refugees in Italy has been framed by the Italian media and far right politicians as an “invasion” that we have been abandoned to face on our own

without the help of the European Union. Indeed, the Italian far right has exploited people's fear and fuelled xenophobia and racism in Italy. Matteo Salvini, the leader of the populist far right party Lega (the League) has been the spokesperson in Italian politics to the fight against migrants. During the height of the migration crisis, in between 2013 and the end of 2016, Salvini was part of the opposition to Matteo Renzi's government, making strong statements against the current establishment at the time. In 2018, after a year with a technical government, the Partito 5 Stelle (5 Star Party) won the elections and formed a coalition government with Matteo Salvini's party. Salvini took the position of Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Internal affairs. While in office, Salvini, other than ordering to close the harbours to not let refugees and migrants in the country, created the infamous security decrees that, among other things, changed some of the rules regarding immigration in Italy. The security decrees changed the rules for asylum seekers, indeed more felonies were added to the ones that would have resulted in instant expulsion, they changed the maximum number of days migrants could be detained in expulsion centres going from 90 days to 180, they introduced a rule that made citizenship revocable in case of terrorism related crimes, they increased the funds for repatriation, and last but not least, they changed the rules for the SPRAR, that was the system of protection for asylum seekers and refugees (Cipolla, 2020). The SPRAR allowed towns to create system of integrations for asylum seekers and host them in comprehensive systems during their asylum-seeking process (Retesai, 2022). With the new security decree only minors and refugees that already had gained asylum could stay in these programs (Cipolla, 2020). The SPRAR was what allowed Riace to host refugees and create the comprehensive settlement known as the Riace Model. The Riace Model is a central topic of analysis of this research paper, and it will be discussed in Chapter 4.

1.3 Problem statement

The Riace Model was a comprehensive hospitality program for refugees coming into Italy started by Domenico Lucano in the town of Riace in the southern region of Calabria. The Model worked for years, and it was praised on an international level for its innovative take on refugee protection within Europe. What made the Riace Model special was that it tried to create a win-win situation for both the migrants and the locals, using the refugee settlement to boost the local economy and bring new life to the nearly abandoned town of Riace. The Model was shut down because of a trial against Lucano where he was accused to have created the whole model for personal return. The case against Lucano falls under the definition of Criminalization of Solidarity, a concept that is applied when people that help migrants are portrayed as criminals. The aim of this research is to understand what happened in Riace and what the aftermath of the Criminalization of Solidarity of the Riace Model is and if the Model could be replicated in view of local hosting strategies. This research aims to contribute to the literature on humanitarianism, in an effort to inform European policymakers on possible innovative strategies to create more ethical migrant settlement while developing the local population. Interviews with key informants will be used to gain primary data on micro-scale perception on the events related to the trial against Lucano. The data will be analysed through recent literature on reception in the region, humanitarianism, resilience, and criminalization of solidarity.

1.4 Research questions and sub-questions

How can we understand the Riace Model and the aftermath of the criminalization of solidarity in view of local hosting strategies?

Sub-questions:

How does the Riace Model fit into humanitarianism?

Could the Riace Model be replicated?

Chapter 2: Frameworks

In this Chapter, I will define and discuss the concepts relevant to this research. The first section of this Chapter presents the analytical framework developed for this case study. Further sections define and discuss the concepts of resilience humanitarianism, criminalization of solidarity, and multilevel governance. In the final section of this Chapter, I summarize and contextualize previous studies on the Riace Model in order to identify the gap in literature this study aims to fill.

2.1 Analytical Framework

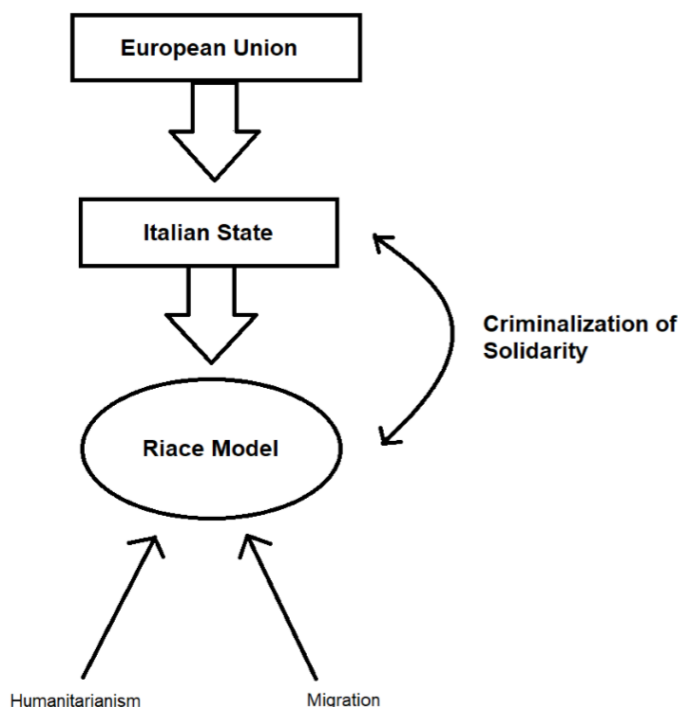


Figure 2

Figure 2 illustrates the analytical framework of this research paper, developed from the theory of multi-level governance. The theory of multi-level governance states that power is distributed vertically through the different branches of government. As the model illustrates, the European Union exercises control over the Italian state, that consequentially governs over all towns and cities in Italy. The Italian state, thus, has direct power over the systems of refugee and migrant assistance that have been created on a local level. These systems are represented by the migration and humanitarianism labels in the diagram. When acts of humanitarianism conflict with the power structure dictated by multi-level governance, conflict persists. These conditions of conflict between

local governance and state governance made criminalization of the Riace Model possible in the first place. The concepts introduced in this framework are further developed in section 2.2 which details the theoretical framework used in this study.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

2.2.1 Resilience Humanitarianism

Humanitarianism in general and resilience humanitarianism in particular are two topics that are central to this research paper. In the paper “Classical humanitarianism and resilience humanitarianism: making sense of two brands of humanitarian action” by Hilhorst (2018), the author explains the difference between classical humanitarianism and resilience humanitarianism. These two paradigms define the way that humanitarian workers act in time of

crisis. Historically, Dunantist or classical humanitarianism has been the main narrative for humanitarianism, and it is based on the concept of exceptionalism: humanitarian aid is given only in case of emergency, and it is retracted when the emergency status is downgraded. Classical humanitarianism is also strongly based on the basic principles of humanitarian action, that are impartiality, humanity, independence, and neutrality. These principles ensure that humanitarian action is not driven by political motives and is based on the needs of the affected populations (Hilhorst, 2018).

In recent years, a new paradigm known as new humanitarianism or resilience humanitarianism has surfaced and gained traction in the humanitarian arena. New humanitarianism is based on the concept that crisis is the new normal, and humanitarian aid should be devoted to enhancing the capabilities of local response in case of a crisis. Resilience humanitarianism is based on the idea that people are resilient and have the capacity to bounce back and adapt to disasters. Resilience humanitarianism gained popularity in disaster response, and then spilled over to refugees and conflict (Hilhorst, 2018). The Riace Model can be an example of resilience humanitarianism: the refugee settlement in the town was created to be stable and it was not founded as an answer to a crisis. Refugee reception in Italy is mostly based on refugee camps and are based on the concept of exceptionality, they are not stable nor there to stay and relate more to classical humanitarianism.

In the article Introduction “Politics, humanitarianism and migration to Europe” by Jaspars and Hilhorst (2020), the authors point out how, since the migration crisis started, European countries have seen this crisis mainly as a security issue. This is largely due to the perception of migrants as dangerous individuals that may exacerbate issues of unemployment and commit violent and substance related crimes. This has resulted in the securitization of the borders, in the criminalization of migration and in the outsourcing migration management to other countries outside the EU that often do not respect human rights. This puts humanitarian actors in a difficult position, as many of them are founded by the EU Member States, so it is more complicated to follow the humanitarian principles, especially the ones of impartiality and neutrality. Politics is prioritized over humanitarian values, and it impedes humanitarian workers from doing their job properly within the EU borders (Jaspars and Hilhorst, 2020). What happened in Riace and the demolition of the Model is a result of securitization of the borders and the criminalization of migration and solidarity. These political issues are the reason behind the end of the Riace Model.

In the article “Refugee protection in the region: A survey and evaluation of current trends” (Vezzoli et al. 2022) the authors discuss refugee protection in the region. They state that the least challenging option for refugee protection in the region is local integration. Local integration should be a win-win for both refugees and the local community because local integration brings development to the region through investment in the local economy, infrastructure, and social services. Protection in the region falls under the approach of resilience humanitarianism because it fosters self-resilience in both the refugees and the communities where they are hosted and is not reliant on principled aid (Vezzoli et al, 2022). The Riace Model is an example of local integration and refugee protection in the region, because the Model is based on the community’s self-resilience and the refugee settlement in the town brought economic growth and has repopulated the area.

2.2.2 Criminalization of solidarity

Criminalization of solidarity is one of the central topics of this research paper and the article published by ReSoma (2020) gives a precise definition of it that is often quoted by other authors talking about this same topic. ReSoma writes that,

“Criminalization of solidarity refers to the increased policing of people who help migrants, including through search and rescue operations, reception activities and the provision of food,

housing and services. In particular, people helping migrants, including lifeguards, journalists, priests, volunteers and NGOs, have been portrayed and investigated as criminals.” (p. 2, 2020). *jour-*

The article explains that this phenomenon is becoming more popular in the European Union, and this is because the laws defining migrant smuggling are very vague and essentially any help given to migrants could be criminalized. Attempts to securitize the EU have exploited these unclear laws on migrant smuggling to criminalize people acting in solidarity and for humanitarian purposes. ReSoma reports that as of December 2019, at least 171 individuals were criminalized across 13 member states, most with the charges of facilitation of entry or transit. The case against Domenico Lucano, the former mayor of Riace, is a case of criminalization of solidarity, one of the 171 individuals that were criminalized because of their actions of solidarity towards migrants and refugees.

2.2.3 Multilevel governance

As it is presented in the section on the analytical framework, this research paper relies on the concept of multilevel governance. In the article “Theorizing the ‘local turn’ in a multi-level governance framework of analysis: a case study in immigrant policies” by Zapata-Barrero, Caponio and Scholten (2017), the authors analyse the role of local government in the context of multi-level governance (MLG) and the implication of the integration of migrants. Different responses to migrant integration on a local level can affect migration policy on a state level. Often in countries like Italy where regional governments hold independence from the state government on matters related to migration integration, the reality is that local responses are completely disconnected from the state policies, and it results in conflict and contradictions in between the different levels of governance. This article strongly relates to the Riace Model and the clashes in between the town’s governance and migrant treatment and the attitude of Italian institutions towards migration.

2.2.4 The Riace Model

Multiple scholars have written about the Riace Model, and they have often used different angles and research methods to do so.

In 2020 Driel published the results of an ethnographic study conducted between 2015 and 2017 called “Refugee settlement and the revival of local communities: lessons from the Riace Model”. The purpose of the study was to examine to what extent Riace’s reception program supported the successful settlement of refugees and affected the local community and their attitude towards newcomers. In the paper the author underlines the importance of the culture of hospitality that is present in the town, the importance of an active mayor, Domenico Lucano, the positive influence of media attention and the significant impact that personal pride of the people of Riace had on the Model. The author also points out the challenges that the Model faces, namely high unemployment rates in the area and limited public funds.

Another article by Driel and Verkuyten (2020) entitled “Local identity and the reception of refugees: the example of Riace”, expands on the study mentioned above and concentrates on hospitality in Riace, examining how the community can influence refugee reception. Through ethnographic study the authors find that hospitality in Riace is a point of pride and identity and is rooted in the history of the area. Calabria was part of the Magna Grecia, an area historically known to be particularly hospitable. Another finding of the authors is that since the start of the migrant reception projects the attitude of some people changed: initially people were participating at the project out of the goodness of their heart, but now for many migrant reception projects has been transformed into a business opportunity to gain public funds and not to help migrants. This critique of the Riace Model will be later addressed in Chapter 4.

In the article “Hosting spatial justice: Riace Model and rhetorics of recognition” (2019) Li Destri Nicosia takes a different approach and analyses the model through a media perspective. The purpose of the study is to look at the relationship between spatial justice and recognition. The author tries to understand how the identity of Riace was produced and how it shaped the “rhetoric of recognition” in the context of a conflict between national and local government. The method of analysis chosen to answer these questions is media analysis and the analysis of public statements. The author finds that claims for recognition may drive towards negative outputs like further marginalization.

Another article that utilizes media analysis to look at the Riace Model is “It was the Wind: Integration and Agapic Action: the Riace Case”. The purpose of this article, written by Mongelli and Contini (2019), is to contextualize Riace as an agapic action, and to do so they utilized content analysis and newspapers.

In the article “Fundamental rights, the fight against irregular immigration and its limits. A new approach in the regulation of immigration” by Devoto the author seeks to describe the context in which the SPRAR was developed. The SPRAR is the system of protection for asylum seekers and refugees, and it was born from the example of the Riace Model. This article takes a legal angle, and its methodology is to analyze the SPRAR born from the Riace Model and the European legislation on the matters of asylum seekers and refugee protection. Devoto finds that the Riace Model is in direct conflict with the guidelines of the national government, so it is unclear if the Riace Model was actually a ‘game-changer’ or if it gained so much popularity because of its clash with national government. The author finishes the article saying that future research on the topic should study the whole process of the Riace Model and investigate the accusations made against the former mayor Domenico Lucano to understand if the Model was as pioneering as it was praised to be. Through an analysis of recent literature and conduction of semi-structured interviews this research paper aims to do just that.

Chapter 3: Methodology

In this Chapter I will illustrate my positionality regarding this research, I will talk about my data collection process, explaining my fieldwork experience, how I conducted the semi-structured interviews that support this research, and I will look into the ethical considerations of my research methodology. I will then explain how I analyzed my data, and finally I will talk about the limitations and obstacles that I faced while researching.

3.1 My positionality

When I was choosing a topic for this research paper, I was sure I wanted to write something related to the Mediterranean migration crisis because it is a topic that I always found interesting, and I wanted to know more about it. I was familiar with the Riace Model, but I did not know a lot about the specifics of it and what criminalization of solidarity was. The more I've learned about this Model and everything surrounding it, the more I found this topic fascinating and worth researching it. I knew I was in an advantageous position to research on this because I am Italian and finding information and processing them in Italian would not have been a limitation for me. On the other hand, I grew up in a very different setting than Riace or Calabria in general, so the culture I know and have experienced while living in Italy is not the same as the cultural heritage that I would have if I grew up in the South of Italy. I am from the Northern part of the country, and I conducted my research in the South. Historically speaking the North and the South of Italy are very different. The South is poorer and less developed, while the North, especially the area around Milan where I am from, is the industrial and financial heart of the country. On the one hand, the North is known to be less welcoming, people are colder and less friendly than people in the South, but on the other hand, the common thought is that in the South you can get places only if you are connected to the right people, this is also the case in the North of the country, but it's a common belief that it happens less often. I am explaining these differences between the two parts of Italy because I think they are fundamental to understanding my mindset when going into the fieldwork, what challenges I expected to find and what obstacles I actually encountered. When I was going to Riace for my fieldwork, I was afraid no one would have wanted to be interviewed by me because I had no connection with them, and they did not know me. Luckily this was not the case because one of my contacts helped me organize my interviews, but also, I was not expecting the welcoming environment that I found. The people of Riace welcomed me for the few days I was there and did not make me feel like I was out of my element. The sense of hospitality is central to my research paper, and I cannot stress enough how important this cultural characteristic is for the working of the Model itself.

3.2 Data collection

3.2.1 Fieldwork

My data collection was initially supposed to be done through online interviews, but because of a fortunate turn of events, I was able to go to Riace and attend a conference about criminalization of solidarity that was part of a movie festival hosted in the town. I was in Riace for five days and during this period I was able to conduct six interviews to support my research. Something I did not expect from my experience of fieldwork was how much conducting the interviews in person in Riace would have impacted my final research. Feeling the town and its people made me understand why the Model worked so well for so many years in a deeper way, in a way that could not be explained through reading an academic paper on the topic or through research about it online. As I explained in the previous section, people from the South of Italy are known to be particularly welcoming, but I did not think I would

experience it on my own skin, especially because I stayed there for less than a week. While in Riace I rented a small apartment, and one day during my stay the land lady called me to ask me if I liked figs, I said yes and she answered saying “good, my husband is on his way to you now with hand-picked figs from our garden!”. Where I am from this is not something that happens often, so it left me with delicious figs and a newfound understanding of the concept of being hospitable, making me realize how this behavior so common and traditional in this area is the strong base that supported the Riace Model for years.

3.2.2 Conducting semi-structured interviews

While in Riace I conducted six interviews with key informants. The interviews were conducted in person as semi-structured interviews and my goal was to gain primary data on what happened in Riace after the trial against Domenico Lucano. I was able to interview Domenico Lucano the former mayor of the town and the person that started the whole Riace Model, Antonio and Caterina, two social workers that worked for Città Futura inside the laboratories, Emilia, a former literacy teacher for Città Futura that is now employed by the local school, Cosmano, one of the associates of the cooperative of Camini, a town nearby Riace that has applied the Riace Model, and last but not least Maria, a woman from Milan that has worked closely with Lucano and Città Futura for the last 20 years and the reason why I was able to get my interviews. I conducted the interviews face to face in Italian, I recorded them and took some notes of some of my impressions. They all lasted less than one hour, and I asked similar questions to all the interviewees. I prepared a list of possible questions beforehand but some of the questions I asked differ from one another because they varied depending on how the conversation was going and if they were talking about something particularly interesting, I would deviate from my script to ask a more in-depth question on that specific topic. The general questions asked in the interviews can be found in the Appendix.

While in Riace I also attended a conference on how the case of Lucano falls under the definition of criminalization of solidarity and because this topic is central to my research paper, I decided to record it and include it as one of my main sources for this paper. The conference had five speakers, a journalist that was facilitating the conversation, Domenico Lucano, his two lawyers and Luigi De Magistris, the former mayor of Naples and a strong ally of Lucano. I did not ask permission to record, but the event was held in a public square, and it was also filmed.

3.2.3 Ethical considerations

Before starting the interview, I asked my interviewees if they agreed to be recorded, and I brief them on why I was conducting these interviews and what I was researching. I did not find my interviewees myself, but I was spontaneously helped by Maria, indeed before starting the interview I thank them for their time and told them that it was not mandatory for them to be interviewed and if they felt uncomfortable, we could have stopped at any time before or during the interview. As a matter of fact, one of the people found my Maria, another social worker, did not want to be interviewed, so I told her that it was not a problem and did not pressure her. All my interviewees agreed to share their names, I personally decided not to include their last names for privacy reasons, except for Domenico Lucano because he is a public figure.

3.4 Limitation and obstacles

This study did not come without limitations and obstacles, first and foremost this topic is extremely broad and deciding which angle to use when looking at it was an issue from the beginning. I did my best to capture the Model and the most important factors of it, but many

things will be left out from this study because of the limitations that come with a master's research paper. Another great limitation has been my positionality and my preconceptions about Calabria. I do not think my preconceptions were negative per se, but I did not have an unbiased opinion before starting with this research. As a researcher I have tried to take a step back from my personal opinions, but they are still present and visible in this paper.

Something that has been a limitation for the qualitative analysis has been not being able to choose my interviewees, indeed Maria, one of the people I have interviewed, was my first contact and she was the one that told me about the conference and helped me organise my trip to Riace. I am very grateful for her help, especially because without her I would not have been able to interview Domenico Lucano, nor anyone else except for Cosmano. On the other hand, if I could have chosen my interviewees, I would not have picked two social workers of Città Futura, but I would have included someone else, maybe someone from Riace that is not entangled with Città Futura, to get a different opinion on what happened in this town. Another limitation I encountered has been reaching out to refugees. I think that including a refugee voice in my research, perhaps someone that went through the Riace Model, would have been very enriching, indeed the lack of the refugees' experience in Riace is something that is missing in my research and could be developed in later studies that have more access to refugees.

Chapter 4: The Riace Model

Chapter 4 investigates the Riace Model and tries to answer the first part of the research question of this paper: “How can we understand the Riace Model and the aftermath of the Criminalization of Solidarity in view of local hosting strategies?”. Chapter 5 will address the second part of the research question, analysing the Criminalization of Solidarity in the Riace case. Section one of this Chapter will investigate the chronology of the Riace Model and how it was born, while section two will look at how it used to work. To explain the workings of the Model an analytical framework that analyses the sense of self-reliance, the sense of community and the sense of hospitality is introduced. The findings of this section are supported by the data gathered through field work. In section three, this Chapter also presents the different ways of migrant reception present in Italy, and gives a closer look to the SPRAR, the system that allowed the Riace Model to work, and the CAS, the less appealing option to the SPRAR. Section four of this Chapter presents some critiques that have been forwarded to the Model, while section five explains the relationship between the ‘Ndrangheta Mafia and the Riace Model.

4.1 Riace before and after

Riace is a small town with less than 2000 habitants located in the southern Italian region of Calabria, an area that for decades has been characterized by waves of emigration and a declining population. Due to poverty and a corrupt political system supported by complicated laws and the traditional power of the ‘Ndrangheta mafia, Calabria remains underdeveloped and attracts little external investment. The area has high unemployment rates, an ageing population, and a lack of social services.

In 1998 300 Kurdish refugees landed on the Ionian coast near Riace and a group of young people spontaneously decided to help them. One of those volunteers was Domenico Lucano, also known as Mimmo, that is the man that changed the fate of the small town of Riace. One year after the refugees made their way to Riace Città Futura was founded. Città Futura literally means “city of the future” and it is a civil society organization founded by Mimmo Lucano to help hosting refugees in Riace. Ever since, refugees have been hosted in houses that were abandoned by local emigrants looking for work abroad or elsewhere in Italy, leaving behind an impoverished ‘ghost town’, mainly inhabited by elderly people. In 2004 Mimmo Lucano became the mayor of Riace, developing over time a comprehensive settlement programme to help refugees. Refugees, in turn, brought new life into the once-dying town. The success of this settlement programme is illustrated by the fact that various (inter)national authorities, including EU politicians, and the mass media have visited the town to learn from ‘the Riace Model’ (Driel, 2020). The goal of the Model was to connect the refugee settlement with the development of the local community. To do so, Città Futura and the Municipality of Riace offered refugees a comprehensive settlement programme that was intertwined with initiatives aimed at the revival of local ancient crafts, including restoration and sustainability projects and solidarity tourism (Driel, 2020).

After decades of population decline the settlement programme resulted in a population increase. On average between 300 and 400 new inhabitants were refugees, mainly originating from Nigeria, Eritrea, Mali, Somalia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the Gambia. Others are locals who had previously emigrated to the North and decided to return as business

opportunities presented themselves due to the influx of new young inhabitants. Over the years around 6,000 refugees have passed through Riace, and about 100 of them are now living or working there permanently. Others have stayed for about one to three years, until they received the decision on their asylum application (Driel, 2020).

The Riace Model worked for years, until in 2017 the Court of Locri started investigating Mimmo Lucano under the accuse of fraud. In 2018 Lucano is put under house arrest under the accusation of abetting illegal immigration in the country and organizing arranged marriages to give the Italian citizenship to illegal migrants. The vicissitudes of Lucano did not stop there, but they will be explained in better detail in Chapter 5 that will investigate the concept of Criminalization of Solidarity.

4.2 How did the Model work?

As it was said in the previous section the Riace Model was a comprehensive refugee settlement program, but what does this mean? To explain the Model, I framed it through three concepts that I think are what make the Model unique: the sense of self-reliance the sense of community and the sense of hospitality.

4.2.1 Sense of self-reliance

Refugees hosted in Riace could count to have some level of independence that is usually not given to refugees in most settlement programs in Italy.

Refugees in Riace had the chance to work in the laboratories that are workshops that produced different handicrafts from the Calabrian tradition where refugees and locals would work together. It was often a great place for migrants to learn some new skills that they could later use once they would enter the job market. There were multiple labs, for example there was dressmaking, pottery, embroidery, glassblowing, and looming. These labs facilitated social inclusion and fostered economic development, indeed all the things produced by the labs was sold, and the revenue went to pay the shop's workers and to Città Futura. For every Italian employee Città Futura would hire one refugee, in order for them to learn Italian and promote social relationships between refugees and locals.

Another interesting aspect of the Riace Model is the introduction of bonus money. Refugees would receive a monthly bonus of €250 so that they could do groceries. Because the founding would come from the government that would often have delayed payments, Città Futura developed a unique currency that migrants could use to purchase their supplies from the local shops. Once the funds arrived, the shop owners could go and collect the money, giving in the bonus money that the migrants used to pay. The bonus money could be spent only within Riace, this meant giving the refugees financial autonomy and supporting the local economy.

Refugees in Riace were hosted in private housing scattered around the town. During their stay that was their house, so refugees could choose to live either in small groups, preferably grouped with people of the same country or just with friends, or with their families. Refugees in Riace also did not have a curfew, on the contrary of most refugee settlement in Italy, giving even more freedom and independence, and self-reliance to the migrants.

The Model did not only help refugees; indeed, it helped the locals as well. As it was previously mentioned, the region of Calabria is characterized by high unemployment rates and Città Futura created regular job positions for the locals as well. Caterina and Antonio both work for Città Futura and during their interviews they explained to me that finding a job in the area is practically impossible. When I met Antonio, he was working in the wood lab in Riace and he told me that before working for Città Futura he was unemployed and

could not find any job without having to move away from the place he grew up in. Caterina was older than Antonio, and she said that before working for Città Futura she had worked before, but she did not have a regular, legal job, but she had to work ‘under the table’. Irregular labour is a reality in the whole country because employers have to pay high costs to hire employees, but unfortunately in the South is even more common and many people cannot find a regular job with a contract. When the Model was still in place Città Futura gave employment to 80 people for about 15 years, counting both locals and refugees.

4.2.2 Sense of community

Living and working together created a sense of community that involved the migrants as well. Città Futura, the association in charge of the programs, did a great job to create an inclusive environment for migrants, for example for every Italian employee Città Futura would hire one refugee, in order for them to learn Italian and promote social relationships between refugees and locals. Children and teenagers would be enrolled in local school together with their Italian peers. The local school did not have enough local children, so it was about to close, but thanks to the refugees there were enough children to keep it open and foster interculturality from a young age. Unfortunately, since the end of the end of the program the local school had to close, and now the children of Riace must travel to get to the nearest school. Also, the houses occupied by the refugees were in Riace, so that locals and migrants would live as neighbours, fuelling the sense of community. The refugee settlement was strongly linked to the development of the town of Riace. Since the start of the settlement programs the town of Riace has reborn, it went from a ghost town to a thriving place, a meeting point of many cultures. The locals were used to have their town full and now that the migrants have left, it feels like Riace has lost half of its community.

The feeling that something was missing from the town is something that I personally felt when I went there to conduct field work and it was later confirmed by the interviews that I conducted. One of my interviewees, Caterina, explained to me

“Before it was beautiful, there was a lot of people, there were a lot of children. Now unfortunately only a few people are left here, there aren’t many refugees. Before it was beautiful, so many people, so many children, we were like a family, I hope it can go back to the way it was”.

4.2.3 Sense of hospitality

The hospitality of the people of Riace is what made the Model possible in the first place. The sense of hospitality is imbedded in the culture and the tradition of Calabria, and the locals take great pride in it. One of my interviewees, Emilia, when talking about hospitality said

“When talking about hospitality I like to take a step back, you know, historically this was the Magna Graecia¹ and in Greece the guest is sacred. The Saints they worship in this town historically come from Syria and when the pilgrims come the people here open their doors to them”

This same point was underlined by Domenico Lucano during our interview; indeed, he said that the history of hospitality in this area is ancient, and it is anchored in the community. I believe that the sense of hospitality is crucial to the Riace Model and without it would have never worked as well or for as long as it did.

¹ Literally means “Greater Greece” and it is the geographical area that historically was colonized by the Greeks since the VIII century B.C. The Greek settlers brought with them the Hellenic tradition that was then imbedded in the local culture.

4.3 Methods of migrant reception in Italy

4.3.1 The SPRAR

The Riace Model was able to exist thanks to the SPRAR system. SPRAR stands for “Sistema di protezione per richiedenti asilo e rifugiati” (System for the protection of asylum seekers and refugees) and it was a system made up of local networks, funded by the state, which run welcome centers and integration projects across Italy. The SPRAR was officially born in 2002 but it was based on a grassroots project started in 1999 by a network of local authorities and civil society organizations (Colombo, 2022). The experience of Riace was one of the examples that has shaped the SPRAR system (Galera et al, 2021). The SPRAR network as an integrated multilevel governance, indeed it is a collaboration between the ANCI (the national association of Italian municipalities) and the Internal ministry of affairs. The system is defined as “integrated” because its aim is to give more than basic subsistence needs like food and shelter but try to integrate the refugees into the Italian society through social, cultural, scholastic and work integration. Refugees and asylum seekers in the SPRAR system would usually get Italian literacy courses, medical aid and legal help to go through the asylum process, registration in the town of residency, minors would be enrolled in school and aid in the job market for the adults (Colombo, 2022). The SPRAR system was the first system for migrant reception not rooted in the idea of exceptionalism but based on local responses and local integration. The SPRAR can be seen as an example of resilience humanitarianism born by grassroots action. In 2020 the SPRAR was abolished and substituted initially with the SIPROIMI and then with the SAI (System of welcoming and integration). The SIPROIMI was introduced by the former Internal Minister, Matteo Salvini, with the Security Decrees, and it was more restrictive than the SPRAR. The government that followed the one with Salvini introduced the SAI, that followed the blueprint of the SPRAR.

4.3.2 The CAS

CAS stands for Centri D'accoglienza Straordinaria (Centers for extraordinary reception) and it is a system rooted in the idea of exceptionalism to support the ordinary system. In reality, 68% of migrants in Italy are hosted in CAS centers because the “ordinary” system is not enough. Most reception centers are big; indeed, they host more than 100 people per center usually. This model of migrant reception is based on the concept of exceptionalism, and this links it to the theories of classical humanitarianism. One important difference between the SAI and the CAS is that only nonprofit organizations can participate in the SAI, while profit organizations can apply for the CAS projects. The CAS does not provide the same services as the SAI (former SPRAR), indeed it is not funded enough and many nonprofit cooperatives that used to provide this service have decided to withdraw to avoid providing an indecent service. This has left in the CAS mostly organizations that can profit from it, lowering the quality of the service even more (Colombo, 2022).

4.4 Critiques to the Model

The Riace Model is not perfect. One critique that has been brought up by Driel (2020) against the Model looks at the opportunities that the refugees have after gaining asylum. The asylum-seeking procedure in Italy can take up to three years and this is the time that refugees would spend in the Riace Model, the problem is that after that refugees do not get any help from the Italian State, as it is lacking a strong welfare state. Most refugees move from Calabria because of the lack of opportunities, indeed as it is difficult for locals to find jobs it is even

more difficult for refugees. The men that stay often find settle illegal agricultural jobs, often controlled by the ‘Ndrangheta, while many women end up as illegal sex workers. Even if the Riace Model works and refugees prefer to go there rather than the overcrowded CAS centers, there is still an issue on what happens to them after they are out of the programs (Driel, 2020)

Another critique presented by Driel (2020) is that some inhabitants of Riace are afraid that hospitality can be turned into a business. The Riace Model when it was working was well funded and some inhabitants were afraid that it would attract people looking for easy money, and this could have led to situations of corruption and money laundering. Some locals also suggested that the jobs related to the refugee settlement were often given out to supporters and friends of Lucano, following a ‘mafioso’ behavior. In response to these accusations the former mayor affirmed to be “as transparent as possible” in the decision-making process. Within my research I found supporting arguments for the claim of having people turning hospitality into a business, indeed one of my interviewees said that

“...after the start of the projects some people have taken advantage of it. Some people that found work in the hospitality projects have thought more about their pockets rather than other things, the problem is that the one that took the fall is him (Domenico Lucano)”.

I did not find any proof that supports the claim of Lucano behaving in a Mafia-like manner, on the contrary, I found that my interviewees all had strong anti-mafia stands, even Domenico Lucano. Driel’s (2020) study has more data, and her research covers the span of multiple years, while I could only gather six interviews for this study, for this reason I do not think that my findings on Lucano’s behavior are sound enough to counter argument Driel’s findings.

4.5 The Mafia and the Riace Model

When talking about the underdeveloped areas of the South of Italy is difficult not to touch upon the topic of the Mafia. This paper does not want to go into the details of the working of organized crime, however some context on the topic is needed as it is intrinsic to the Model itself. The Riace Model holds a strong anti-mafia sentiment; indeed it was born in land ruled by the organized crime, specifically by the ‘Ndrangheta, one of the most powerful criminal organizations worldwide, with links all over the world, from South America to Australia. The ‘Ndrangheta has been present in Calabria since the 1800, and it has influenced this land ever since. The ‘Ndrangheta is known for money laundering, racketeering, extortion, and prostitution. The Mafia has destroyed Calabria by dumping radioactive waste in landfills, it has taken over agriculture where it exploits migrants for a few Euros a day in slavery-like conditions, it has bribed politicians to keep killing and exploiting the land and the people. The ‘Ndrangheta is real and is felt in Calabria every day. The Riace Model has had anti-mafia sentiment since the beginning. For example, the full name of the Città Futura association is “Associazione Città Futura – Giuseppe Pugliesi”: Giuseppe Pugliesi was a Sicilian priest that was murdered by the Mafia. In 2009 Domenico Lucano was even shot by members of the ‘Ndrangheta while he was eating in a restaurant in Riace, despite these intimidations the Riace Model kept running until its forced end in 2018.

Chapter 5: The Criminalization of Solidarity

In this Chapter I will try to answer the second part of my research question and to do so I will investigate the trial against Domenico Lucano. In the first section of this Chapter, I will present the outcome of the trial and then present the anomalies in the trial brought forward by the lawyers of Lucano during a conference on Criminalization of Solidarity that I attended in Riace in August 2022. In the second section of Chapter 5 I will talk about Criminalization of Solidarity in the Riace case, investigating the political reasons behind the court's ruling; to do so I will draw from the interviews that I conducted during fieldwork, and I will investigate the role played by the former Interior minister, Matteo Salvini. In the last section of this Chapter I will give a closer look at the outcomes of the Criminalization of Solidarity of the Riace Model.

5.1 The trial against Domenico Lucano

The case against Domenico Lucano is central to the understanding Criminalization of Solidarity of the Riace Model, and to better explain it I will first illustrate the accusations made against him and then I will draw from the Conference on Criminalization of Solidarity that I attended in Riace on the 21st of August of 2022 where Domenico Lucano and his two lawyers spoke about the trial.

5.1.1 The outcome of the trial

On the 30th of September 2021 Domenico Lucano was condemned to 13 years and 2 months in prison under the accusation of abuse of office, fraud, embezzlement, forgery and racketeering, while he was absolved from the crimes of official misconduct and aiding and abetting illegal immigration. The ruling was emitted in the setting of the Xenia trial and sees Lucano and seventeen other convicted people. The ruling of the Court of Locri came as a shock to most people because the prosecution asked for 7 years and 11 months, while the tribunal ruled for nearly double the initial request (Mentasti, 2021). The Italian legal system allows three grades appeals to a ruling, meaning that the trial against Lucano will keep going after his lawyers appealed to the ruling.

The Xenia investigation ended on the 2nd of October of 2018 and on the same day Lucano was put under house arrest under the accusation of aiding and abetting illegal immigration and illicit entrustment of the service of waste disposal in the town of Riace. On the 3rd of October of 2018 Lucano got suspended from his role of Mayor of Riace and on the 16th of October of 2018 the tribunal of Reggio Calabria swaps house arrest with the prohibition to reside in Riace. The ban from Riace was later lifted in 2019 (Mentasti, 2021).

For the judges that supported the prosecution Lucano was organizing convenience marriages between Italians and migrants to facilitate their illegal permanence in the Italian territory. This accusation came from the transcript of wiretap. This was never proven as those weddings talked about in the wiretap were never celebrated (Il Post, 2021).

5.1.2 The lawyers' opinion

The lawyers of Domenico Lucano knew from the start that there was something wrong with this trial because after a surprise inspection of the hospitality projects in Riace the report was sent to the media outlets rather than Domenico Lucano. None of the other hospitality projects got surprise inspections and this was the first alarm for Lucano's lawyers, they knew that this inspection was made to hit the Riace Model and Domenico Lucano. The report was sent to Lucano 8 months after, even after multiple requests by the lawyers. Another legal inspection was made, but the report from the first illegitimate one was the one being used

by the prosecution to build their case. The second anomaly was that one of the felonies Lucano was accused of was based on the testimony of a person that was sued by four of the accused, but he was never charged. Another anomaly was that a third inspection was made. The lawyer explained that it is normal to find something out of order in hospitality projects, and usually these problems are penalized through a low grade on the report. This did not happen; indeed, the police were called right away to shut down the Model. Even after appealing to the TAR (the regional tribunal) and the State Council the trial against Lucano kept going and resulted in a sentence double the one requested by the prosecutor.

Within the trial, the lawyer explained, there were references to data that had nothing to do with the accusations. Multiple files that were considered by the defense unfit for the trial were used by the prosecution anyway and some files presented as proof of innocence by the defense were defined unfit without an explanation by the tribunal. Specifically, this is about the acquisition of property by Città Futura. The prosecution accused that the property was bought with public money, while the defense proved that they were bought through funds gathered by donations and proof of this could have been found in the ledger of the association. The proof was sent to the public persecutor office that said it was never received. Another anomaly was found in the wiretapping. The prosecution based its case on a phrase that is actually not present in the transcript of the wiretap, making the case not sound. This gives hope to the lawyers; indeed, these will be the central points of the appeal against the court ruling.

5.2 Criminalization of Solidarity in the Riace case

As it is explained in the previous section, this case has many loose ends, and it has been defined as a case of Criminalization of Solidarity. Domenico Lucano has admitted that he must have done some mistakes on the administrative side of things, especially because Italian bureaucracy is known to be Kafkaesque, but he stands in the position that everything he did was in solidarity with migrants, it was to help people have a better life. At the conference it was even argued that Lucano's actions were in complete agreement with the Italian constitution, because to commit a crime there has to be an intention to do so, while in this case the intentions were for the greater good, so it should not be considered a crime. I personally do not agree with this view, especially because crimes can be committed without knowing they are crimes. Sometimes though actions that should not be crimes are criminalized. The criminalization of Lucano's actions was possible because the European laws about migrant smuggling are very vague and essentially any help given to migrants could be criminalized. Attempts to securitize the EU have exploited these unclear laws on migrant smuggling to criminalize people acting in solidarity and for humanitarian purposes (ReSoma, 2020). As it was mentioned in the theoretical framework in Chapter 2, there has been multiple reported cases of Criminalization of Solidarity throughout the European Union and it will keep happening until the policy surrounding abetting illegal immigration will be made less vague and easy to misinterpret or exploit.

Throughout the interviews that I conducted the common feeling is that this trial has a political motivation and it was started because some Italian politicians did not want this Model to work, indeed they wanted to shut it down and not have migrants and refugees integrated properly in the Italian society.

“It has been a trial that from a juridical point of view had some weaknesses. The management of Riace was a bit disorganized that much is true, but the attack was ‘enough with this strategy or repopulating the South with refugees’” (Maria)

Interviewer:

“Something that I heard from in the other interviews and around town is that there is this idea that the trial was done mainly for political reasons”

Interviewee:

“Yeah, this is the idea that unites us all, but it can also be an exaggeration, why such a harsh sentence? Why? I mean we are allowed to make mistakes; I can’t say that everything was perfect, people can do mistakes, it’s human” (Emilia)

I asked one of the interviewees what was the relationship between Riace and the State and he said:

“When there was the government with Salvini, I think something happened there, because Lucano was in exile, but the moment the government fell he was allowed to come back to Riace. I think it depended on him (Salvini) because he did not like the Model, and he always said that he does not want Italy to be based on these models, and he saw in Lucano his first enemy. And as you saw it as well, Mimmo is the kind of person who will tell you what’s up, if he doesn’t like something he’ll tell you, he doesn’t care. It could be Salvini, it could be Trump, to any person, he’ll talk.”

“So the feeling is that the trial was mainly a political thing”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah, absolutely, in my view is totally political because they are afraid that if everyone follows the model everything will become a mess when it’s not like that. They see Lucano and they say if we stop him that is the main representative, we break everything. By killing Riace they kill the ideal, if someone wants to do something similar they won’t because they know how it will end” (Antonio)

5.2.1 Matteo Salvini’s role

Matteo Salvini, the former Internal minister and the leader of Italy’s far right parties, is the most exponential figure with the most negative view of the Riace Model and it is alleged that he was the one that started the Xenia operation, as he would have had that power as Internal minister. The former minister tweeted against the Riace Model multiple times, Figure 3 is an example of some of the tweets of the politician.



Figure 3

The tweet above states *“#Salvini: I can’t repopulate Calabria, Sardinia or Trentino with migrants paid with Italian money. This Government will help #Riace to repopulate with Calabrian people, not by taking pieces of Africa and bringing them to Italy.”*

This tweet is an indirect attack to the Riace Model and Salvini’s argument frames the Model as something made just to “bring pieces of Africa to Italy” and not to save people’s life and integrate them in the Italian society. This kind of framing tries to fuel people’s racism and anger and works on the illegitimate use of “Italian money” to pay for migrants to move here. The argument presented by Salvini in this tweet is a great example of propaganda.

The Riace case is not the first instance in which Matteo Salvini can be seen as one of the reasons behind a case of Criminalization of Solidarity, indeed The Sea Watch 3 was a ship captained by Carola Requete and in June 2019 was denied the possibility of docking in the harbour of Lampedusa. This happened because Requete was bringing to safety a group of migrants and the former Internal minister, Matteo Salvini, refused let her dock until other EU countries would have agreed to take the migrants. After more than two weeks Requete

decided to dock anyway because of exhaustion of her passenger and got arrested by Italian authorities and risked jail time, making it another case of Criminalization of Solidarity. The Sea Watch 3 case got extensive international media coverage and public support and resolved with a court ruling stating that Rekete did not do anything wrong and acted in the best interests of her passengers.

There is no direct proof Salvini is behind the trial against Domenico Lucano and the case of Criminalization of Solidarity that was born from it, but it can be stated with certainty that he is not a supporter of the Model and agrees with the ruling of 13 years and 2 months made by the Court of Locri.

5.3 The outcome of Criminalization of Solidarity

The criminalization of the solidarity actions of Domenico Lucano and the Riace Model had some harsh consequences. First and foremost, the Riace Model was shut down, meaning that all the people that were hosted there had to find another place to go, most probably in the CAS centers, that are less humane and give less liberties to refugees. Another obvious consequence is that no new refugee can go through the Riace Model because the hospitality projects are shut down and there is none of the public funds to help the migrants. The economy of Riace has taken a tool, many locals were employed in the projects and now they find themselves unemployed and the risk of Riace going back to a ghost town is becoming more of a reality every day. The school in Riace had to close again because of the lack of children and many local shops had to close because there are not enough people in the town that use these services. Another unfortunate consequence is that seeing the outcome of the trial some small realities like Riace that could have applied to the Model will not do it because they are afraid of the possible similar consequences faced by Lucano.

There is still hope though. Riace is known to be the “città dell’accoglienza” (the town of hospitality) and it still is. Since the end of the projects migrants and refugees still show up in Riace in the hope to be helped, because thanks of their informal networks Riace is known to be a safe place where someone will try to help them as best as they can, and the people of Riace still do it today. Riace is now a destination of spontaneous hospitality, where migrants and refugees go in search of help. Città Futura, thanks to private donations, has been able to provide a few houses for the people that show up in need and many former employees work for free to help the refugees. When I went to Riace to conduct fieldwork I was expecting an empty town left with no hope, but that was not what I found. I found a wounded place, that wants to heal and go back as it was before, but is not waiting for things to resolve themselves, on the contrary, it has taken matters into its own hands, and it is still trying to help people even at its lowest moment. When I was there in August of 2022, around sixty people were hosted in Riace, mostly were Afghan refugees that found their way there through a humanitarian corridor.

Chapter 6: Riace and humanitarianism

Chapter 6 will try to answer one of the sub-questions of this research paper “How does the Riace Model fit into humanitarianism?”. To do so I will first explain what humanitarianism is and to do so I will present the principles of humanitarianism and see if the Riace Model fits into them. I will then explore the concepts of volunteer humanitarianism and grassroots humanitarianism to better place the Model within the relevant literature. In the second section of this Chapter, I will concentrate on the concept of resilience humanitarianism, and I will investigate ways in which the Model shows signs of it. To do so, I will give a closer look at resiliency and refugee protection in the region.

6.1 Humanitarianism and the Riace Model

As it was previously mentioned, in this Chapter I will try to answer the question “How does the Riace Model fit into humanitarianism?”. Thanks to the previous Chapters it is already clear what the Riace Model is, but what is humanitarianism? Humanitarianism at its core is just belief in the value of human life, and this idea has brought to the development of humanitarian action, that are actions aiming to protect human life and alleviate human suffering. At the foundation of humanitarian action there are the four humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality, humanity, and independence. To understand if the Riace Model fits into humanitarianism I will try to see if it fits into the humanitarian principles. OCHA (2022) provides a definition of these principles, and this will be the starting point of this analysis.

Humanity: Human suffering must be addressed wherever it is found. The purpose of humanitarian action is to protect life and health and ensure respect for human beings.

Neutrality: Humanitarian actors must not take sides in hostilities or engage in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

Impartiality: Humanitarian action must be carried out on the basis of need alone, giving priority to the most urgent cases of distress and making no distinctions on the basis of nationality, race, gender, religious belief, class or political opinions.

Independence: Humanitarian action must be autonomous from the political, economic, military or other objectives that any actor may hold with regard to areas where humanitarian action is being implemented.

(OCHA p.2, 2020)

The Riace Model fits into the principle of humanity as it has protected the life of refugees and has implemented internal policies to support them not only on a financial level but a human level too. Indeed, refugees in Riace used to have access to doctors, lawyers and social workers to help them and give them a sense of self-reliance. When talking about the principle of neutrality the answer is not as straightforward: the Model was neutral per se, but it had left leaning leadership and, in the end, it was engaged with political controversies related to the case against Domenico Lucano. The Riace Model was impartial, it welcomed all migrants entering the projects despite their nationality, gender or personal beliefs. Finally, the Model was not following the principle of independence because it was funded with public money and the reason why it had to close was its connection with Italian bureaucracy, but at the same time it is intrinsic into a method of migrant reception to be related to the politics and management of the host country. Most humanitarian actors base their work on these principles because they recognize themselves as humanitarian actors

in the humanitarian arena, but what if this is not the case? What if someone or something just becomes a humanitarian actor because of their actions? The Riace Model was born to help refugees and the local community, not to be an example of humanitarianism. Nevertheless, the principles of humanitarianism are strongly related to classical humanitarianism, while the Riace Model fits better into resilience humanitarianism, as it will be better explained in the second section of this Chapter.

Sandri (2017) introduces the concept of “volunteer humanitarianism” when talking about volunteer groups and grassroots organizations helping in the Jungle refugee camp in Calais in France. Volunteer humanitarianism is defined by Sandri through some specific elements, informality, geographical proximity, sociality, improvisation and activism. Volunteer groups were not founded by international aid agencies or governments, but it was founded by donations and relied only on volunteer work. Most volunteers were not trained and learned on the job, taking over different positions in view of what was needed at the time. Volunteers were managed by grassroots organizations that initially did not have any political motivation beside helping people, but after the start of their humanitarian commitment these organizations began to participate into activism to improve refugee and asylum seekers treatment (Sandri, 2017). Volunteer humanitarianism offers an alternative to the ‘humanitarian machine’ where decisions can be made on filed, without having to obey to the top-down structures that characterize intuitional humanitarian aid, and it also provides a counter narrative to the EU migration policies that are often dehumanizing (Sandri, 2017). Sandri’s (2017) definition of volunteer humanitarianism is specific to the setting of the Jungle of Calais, but it has some common features with the Riace Model. The Model was born after a group of Kurdish refugees arrived in the Ionian Sea near Riace 1998 and the start of migrant reception was informal and improvised and it was mainly based on geographical proximity to the docking place. Within its history the Riace Model shows all of the characteristics listed by Sandri (2017), but it never had them all at the same time.

When the Model was working it fostered activism and sociality, but it was not improvised nor based on informality anymore because most people working for Città Futura had a job contract, and they were not working as volunteers. At the same time, the Model is an alternative to the ‘humanitarian machine’ as it does not have any direct connections to humanitarian organizations, but it still had to obey to the rules imposed by the Italian government. The Model was part of the counter narrative to the dehumanizing treatment of refugees in the rest of Europe, even before the start of the phenomenon of volunteer humanitarianism in the Calais’ Jungle. Rather than using “volunteer humanitarianism” a definition that could be applied to Riace is “grassroot humanitarianism”. The Riace Model was born thanks to a grassroot action and from there it has developed a grassroot organization, Città Futura, that managed the refugees and the asylum seekers. Even if the Model has been institutionalized it does not fit into the classic definition of humanitarian actor, but it is not based on volunteers, even if at its core is still ordinary people aiming to protect human life and alleviate human suffering of refugees and asylum seekers.

5.2 Resilience in the Riace Model

Resilience defines the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties, and in the theoretical framework of this research paper the concept of resilience humanitarianism was already introduced and explained. Ilcan and Rygiel (2015) look at refugee camps from the angle of resiliency humanitarianism. From this lens, camps are not seen as

a temporary place where refugees are “stored”, but they are places with the potential to develop a community and entrepreneurial projects. In this view refugees are not passive recipients of aid, but they are residents of the camp, and most importantly they are resilient beings (Ilcan and Rygiel, 2015). The Riace Model is an example of resiliency humanitarianism as it empowers refugees and asylum seekers into reinventing themselves: it gives them chances to learn new skills and the Italian language, it treats them as human beings with the capacity of making their own informed decisions and not just as aid recipients. The reception projects in Riace are a strong part of the community and a source of development for the local economy. The Riace Model was a place of transition for most asylum seekers, indeed after the process for the asylum request was over most of them moved away from Riace, but the investment of the local community is what makes the Model resilient. Resiliency can be found in both the locals and the refugees: the local are resilient because they bounced back from what once was a dying town and created the Riace Model, while refugees are resilient because they overcame the difficulties of the journey to Europe and after that probably traumatic experience, they are ready to begin a new life from nothing.

Within the section on humanitarianism in the theoretical framework of this research paper another concept that is part of the literature on resilience humanitarianism was introduced. Vezzoli et al. (2022) discussed refugee protection in the region and the perks of local integration. Protection in the region fosters self-reliance and resilience and is a win for both the local population and for the refugees. Protection in the region connects migration and resilience humanitarianism, and because of its multiple perks it has been heavily founded by the European Union and the United Nations. The Riace Model is a European example of refugee protection in the region, and this is rare, because this practice is applied to refugee protection outside Europe in an effort to securitize the European Union’s borders. The peculiarity of the Riace Model is that it could not have been born in another way: current policy and power relation do not allow big NGOs to create other resilient refugee protection projects within the European borders. Many of the donors of these NGOs are located in the Global North, while usually these projects take place in the Global South. Europe’s refugee crisis has created the setting for these NGOs to create projects within the EU too, but this could result in a conflict of interest between the NGOs and their donors. The Riace Model was funded with public assets, and this is one of the reasons why it fell, indeed if it was privately funded the relations with the Italian State could have been easier and the Model might not have been criminalized, but the Riace Model even if politically speaking it was not approved by all politician in power it never faced a conflict of interest and it could always act in the interest of the refugees going through the hospitality projects.

In conclusion, how does the Riace Model fit into humanitarianism? The Riace Model fits into resilience humanitarianism, but it is distant from the classical paradigm. At its core the Model has as its one of its main interests to save lives and alleviate human suffering but also it does not fit into all the principles of humanitarianism, it was not born to be part of the broader humanitarian arena, but in the end, it is a humanitarian project. The Riace Model does not fit into the “humanitarian machine” but it fits seamlessly into the new humanitarian politics promoted by the UN and the EU, indeed as it was previously mentioned it is an example of refugee protection in the region, but the criminalization of reception is a sign that these actors only promote this kind of model outside of Europe, and within the EU they keep sponsoring the securitization of the borders.

Chapter 7: Is Riace replicable?

Chapter 7 will try to answer the second sub-question of this research paper “Could the Riace Model be replicated?”. To do so I will look at the case of Camini, a town nearby Riace that has applied the Riace Model. In this section I will tell the story of how Camini started welcoming refugees and then I will look at the differences between Riace and Camini. In the second section of this Chapter I will look at the replicability of the Riace Model, to do so I will illustrate the main characteristics that make the Model, and I will explain which ones are, in my opinion, the fundamental ones for replication. In the last section of this Chapter I will investigate what makes this a Model.

7.1 The case of Camini

Camini is a town of 800 people 2.6 kilometers from Riace and in July 2011 it started welcoming refugees, starting with a group of people coming from Côte d'Ivoire. The association that manages migrants is a cooperative called Eurocoop and it was born in 1999 to help underprivileged people to find a job. In 2011 Eurocoop opened its headquarters in Camini and called it Jungi Mundu, that in the Calabrian dialect means uniting the world. Camini has hospitality projects founded through the SAI (former SPRAR) and it can host up to 118 refugees. Camini was once a dying town with an ageing population and heavy emigration, but it decided to follow the path laid by the close by town of Riace, and it has created its own hospitality projects. Just like Riace, Camini has multiple labs that are open for refugees to learn new skills, but also to tourists that are interested in learning as well. In Camini there are multiple different labs, they have the sawing lab, the art lab, the pottery lab, the weaving lab, the cooking lab, the textile lab, the paper jewellery lab and the lutherie lab. Camini applied the Riace Model and when the projects got shut down in Riace Camini risked the same fate, indeed they were under investigation as well, but they strictly followed the rules, and the investigation was dropped after nothing was found out of place.

Riace and Camini are very similar, but there are some differences between the two, for example Eurocoop decided to invest some of the revenue to open a bar and Camini's only restaurant. Both the bar and the restaurant provide job opportunities for locals and refugees. Another difference between the two towns is the lack of a leader. Domenico Lucano is a very important figure; he is the leader and the frontman of the whole Model, and he is venerated by the people working in it. In Camini there is a person in a position of leadership, but they are not venerated as Lucano; most importantly though, the town administration of Camini and the refugee reception program are two separate entities that work together but are not guided by the same person. Another important difference between Camini and Riace is how the projects started. Through my interviews an idea that surfaced is that the Riace Model was born on the base of ideals, while the people in Camini did not have this idealistic push, but they engaged in the hospitality projects because they saw it working in the neighbouring town. When asked about the similarities between Camini and Riace one of my interviewees said

“It's not a similar model, they have hospitality projects, but what they are doing does not have change as its final aim. Because it is a SAI hospitality project, an integration project, but it stops there. There is no vision of stopping the Mafia's control over the area, and letting the town free of some of these bad connection”

In this person's prospective, at the core of the Riace Model there are ideals, meaning that without those ideals the Model could not be replicated properly, but is this actually the case? I believe that the Model is replicable, but it must follow some specific

recommendations and it would not work in any geographical area. In the next section I will discuss what makes feasible the replicability of the Riace Model.

7.2 Replicating Riace

The Riace Model is a comprehensive refugee welcoming program, and it has some specific characteristics that make the Model work. To work the Model must be set up in a place with many empty houses, meaning that a place characterized by emigration like Riace will work but emigration might not be a fundamental characteristic. The Model should be set up in a place where the three sense of hospitality, community and self-reliance could be applied, this means that the Model should be set up in a place with a culture of hospitality, but unfortunately this is a trait that is difficult to quantify. This given place should also have a small community where integration would be easier and it should provide all the needed services to the refugees, like free access to medical care, legal counsel, social workers, school for the children and literacy courses for adults and the laboratories, or places to foster local inclusion while it teaches refugees new skills that could help while job hunting. Another defining characteristic of the Riace Model is the figure of Domenico Lucano, a strong chief leading both the Model and the public administration of the town. Lucano is the mind behind the Model, and the narration forwarded by his followers is that the Model is based on ideals, and Lucano embodies these ideals. In my opinion the Riace Model was born from ideals, but these ideals are not as structural as they are represented to be. The Model could be replicated without Lucano's figure, but the aim of the Model must still be humanitarian and not financial.

The last most important requirement for the Model replicability is that it must be set in a way that is a win-win for both the refugees and the locals. Indeed, the locals must see the perks of having a comprehensive welcoming program for refugees in their community, otherwise if the locals are hostile towards the welcoming programs, the sense of community and the sense of hospitality would be lacking, making the efforts to replicate the Model void. If these characteristics are met, then and only then the Model would be replicable. If not all the characteristics are met the result would still be a refugee welcoming program, but it would not have the same perks as the Riace Model and on the long run it might not have the same positive outcomes for the local community. Replicating the Model as it would mean economic growth of the hosting community, it could bring solidarity tourism and multiculturalism to the area and, if it would be applied to a place of emigration, it would bring life back to a dying place. Camini has been the most successful replica of the Model, but it has not been the only place that have tried to replicate it, indeed when Riace was thriving thanks to the welcoming programs many towns in Calabria decided to follow its example, but most of these attempts either failed or were thought on a smaller scale, just as a SAI (former SPRAR) program, meaning just a program to host in private houses refugees for the time it takes for the asylum seeking procedure, without most of the perks of the Model for both the locals and the refugees. Something that is worth mentioning is that most SAI programmes in Italy are in the South of the country, in the most underdeveloped regions (ReteSAI, 2022). This fact could be related to the availability of empty accommodations in the South because of internal migration in the country, or it could also have to do with their geographical proximity to the Mediterranean.

7.3 Is it a Model?

The comprehensive refugee welcoming program of Riace has rose to fame as a “model” but this word that implies something to use as an example to imitate has no connection with the

replicability of the Model. It is nearly impossible to pin-point when this term has started to be used to define the comprehensive refugee welcoming program of Riace, but some of my interviewees have implied that this term was used first by the media when talking about the welcoming programs in Riace. So, the question remains, is it a model? It can be if it is treated as something that should and can be emulated. As it was said in the previous sections, multiple attempts were made to emulate Riace's experience, and a lot has been written parsing the virtuosity of it, so even if it was not born as a model and the word model was paired to it most probably not knowledgeably, it is a model because it is treated as such. My hope is that this analysis will be of some help in case someone else in the future will want to try to recreate the Riace Model.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

8.1 Critique to Riace

In my opinion, the Riace Model is a great idea that poses an improvement to migrant reception in Italy, indeed I see it as a better option than the other hosting strategies on an Italian level, but it is still not perfect, and it could be improved through more accommodating policy and funding. By biggest critique of the Model goes to the figure of Domenico Lucano. Lucano is the mind behind the whole Model, and he deserves the credit, but it seems like all of the decision power is in his hands, and even after the conviction by which he lost his position of power, his followers treat him like a God-like figure. They have this reverence for Lucano, when they talk to him or about him, and this really stood out to me. In the future I think that the focus should shift from Lucano to the Model itself and the other people that made it possible, not just him. I realize that the focus on Lucano is not dictated by him but by the media and the political vicissitudes related to this whole topic, but I think that in an effort to sponsor the Model the focus should be on the ethical matters rather than the political ones.

Another critique, more to the Italian system rather than the Model itself is the focus on integration rather than interculturalism. The people I talked to in Riace were happy to learn from other cultures, they even defined it as enriching. Why should refugees have to assimilate to the “European Culture”, why can’t it be a question of multiculturalism? The final aim of these projects should be questioned. Something else that need to be taken into account is the lack of a strong welfare state that can help support refugees once they terminate the asylum-seeking process, as it was mentioned earlier often when refugees gain asylum they are left without support, and they have to rely on illegal activities to gain an income and they are often exploited too. A better welfare state could avoid this situation and help refugees to access a better quality of life. Unfortunately, the current political situation of Italy does not give bright prospects on this topic, indeed in September 2022 the far-right has won the elections in Italy and there is a great chance that it will implement stricter immigration rules and policies to secure the Italian borders even more.

8.2 Final thoughts

This research paper started posing one research question and two sub-questions, namely “How can we understand the Riace Model and the aftermath of the Criminalization of Solidarity in view of local hosting strategies?”, “How does the Riace Model fit into humanitarianism?” and “Could the Riace Model be replicated?”. The main research question was answered in Chapters 4 and 5, indeed we can understand the Riace Model thanks to the three senses of hospitality, self-reliance and community, and we through the analysis we could see that Criminalization of Solidarity has blocked the Model and favoured other hosting strategies, but it has not taken away the hope and Riace was and will continue to be the “Città dell’accoglienza” (the Town of Hospitality). In Chapter 6 we answered to the first sub-question, and we concluded that the Riace Model is part of resilience humanitarianism and it fit seamlessly into the new policies sponsored by the EU and the UN, but the criminalization of reception is a sign that these actors promote these models of integration only outside of Europe and within the Union they keep sponsoring the securitization of the borders. In Chapter 7 we answered to the second sub-question, and we concluded that the Riace Model could be replicated as it has already happened in the town of Camini, but it cannot be replicated in anywhere, as it need some common grounds with Riace to ensure replicability.

8.3 Recommendations

The Model has proven to be a winning strategy and it could help other underdeveloped areas to bring investment and new people in it, but this can be done only by policy makers. To replicate the Model in other European countries the European Union's needs to shift their policy from securitization of its borders to refugee protection within Europe with projects like the Riace Model. There must be a shift from the current classical humanitarian paradigm applied in Europe, and more resilient policies must be enforced: we are living in a climate crisis and developing countries are the ones paying the higher price. In future years we will see more and more climate emergencies and there must be a shift in resiliency within the European borders.

Further studies on this topic should analyse the media involvement in the outcome of the criminalization of Domenico Lucano, indeed part of my research pointed in the direction of intense framing from both left and right media outlets in the sequences of events of the Riace Model and the trial against Lucano. Another aspect that should be further analysed is the multi-level governance prospective, as the Riace Model is part of multiple institutional bodies and a multi-level governance prospective would shed light on the intricate workings of this kind of governance. Last but not least, the Model should be further analysed from a migration perspective: for example, something that I could not do in this research paper was including a migrant voice, mainly because of time restraint and because it is difficult to track down someone that went through the Model now that it is not in place anymore.

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