

Contingent camps

An ethnographic study of contested encampment in the northern
French and northern Moroccan borderlands

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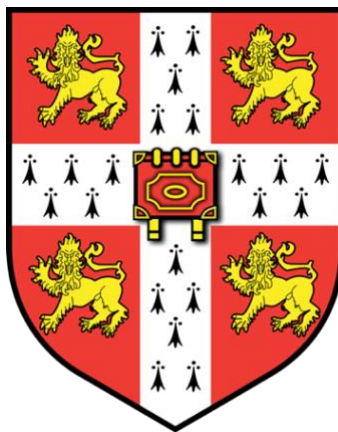
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Under the supervision of Prof. Ash Amin

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Prof. Yael Navaro

Dr. Jonathan Darling



This thesis is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my thesis has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the Earth Sciences and Geography Degree Committee.

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Maria Hagan

Abstract

As clandestine migration towards the European Union continues, politics of hostility and securitisation against those who travel northwards are constantly being reinforced. This thesis is situated in the shadows of borders zones where makeshift encampment is no longer tolerated, and violent deterrence practices intimately target migrant people. Drawing on extensive fieldwork among displaced people living in the borderlands of northern France (2017-2020) and northern Morocco (2019), it scrutinises how racialised acts of routine shelter destruction by police forces have come to be the norm at these sites. In these conditions, displaced people constantly seek to rebuild shelter or forge it out of the environment at the frontier: between the headstones of an abandoned Tangier cemetery or the petrol pumps of an industrial zone in Calais. Through a deep ethnographic approach, this thesis tunes into the rhythms that govern encampment, the atmospheres inherent to these spaces and their effects on those who live them. Moving beyond readings of the camp as a fixed space, it conceptualises these fleeting spaces of dwelling as “contingent camps”, drawing on assemblage, non-representational theory and writing on Black fugitivity to capture their dynamic ontology. Through interview extracts, field notes and visual materials, this thesis bears witness to a punitive contemporary geography of ruination, drawing on microlevel evidence to discuss the human, humanitarian and (geo)political implications of the rise of contingent camps. It also investigates the ambiguous social formations and modes of resistance these spaces give rise to, conceptualising the mode of dwelling that emerges in these conditions as rhizomatic and fugitive, joining a broader body of work theorising migration as a defiant, decolonial act.

Preface

This study builds on the thesis I submitted as a partial requirement for my MA (Res) degree in International Development Studies at the University of Amsterdam in 2018. The MA thesis is titled: ‘Disassembling the camp: the politics of policing exiles in Calais, France’ and has been published both in the university archive and as an SSRN working paper.

Two articles were written collaboratively during my PhD, drawing on work done in the context of this degree. The first was co-authored with Dr. Lorena Gazzotti:

Gazzotti, L., & Hagan, M. (2021). Dispersal and dispossession as bordering: Exploring migration governance through mobility in post-2013 Morocco. *The Journal of North African Studies*, 26(5), 912-931.

The second was written in collaboration with Prof. Dorothea Hilhorst and Olivia Quinn:

Hilhorst, D., Hagan, M., & Quinn, O. (2021). Reconsidering humanitarian advocacy through pressure points of the European ‘migration crisis’. *International Migration*, 59(3), 125-144.

I have written three other solo-authored publications alongside my PhD, short sections of which may overlap with parts of this thesis:

Hagan, M. (2021). Precarious encampments in hostile border zones: the methodological challenges of and possibilities for studying contingent camps. *Area*.
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Hagan, M. (Forthcoming) ‘They tell us to keep our distance, but we sleep five people in one tent’ The necropolitical governance of migrant people in Calais during Covid-19. *Social & Cultural Geography*.

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CHAPTER 1 | INTRODUCING CONTINGENT CAMPS



Post-eviction encampment | Photo by author, Calais Coquelles ‘Auchan’ camp, Jan. 2022

The Calais Jungle took root at the northern French border at the height of the 2015-16 migration “crisis”. The sprawling makeshift camp was the epitome of European governments’ failure to deal humanely with large numbers of migrant people¹ arriving informally on the continent. It was home to thousands and rendered hypervisible by international media: residents of the camp and the volunteers who flocked to it were interviewed at length, while the squalid on-site living conditions were widely documented. This camp, and other similar ones like Idomeni camp in Northern Greece (Pelliccia 2019) or the “Barracks” in Belgrade (Foucher 2018), served as stark reminders that politicians of the European Union had little control over a chaotic situation. These were unsettling geographies which developed in an urgent bid for shelter, the pace of their emergence and haphazard aesthetics fuelling an atmosphere of crisis and generating divisive sentiments of solidarity or fear among the general public (Nail 2015). The humanitarian issue was suddenly not distant but intimate, and volunteers flocked to the camps to lend a hand and experience a formative moment of European politics and history. Davies et al. (2017) fittingly read such spaces as ones of ‘violent *inaction*’, in which undesired communities are governed through neglect, left to live in degrading conditions. However, this inaction was short-lived:

¹ Discursive categorisations that divide people into hierarchised groups of “migrant,” “asylum seeker” or “refugee” according to their perceived (un)deservingness are problematic (Apostolova 2015; Ticktin 2016; De Genova & Tazzioli 2016; Crawley & Skleparis 2017), evoking moral presumptions of innocence or guilt that leave little room for their humanity (Ticktin 2016). I therefore prioritise the terms “migrant people” and “displaced people” throughout this thesis, with the exception of passages where a particular categorisation is relevant to the discussion at hand. While these terms are also imperfect and reductive, my intention is to emphasise the common characteristics that the people I refer to are undertaking through movement, the term “people” emphasising a common humanity that steers away from the negative connotations implicitly evoked by the label “migrant” alone (especially when used in contrast with that of “refugee”).

governments soon felt compelled to act rather than neglect these camps in their informality, both for humanitarian reasons and on national security grounds. The demolitions of Idomeni camp and the Calais Jungle in May and October 2016 were spectacular, widely televised events. The message to the world was clear: informal camps would not be tolerated on EU soil any longer. Meanwhile, across the Mediterranean, the EU has increasingly outsourced its border control to frontier countries of the Maghreb: Libya, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco are incentivised to prevent the displaced from gathering at their northern borders and attempting the deadly, spectacularised Mediterranean crossing (European Commission 2018). People on the move thus encounter a series of “blocked” borders on both sides of the Mediterranean, outside and within the European Union, though appetite for passage appears little tempered. If borders are “closed” and the makeshift camp is forbidden by the sovereign as a visible geography of failure, then the border zone becomes a space in which the stagnant presence of the migrant person is more than ever problematic.

This thesis is situated in the shadows of the transit border, the waiting zone for clandestine border passage. It scrutinises the increasingly precarious sites and modes of dwelling that have emerged in certain controversial borderlands in recent years, where the visibility and politicisation of migration has given rise to violent new modes of governance designed to curtail clandestine human movement at all costs. At both internal and external EU borders, the non-human border apparatus in the shape of walls, fences and natural borders has proved insufficient for deterring migrant people and preventing their passage. Border control is increasingly bolstered by human deterrence to enforce “zero camp tolerance” policies: authorities are not only tasked with making the border “impenetrable”, but also with preventing the accumulation of materialities necessary for the survival of displaced people in the border zone. Banning the camp in this manner generates cycles of destruction by authorities; the materiality of encampment is routinely attacked in the hope that shelters won’t be rebuilt. The human implications of this are drastic: the pace of destruction means migrant people are constantly displaced within their displacement, perpetually unsheltered and relegated to a furtive life in the borderlands. It marks a transition from a phase of governance characterised by violent inaction to one characterised by outright *violent action*, visible at borders both external and internal to the EU.

Contingent camps: violent geographies of border encampment

Migration scholars have identified a plethora of spaces thought up by nation states and humanitarian actors to manage displaced people and sort them into administrative categories that might best serve to help, care for, contain and/or control them (Minca 2015; Kreichauf 2018; Pallister-Wilkins 2019; Tazzioli 2019); many have read camps as spaces for containing and excluding “undesirable” population groups (Agamben 1998, 2005; Agier 2010). The migrant person becomes “good” or “bad” depending on their willingness to submit to containment. Yet the contingent camp has emerged as a space for those who are even *less* desired: they are perceived to have *chosen* to live outside of state-imposed spaces of

legibility or ambiguous protection, altogether or for the time being, while seeking passage elsewhere. The state considers this expression of an active choice to move onwards to override their status of people in potential need of protection, legitimising their criminalisation in the border zone. Seeking to travel beyond the country they are currently in, the displaced person is framed as ungrateful of the hospitality of the state and stripped of the identity of the potential asylum seeker - the one thing that might justify their informal presence. This in turn legitimises violent policing practices designed to deter the displaced through their dispossession at the border. As Andersson writes: 'Europe's border machinery creates what it is meant to eliminate or transform - more migrant illegality' (2014a, 121).

Little attention has however thus far been paid to sites where encampment constantly fluctuates, where the makeshift camp has been replaced by an even more precarious category of dwelling. I conceptualise these precarious, fleeting geographies of encampment as *contingent camps*: absent-present sites of life unmade and remade at speed between acts of destruction by state authorities and acts of rebuilding by displaced people who strive to dwell in the borderlands. Their ontology is cyclical and dynamic, compromised yet ineradicable so long as the desire of the migrant person to travel onwards persists. This hyper-temporary mode of encampment isn't quite captured in existing readings of the makeshift. It marks a sovereign desire to sever from a phase of governance characterised by a loss of control implicit in the terms "emergency" and "crisis" to *retrieve* control through practices designed to regain a firm upper hand. These encampments often emerge at sites where more established humanitarian infrastructures once were but have been stripped of them, leaving the space "emptied" of some of the services one might expect. The question is what material components of encampment remain in these conditions, and the social, environmental, affective and experiential dimensions that constitute them. It calls for attention to contingent camps not only as a side effect of the border control apparatus, nor as mere overflow from institutional or makeshift camp spaces, but as a space type *in its own right* emergent from a specific biopolitical mode and with significant implications for the treatment and framing of displaced people.

Although contingent camps are largely set apart from society and invisible to most citizens of the states they emerge in, they are constitutive of contemporary geopolitical landscapes. Paradoxically, they are permanent fixtures of certain borderlands despite their individual ephemerality. Contingent camps are exceptional micro-geographies, symptomatic of the brutality to which states are willing to stretch to preserve an illusion of efficient governance and control, to perform the fantasy of "camp-free" border zones. This unrelenting desire for control over movement threatens to make the contingent camp a mainstream, violent geography of migration governance in countries home to strategic borders. Violent eviction practices have rapidly become routine where they have emerged, and it is essential to document and scrutinise this slippage. This threat is particularly visible in the growing encroachment of securitisation on political agendas, and in inter-nation mimicry as states engage in a race to the bottom to deter the displaced. This normalisation occurs not only in the eyes of the state and society, but often even in the eye of the displaced person who now, perhaps more than just five years ago, has been given

little reason to expect or assume hospitality on the part of transit or host states (Darling 2014b; Le Blanc & Brugère 2017). Border control strategies have effectively been expanded to encompass, criminalise and pre-emptively target *being* at the border with the intention of passage. Presence becomes a transgression before the act, with severe effects on the body and mind of the person on the receiving end. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork carried out in the northern Moroccan borderlands in 2019 and ongoing in northern France since 2017, this thesis bears witness to these violent and ephemeral yet largely invisible geographies, offering a deep, phenomenological understanding of their human and political implications.

The Calais & Tangier borderlands

The borderscapes of northern France and northern Morocco have been known as key and controversial sites of clandestine migrant passage for decades. Both emerged as bottleneck points after the Schengen agreement was signed in 1995. Migrant people from sub-Saharan African countries were drawn to the northern Moroccan border seeking passage to the EU via the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla. Simultaneously, the northern French coast became tense: where France is signatory to the Schengen agreement the UK is not, effectively making this coast the UK border not only with France, but with the expanse of European states between which borders have been abolished (Hicks & Mallet 2019). As a result, the EU and both sets of governments (UK/France & Spain/Morocco) have rolled out a series of border enforcement strategies to resolve what has become an ongoing, historical issue of migrant people stagnating in these zones while seeking clandestine passage. Commonalities in the roles of gatekeeper held by French and Moroccan authorities at their northern borders, and the ways in which they seek to regulate migrant people hoping to pass through them, took me to Tangier (July-Dec 2019) and back to Calais (Jan-May 2020).¹ These port cities, which by accident of their geographies have become key sites of life for migrant people seeking passage to Spain and the UK respectively, form the core empirical sites for this study. While these are urban places (Tangier is home to 1,1 million inhabitants and Calais to 74,500 inhabitants in 2019), life for migrant people at the border is anything but an urban experience. In both borderlands, they live in neglected and actively policed spaces within or on the fringes of these cities, in proximity to the borders through which they seek to pass.

Critical refugee scholars increasingly question the assumption that refugee governance “in the region” is fundamentally different from European migration management (Stel 2021). The choice of one case study within Europe and the other at its external border joins this body of work in seeking to unmake the assumed lack of comparability between sites in the so-called North and South. As Stel argues, this differentiation is often rooted in assumptions of different modes of governance in the “liberally democratic” North compared with “fragility and/or autocracy” in the South, and that democracy leads to more liberal and humane immigration policies than autocracy (ibid). The contingent camp is a pertinent example of how in practice such assumptions are weak and unsubstantiated, with

countries both in the EU and at its borders mobilising (if not cooperating on) similar strategies of institutional ambiguity and dispersal, with the goal of spatially and temporally marginalising groups of displaced people in an effort to better control them (ibid; see also Gazzotti & Hagan 2020).

Müller & Schlüper (2018, 17) describe the UK border at Calais as ‘an intra-European laboratory for an EU external border regime’ (in Hicks & Mallet 2019). While it is a quick assumption to say that the internal EU border regime precedes measures in place at its external borders, it is valuable to read these spaces which might not intuitively be compared in tandem, to learn about the overarching modes of deterrence and strategies that govern them. This thesis considers the practices of the Moroccan and French states in parallel, in their relation to the same biopolitical questions. Despite being rather different sites on geopolitical and cultural levels, operating within different legal frameworks, these sites share the core characteristic of being borderlands from which migrant people seek irregular passage to another state, in countries incentivised with the role of keeping them back by that desired state. The question for both France and Morocco is what to do with groups of people who are stuck on their territory but do not seek the hospitality of the state. As such, they are not perceived as deserving of assistance, but as bodies to be hindered in their attempts to exit the country northwards. Migrant groups at both sites are subject to hostility through routine eviction; they live in constant uncertainty. It is insightful to look closely at the common use of spatial and material disorientation as intimate deterrence strategies by France and Morocco. Contextual historical and political characteristics of these sites are further elaborated in chapter three.

The comparative ethnographic study of these sites offers micro-level understanding of these easily overlooked and sanitised socio-spatial geographies. It begins to grasp how contingent camps are lived, the nature of the struggles from which they emerge, and their human and political implications. At the core of each case study are groups of people seeking to cross a border and their spaces of life in the border zone. In Tangier I spent several months with a group of young men from Cameroon struggling to maintain a place of life in a rundown cemetery, while in Calais I spent time with groups of several nationalities (with a focus on Eritreans and Iranians) living informally in an unsanitary industrial zone on the edge of the port city and similarly struggling to maintain their places of shelter. Reading these sites alongside one another allows for a detailed conceptualisation of contingent camps, their effects, how they are lived and contested.

Lines of investigation

The main theoretical contribution of this thesis is a conceptualisation of contingent camps as dynamic assemblages caught in a constant state of struggle. Throughout the research process, I have sought to capture microscale processes and practices of camp destruction and rebuilding, and the negotiations that take place in-between. The contingent camp is a temporary yet permanent geography: a spatial manifestation that is constantly undermined yet simultaneously constantly negotiated and reinvented.

Seeking to understand this assemblage and the entities that constitute it drives the core axis of this study, which asks: *What entities are at work in contingent camp assemblages and what can we learn from their struggle and dynamic interaction?* Within an assemblage approach, this study is particularly concerned with human experiences of living these precarious spaces, and has sought to learn: *How is life in contingent camps lived and what can we draw from the narratives, practices and experiences of those who inhabit them?* Through scrutinising micro-level dynamics, broader biopolitical implications and paradigm shifts represented in the emergence of the contingent camp phenomenon may also be reached, asking: *What do contingent camps reveal about shifting forms of securitisation and humanitarianism and what are the biopolitical implications of their emergence?* Finally, this thesis is concerned with the racial dynamics that contingent camps produce and reveal, considering: *What racial assumptions underpin these geographies and how do those targeted challenge them?* This thesis sheds light on the implications of changing approaches to the regulation of human mobility and the impact of these changes on humanitarian structures, contributing to social justice debates on the governance of informal migration. These guiding research questions, and how I went about answering them methodologically, is elaborated in chapter four.

Thesis structure & chapter summaries

Engaging with rich existing bodies of work in camp, migration and refugee studies, chapter two proposes a conceptual intervention into understandings of contemporary forms of encampment, arguing for the necessity of incorporating the concept of the contingent camp to readings of contemporary migration geographies. It fleshes out a theoretical conceptualisation of contingent camps as dynamic assemblages, inspired by the work of Deleuze and Guattari (2013 [1983]) among others. Each empirical chapter that follows explores particular dimensions of the contingent camp assemblage, refining this initial theoretical conceptualisation by scrutinising how the concept applies in different ground-level contexts and its implications, in order to better explain how these spaces are lived, sustained and their effects.

Chapter three offers crucial context, exploring the recent history of shelter at the northern borders of Morocco and France in conversation, emphasising both national and local scale developments that have come to generate the contingent camp phenomenon. Drawing on the narratives of migrant people, humanitarians and others who experienced these developments as well as on academic sources, the chapter emphasises how gradual processes of rendering these borderlands hostile to migrant people and restricting their access to decent shelter has led to the emergence of contingent camps. I identify processes of racialised criminalisation, shrinking humanitarianism and expanding securitisation at work in each context, analysing how and why migrant people are constantly policed and deprived of shelter in these strategic border cities and their surrounding borderlands. I begin to expose the social and spatial practices used to exclude migrant people from urban space at the time of my research, to render their

bodies vulnerable, volatile, invisible. This chapter foregrounds the biopolitical arguments made in the empirical chapters that follow.

Chapter four describes and reflects upon the assemblage-inspired methodological approach I took to navigating my inherently shifting field sites. It outlines the ethnography I pursued, taking into consideration the materialities of the contingent camp, the atmospheres, rhythms and experiences of those who inhabit them. The main group from whom I sought knowledge about contingent camps was migrant people themselves, who have the greatest embodied and affective knowledge of these spaces. I was determined to be among these groups as much as possible, to complement semi-structured, in-depth interviews with my own encounters with contingent camps. I sought this proximity out by carefully negotiating ethical access to these places. Throughout the pages of this thesis, I include written vignettes of everyday life in contingent camps, photographs, and some video footage, bringing these opaque geographies to life. In chapter four, as part of my methodological discussion, I also touch on my positionality as a white, privileged female researcher in spaces of racialised violence.

Chapter five teases out the material strand of the contingent camp assemblage, unpacking the material struggles that characterise these places and conceptualising material degradation at the border as an active process of *racialised ruination*. I explore what may be learned about contemporary border biopolitics by scrutinising objects of encampment, their itineraries, transformations and the practices that lead to their removal or destruction. The necropolitical connotations of a border control strategy that exposes the migrant body to the elements through relentless refrains of dispossession are emphasised.

Chapter six considers the enforced intimacy of the displaced person with the border environment they are relegated to, looking beyond their simple coexistence to explore what these “fixed” environments reveal about the territorial, social and political dynamics that play out within them. Materially dispossessed, migrant people are governed through *environmental racism*: targeted with racist violence through the environmental degradation of sites of life that sustain Black bodies. It argues that migrant people are reduced to spectral, furtive presences in these hostile environments; yet their presences simultaneously render these deadlands lively. I draw on work on Black fugitivity to refine a conceptualisation of the dynamic modes of dwelling the displaced engage in as representative of their refusal to be subjected to a system that degrades their humanity.

This leads to chapter seven, which discusses the social fabric of contingent camps and the processes of resistance and solidarity that persist among migrant groups in these contexts. Without romanticising the resistance of migrant people, it emphasises essential practices and modes of organisation groups of migrant people engage in beyond the material, reflecting on how human assembly, determination and hope remain powerful driving forces among those gathered at the border. Drawing on the concept of the counter-refrain, it proposes that routines of social practice run counter to the destructive practices imposed by the state, maintaining the possibility of *being* in border space, which remains a zone of active and productive waiting.

The concluding chapter, chapter eight, ties together the threads and theoretical analyses elaborated in the empirical chapters in light of the research questions posed. It emphasises the proposed conceptual framework and its value for grasping contingent camps, offering a lens through which we may *see* these obscure and concerning geographies of contemporary migration, and mobilise our acknowledgment of them and those who live them to political ends. The contingent camp must be recognised and addressed as a profoundly racialised geography that profoundly compromises the most basic human rights. Indeed, this research calls for an urgent rectification of political agendas that actively dispossesses displaced people, advocating in favour of more humane border policies and a re-reading of contemporary migration as a defiant, decolonial act.

Note: The reader is invited to put aside assumptions of the deserving or undeservingness in mobility of the people encountered in this thesis, to focus first and foremost on their humanity in their encounters with the deterrence apparatuses of the state. Although the majority of my respondents in Calais had plans to ask for asylum in their country of arrival and the majority of my respondents in Tangier did not, in borderlands of transit migrant people are criminalised regardless of these categories, and their treatment by the authorities does not discriminate.

CHAPTER 2 | CONCEPTUALISING THE CONTINGENT CAMP

This thesis draws attention to the micro-geography of the contingent camp. It offers analysis of the political and human implications of the emergence of these spaces while theorising them, not only as a side effect of the border control apparatus or as overflow from other camp spaces, but as a space type in their own right. Minca writes of the camp as ‘the actual and metaphorical space, where some of the key processes at the origin of the present-day crisis of modern political institutions come together and show their most violent face’ (2015, 77), and it is vital we pay close attention to how camp spaces of all kinds warp, shift and emerge in new forms, offering insight into the biopolitics of contemporary life as they do so. Contingent camps are reflective of a specific governmentality: they exist in a continuous state of precarity, generated through constant struggle between the practices of authorities who attack makeshift shelter, and those of displaced people who constantly rebuild in order to survive in the borderlands. Although they are ontologically ephemeral and hidden from sight, their persistent re-emergence emphasises that they are paradoxically permanent phenomena. The emergence of contingent camps highlights the need for rereading borderlands and the materially precarious forms of encampment that exist within them. This chapter is devoted to conceptually unpacking contingent camps and the practices and processes that animate them.

The conceptualisation I propose is anchored in a review of existing scholarly contributions to the field, the identification of gaps therein and my own field research in northern France and northern Morocco, further elaborated in the empirical chapters to come. After situating the contingent camp within a rich body of literature on the camp and encampment, this chapter introduces the core theoretical notion that emerges from this thesis: a conceptualisation of the contingent camp as a dynamic assemblage. It is the product of ongoing struggles for and against encampment which generate precarious yet dynamic, regenerative geographies. Working through and beyond Deleuze & Guattari’s work on assemblage (2013 [1983]), I draw out a theorisation of contingent camps, offering conceptual tools for exploring their ontology, how they are lived and experienced. Thinking through assemblage opens up possibilities for conceptualising the materialities but also the practices, atmospheres, affect, socialities and performances that constitute these spaces. Reading them in this way highlights the political stakes inherent to researching and conceptualising contingent camps, of scrutinising the biopolitical motives that drive the regulation of undesired populations through their dispossession and the human implications of this strategy. Conversely, it also begins to shed light on how crucial knowledge may be derived from attention to the strategies displaced people develop in response to these living conditions, to resistive modes of life in contexts of material precarity.

The framework that follows unpacks certain fundamental strands that constitute the contingent camp, laying an initial foundation. It also anticipates theoretical departures and counterarguments elaborated in chapters five, six and seven. These chapters refer back to this framework and extend it, in

conversation with ethnographic moments and engagement with further scholarly literature these empirics evoke.

Part I | Camp geographies: ambiguous iterations of the camp

Before conceptualising the contingent camp specifically, it is important to situate it within a broader genealogy of the camp of which it is a product and offshoot: as Martin et al. emphasise, ‘camps should not be studied in isolation,’ (2019, 18) even as they increasingly vary in form. Camps offer a gauge of contemporary local and global situations, so ‘to understand a camp’s paradoxes is to begin to comprehend our current spaces, inexorably affected by militaristic, political and romantic extremes’ (Hailey 2009, 1-2). Indeed, over the past decades there has been considerable scholarly engagement with the camp as a spatial technology for governing displaced people, generally focusing on the camp in one of its two most prominent forms: as an institutional space of exception that sit ambiguously between humanitarianism and biopolitical containment (Agamben 1998; McConnachie 2016; Minca 2015), or as a makeshift, semi-permanent place of life become a “city-camp” through its protracted existence and the place-making practices of its residents (Agier 2002; Ramadan 2013; Mould 2017). What follows reviews scholarship on several camp forms and discusses the biopolitics of which they are symptomatic. This is crucial contextual knowledge for understanding the reasons for the advent of contingent camp spaces (a conceptualisation of which follows). Chapter three refers back to these various forms of migration governance and geographies of the camp to contextualise how contingent camps have come to emerge in northern Morocco and northern France.

Containing a problematised population: from the institutional to the humanitarian camp

Minca argues that ‘the institutional camp should be treated as a violent political technology that emerges every time the state does not know how to qualify people in spatial terms, but at the same time needs to govern their mobility and define their proper “place”’ (2015, 91). Scholars have traced the origin of the camp as a modern institution back to colonial history, namely to experimentations with new modes of governance in the colonies (Chimni 1998; Martin et al. 2019; Diken & Lausten 2005). Gilroy explains that camps were historically intended to control racialised and feared colonial subjects who otherwise defied “fixation” (2004). Continuity between these colonial camp spaces and the 20th century European concentration camps has also often been drawn (Arendt 1968; Agamben 1998; McConnachie 2016; Martin et al. 2019; Abushama 2021). These camp forms offer a sombre backdrop to its contemporary manifestations, namely those designed to perform the care and control of the migrant person. Agamben’s influential work on the camp has heavily informed the field of migration studies. He reads the camp as a space of limbo symptomatic of the modern nation state (2015), explaining that ‘what

industrialised countries face today is a permanently resident mass of non-citizens that do not want to be and cannot be either naturalised or repatriated' (2000, 94). Non-citizens find themselves 'in a condition of *de facto* statelessness' (ibid), and as such are reduced to a condition of 'bare life': excluded from human rights frameworks reserved for the protection of "legitimate" citizens (2005). It is in this sense that the philosopher considers the camp a space of exception: a biopolitical space in which social and political power are exerted over defenceless biological human life (Foucault 1998, 173). Despite its exceptional quality, the camp and people associated with it are ironically still subject to state forces and legislation: they are paradoxically both outlawed or excluded from society *and* subject to the law (Agamben 1998, 18).

Both the colonial history of camp spaces and the ambiguous regulation of racialised residents they connote undermine the humanitarian rationale often used to justify the implementation of a refugee camp. This topic has undergone great academic scrutiny (Agamben 2000; Gilroy 2004; Minca 2015), with Agier for example observing that the "logic" of the institutional camp is often reproduced within humanitarian camps, where residents are treated as a mass of *undesirables* in need of management (2011). He reads the humanitarian camp as reflexive of a desire to separate clean, healthy and visible people from obscure, ill and invisible "leftovers" (ibid, 14). Indeed to the outside world, these camps tend to be 'justified by feelings of suspicion towards the free circulation of black, brown and "other" bodies' (Feldman 2018, 160 in Brankamp 2021). Brankamp criticises the 'presumed innocence' of humanitarian camps, accusing them of performing a 'carceral humanitarianism [...] characterised by the temporally unspecified storage of racialised human surplus through the subterfuge of aid, compassion and protective capture' (2021, 112).

In a contemporary context of increased migration towards Europe, the desire to give a proper place to a population perceived as problematic is clear. By setting up putative systems of camps in which the refugee can be contained, an illusion of positive action is created, the "problem" is spatialised (Minca 2015, 81). This resonates with the status-processing centres established by the EU in the name of humanitarianism: asylum centres and hotspots where processes of humanitarian triage (filtering and sorting) are set in motion (Pallister-Wilkins 2016), separating the supposed "deserving" from the "undeserving."² These are spaces of government devised to perform sovereign registration policies, by virtue of which the humanitarian apparatus becomes 'complicit with sovereign processes of control designed around exclusive practices of exclusion and exile through deportation rather than the inclusive ideal of universal humanity' (ibid). They are vested with the power to govern onward mobility, to redirect the migrant person to other, potentially more threatening camp spaces like the detention centre where they are criminalised (Kalir & Wissink, 2016). As Ticktin writes: 'if humanitarianism is the

² As well as in Europe, in 2018 the EU proposed to set up closed UNHCR-run processing centres in Morocco among other north African countries, where migrant people intercepted while attempting a sea crossing would be sent to be sorted into categories of asylum seekers admissible to Europe, and irregular migrants who could be sent back to their home country. However, Morocco categorically refused to play this gatekeeping role (LesEco 2018).

primary language used to counter closed-border and anti-immigrant policies, the majority of migrants [...] will be sent to detention centres or deported without due process' (2016, 257). Following Pallister-Wilkins, hotspots (like asylum-processing centres) are spaces which turn 'humanitarian practice on its head' (2016).

This is particularly reinforced when a humanitarian situation intersects with the space of the border. The concept of the "humanitarian borderscape" (Pallister-Wilkins 2017; 2018) has emerged in recent years, as borders and border zones have increasingly become spaces of life and death (Walters 2011). At the humanitarian border, practices are reoriented around provisions for particular *forms* of life, bringing humanitarian actors into the state borderwork assemblage (Jones et al. 2017, 6). This reinforces the argument made by scholars of humanitarian borderwork that, when co-opted or solely provided by the state, humanitarianism may be rendered complicit in both performing and concealing not only the "triage" described above, but also violent border enforcement (Pallister-Wilkins 2017; Gazzotti 2020). Humanitarians who remain independent from humanitarian borderwork assemblages at these sites are often considerably compromised in these contexts.

Beyond Agamben: the (semi) autonomous makeshift camp

Alongside the study of hotspots and asylum processing centres, the study of migration-related makeshift encampments has increased in recent years, as these spaces have increased in numbers and visibility in various European cities (Bock 2018 [Rome]; Babels 2017 [Paris]; Saltiel 2020 [Brussels]; Vandevordt 2021 [Brussels]), along the Balkan Route (Obradović-Wochnik 2018; Davies et al. 2020; Jordan and Minca 2021) as well as in certain strategic border zones such as those of northern Greece (Pelliccia 2019) and France (Mould 2017; Davies et al. 2017; Agier 2018; Katz 2017). Makeshift camps often emerge as an unintentional fabrication of host states who close their borders, fail to organise hosting infrastructures, and as a result of a rupture in solidarity between states (Babels 2017, 9). Neglect gives rise to improvisation, to the spontaneous emergence of camps as "temporary solutions" along obstacle-laden routes (ibid). Often, these makeshift encampments emerge alongside institutional camps (Katz 2017 [Calais]; Bhagat 2021 [Paris]; Stojić Mitrović & Vilenica 2019 or Minca et al. 2018 [Serbia]; Pail 2021 [Lesvos]), either because the institutional camps are full or because migrant people do not want to submit to the formal, ambiguous humanitarianism and triage of the spaces described above. Davies et al. (2019) call upon geographers to look beyond camps in the formal sense, to devote more attention to these informal types of *encampment* and the roles they play in migration and the production of "bare life". The encampments they refer to are ones that emerge from what they call the "violent inaction" of states (Davies et al. 2017) which feign ignorance of these impoverished spaces (ibid 2019, 222). This categorisation of the space of the makeshift camp is fitting, however within this makeshift category various geographies may be distinguished, each with differing material qualities, temporalities, arrangements, and scopes for resistive political action. For example, the makeshift Calais Jungle and

the post-camp, scattered and precarious encampments that have emerged in its wake are of profoundly different natures. After reviewing the ways in which the semi-permanent, organic makeshift camp has been conceptualised, I will move on to a discussion of hyper-temporary makeshift encampments, namely what I conceptualise as contingent camps.

In recent years, many scholars have written against and beyond the Agambenian perspective of the camp as a space in which the refugee is reduced to “bare life”, to pure biological concerns (Martin et al. [2019] describe this as a “post-Agambenian” scholarly wave). The approach has been criticised for the anonymity and disempowerment it projects onto camp residents, in its use of the space as a vessel for unpacking abstract state logics and politics. It is a line of argumentation that departs from a rich body of work on camps such as the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon (Ramadan 2012) and the West Bank (Woroniecka-Kryzanowska 2017), or Kakuma camp in Kenya (Bhagat 2020b), which in the protractedness of their existence are semi-permanent, (semi) autonomous spaces which resemble “stunted cities” (Agier 2002). These critics choose to centre the lived experiences of camps, the subjectivities and everyday practices of the people who inhabit them (ibid), rather than reducing these residents to disempowered subjects. Much focus is placed on the dense social fabrics of shorter-lived but nonetheless established makeshift camps, whose residents often have shared interests, giving rise to the possibility of political action centered around common claims (Rygiel 2011; Sigona 2015; Singh 2020; Katz 2017; Vasudevan 2015; Sanyal 2011). This recentres the human over an abstract conceptualisation of power that obliterates the subjectivity of the individual and their capacity for political action. Camps of these sorts are often spatial formations ‘in which new identities crystallise and subjectivation takes root’ (Agier 2002, 318), defying its hopelessness by becoming a place rather than an abstract space, through ‘inventions of the everyday’ (ibid, 329). However, in this capacity, semi-autonomous camps pose the threat of becoming a *polis*: rooted in space, evolving, increasingly politicised and difficult for authorities to control (ibid; Ramadan 2009; Sanyal 2011). This ultimately compromises the longevity of the camp space, as was the case of the former Calais Jungle and Idomeni camp, which both faced destruction (Agier 2018; Pelliccia 2019).³ Similar forms of makeshift camps or “informal tent cities” also exist and have existed in Moroccan towns and cities, often described by migrant people as “ghettos” (El Arraf 2017; Gross-Wyrzten 2020b) and maintained by migrant people themselves with some support from NGOs.⁴

³ Writing about the Via Cupa camp in Rome, Bock similarly emphasises how the potential for political action, advocacy and resistance in autonomous makeshift camp spaces elicits harsh responses from the authorities, namely the violent destruction or erasure of these spaces (2018, see also Cantat 2020 for the case of Belgrade in 2015-16).

⁴ Writing about the former Ouled Ziane camp at the Casablanca bus station, Gross-Wyrzten describes: ‘Buildings are made of plastic sheeting, railroad ties, old cinderblocks, and metal from oil drums pounded flat. [...] The dwellings are roughly grouped by nationality, presided over by “chairmen” (migrant leaders), and arranged around a common area that serves as the soccer pitch. This setup resembles ghettos I visited in other cities around the country (down to the requisite soccer pitch). There are several tent-restaurants serving simple meals of rice, beans

The increased numbers and visibility of makeshift encampments brought about by the migration “crisis”, and the increasing mobilisation of citizen humanitarians and activist-volunteers (Sandri 2017; Mould 2017; Cantat 2020; Rozakou 2017), put pressure on many states to act fast and decisively to prevent the (re)emergence of these politically unpopular places. New geographies are emerging as a result, and it is to these that this thesis argues our attention must turn. Thus far, when addressed, these spaces have tended to be spoken of in the language of the makeshift. Only few have gone further in describing these new modes of encampment: as sites of life ‘in-between camps’ (Weima & Minca 2021, 12), as ‘informal transit camps’ (Minca et al. 2018; Minca 2021), as camps ‘that often change location, disappear or shift dramatically in form and function [...] highly transient, temporary and unpredictable’ (Jordan & Moser 2020) or as spaces caught in ‘hyper-cycles’ of destruction through domicidal practice (Van Isacker 2020). Palmas speaks of post-Jungle Calais as a battleground, describing the situation as: ‘a new scenario in which dispersed settlements keep reappearing and migrants are hunted by the police on a daily basis’ (2021, 497). At the Italy-France border (Ventimiglia) Aru observes a similar transition from makeshift settlements being ‘in part spaces of precarity [...] to becoming spaces characterised more by uncertainty and exclusion’ (2021). El Arraf (2017) distinguishes between different types of informal camp residents in the city of Rabat in the mid-2000s-2010s, differentiating ‘rooted-residents’ [*résidents-enracinés*] inhabiting semi-permanent makeshift camps with clear thresholds, from ‘un/derooted-residents’ [*résidents-deracinés*] who engage in even more precarious, fleeting modes of dwelling, such as those that are the focus of this thesis. While these descriptions begin to capture the spaces with which this thesis is concerned, they remain vague and do not attempt to conceptualise them in their own right. Much more precision as to the specific ontology of these spaces is needed and constitutes the main theoretical contribution of this thesis.

Situating the contingent camp

The conceptualisation of contingent camps I propose in this thesis draws on this rich body of work on the camp in diverse ways, however it also deftly moves away from conceptualising the camp as a static geography. My use of the term “camp” to describe the space at the heart of this research is in part designed to draw attention to the *lack* of a camp which the contingent camp evokes, to an unsettling absence where the (potentially) protective structure once was or could have been. Hardened border control strategies give rise to contingent and precarious forms of encampment which stretch the scope of what we might understand as camp spaces. Furthermore, the specifics of the contingent camp

in spicy sauce, fried sardines, or hardboiled eggs on plastic plates hastily dipped in a bucket of water before reusing for the next customer’ (2020b, 898). Many of my Cameroonian respondents in Tangier had previously lived in this camp, making a livelihood off cooking and selling food (among other activities) until the camp burned down in June 2019.

geography invite further inquiry into the camp as a space of autonomy and potential political resistance, through attention to the socio-spatial and the everyday, *and* a return to theorisations of the camp in terms of biopolitics (Foucault 2007) and the exception (Agamben 2005). Where much recent literature positions these bodies of thought as categorically opposed, I argue that both are useful for scrutinising the contingent camp geography.

The emergence of contingent camps happens as a result of a switch on the part of the authorities, from violent inaction to *active violence* through destruction: it marks a sovereign desire to sever from a phase of governance characterised by a loss of control implicit in the terms “emergency” and “crisis” (associated with autonomous makeshift camps), to *retrieve* control through practices designed to regain a firm upper hand. As a result, states still reeling from displays of humanitarian catastrophe visible in sprawling makeshift camps on their shores or at their borders take greater care to conceal their governance practices and the populations they target, generating new obscure geographies of encampment. It marks the moment when the humanitarian façade slips almost entirely, when a shift from apparent humanitarian chaos to regimented and calculated deterrence through dispossession occurs. The contingent camp is the product of a mode of governance that no longer half-heartedly toes the line between humanitarianism and securitisation (Agier 2010; Pallister-Wilkins 2015) but is fiercely punitive in its exacerbation of precarity.

Scrutinising the imaginaries that bolster precarious geographies is crucial for critically studying them (Harris & Nowicki 2018, 390). The contingent camp is, in ways, the shambled product of unattainable sovereign fantasies: that of border zones devoid of people trying to clandestinely pass through them. Drawing inspiration from Navaro-Yashin (2012), I propose that the borderland is made “phantomic” through state attempts to realise their fantasy of migrant-free borderlands. This is enacted through political discourse as well as the constant displacement of these populations and attacks on their places of life. Though actualising such a fantasy is largely a hopeless task, attempts at achieving it lend rationale to a spatial phenomenon that plays out on the ground as absurd and inhumane.

Preventing the emergence of shelter where there are people is costly and time-consuming. Border securitisation technologies and conventional policing alone are insufficient: extra manpower must be invested in to perform destructive practices at a pace that will suffice to render encampment little visible, to erase it before it might be written. The investment these destructive practices demand and the human rights they compromise are a thorn in the side of the nation state: the contingent camp *disturbs* the state’s self-image by revealing its flaws and hypocrisies. And yet, as states become engaged in a race to the bottom to deter the displaced, this emerging camp geography threatens to become mainstream through cyclical repetition and inter-nation mimicry. The question is how exactly contingent camps are created and sustained, and how we might best conceptualise such an uncertain phenomenon.

Conceptualising struggle: the contingent camp as assemblage

The complex dynamics of contingent camps and their dynamism make it intuitive to think of these geographies not as fixed spaces, but as “assemblages”: arrangements of heterogeneous entities (actors, discourses, practices, material elements and more) connected and caught up in a power struggle, held together (or not) as “events” through constantly evolving relations between their constitutive parts (Deleuze and Guattari 2013 [1983]). Assemblage is useful for examining a particular “knot” or “event”: a situation or moment in which entities come together and hold. However, it is also an approach which paves the way for understanding phenomena which *fail* to assemble and hold, for devoting attention to the constitutive entities of a given event, unpacking the workings behind a not-yet event and analysing ‘how the elements of an assemblage might - or might not - be made to cohere’ (Li, 2007, 264). For the purposes of this research, the potential event of interest is that of heterogeneous entities assembling as a place of shelter, as an encampment in a controversial transit border zone. This event however remains perpetually uncertain: constitutive camp elements are held in tension and constantly renegotiated by the actors and mechanisms that organise them without ever fully unifying (or if so, only fleetingly, and never twice in quite the same form). This conflicted ontology means the contingent camp is an absent-present geography. However, an assemblage approach helps us to look beyond the event of the camp to “see” its absence; to unpick the multiplicity of entities and relations on which its emergence is contingent, and which offer insight into the specificities of its particular ontology. It is not so much the end camp event that is of interest, but what we can glean from the disunity of the event and the threads that seek to bind it together.

My choice of the term “contingent” seeks to convey how the emergence of the camp is *dependent* on particular practices which render it fragile and uncertain: the materialisation of encampment is contingent on the destructive practices of state authorities as well as on the strategy and resilience of displaced people in rebuilding and maintaining their presence at the border. As authorities attempt to destroy the camp, the displaced seek to reclaim and negotiate it. This means there is a dynamic interconnection of camp entities constantly *striving to come together and hold*, even when they do not succeed in doing so. This is an important process to acknowledge and scrutinise. Deleuze and Guattari describe the assemblage as a ‘fragmentary whole’ (1994, 16), a pertinent image for thinking through how the emergence of encampment is contingent on countless associations between the entities that constitute them. The concept of the contingent camp enables us to conceptually grasp the idea of an event that never necessarily reaches a final shape, that is held in a constant state of (de)territorialization, seeking to reform in new ways. Even when entities that might materialise the camp are present, the conditioning relations that could bring them together are uncertain; the condition of the assemblage is always abstract (Nail 2017, 24).

Thinking in terms of assemblage enables us to better see and understand the disunity and dynamism of contingent camps and the multiple relationships of possibility that animate them, to recognise their

polyphonic quality: ‘their attempted harmony may or may not be achieved, but in any case, the important [thing] is to understand which “voices”, which temporal instances, become sensorially and affectively dominant, and why’ (Hamilakis 2016, 174-5). It is important to look beyond constitutive entities, to the conditioning processes and practices, atmospheres and relations between actors that animate them. When thinking about processes of (de- and re-) territorialisation, Deleuze & Guattari make a distinction between processes of *striation* (with striated space characterised by practices of boundary-making, order, containment imposed by a hierarchical state), and creative and imminent processes of *smoothing* (with smooth space characterised by fluidity and informality) (2013, 559) emerging in tentacles to claim space. It would seem most evident to associate the authorities with processes of striation, in which one ‘closes off a surface’ (ibid, 559), and to associate the displaced with spatial smoothing as they furtively claim life spaces at the border. In practice however, and while this dualism is of use in thinking through contingent camp dynamics, these processes are more blurred than first meets the eye. As Deleuze & Guattari explain, striation and smoothing only ever exist in *mixture*, constantly transversed and reversed into one another (ibid, 552), they are not so much opposed as mutually dependent. Far from being a simply binary of oppression versus resistance, these territorial processes rival and stimulate one another (ibid, 581): both *striation* and *smoothing* are adopted by both parties. This messy coexistence of (de)territorialising dynamics is of central interest here, driving the seemingly perpetual, rhizomatic and horizontal process of contingent encampment. As McFarlane writes: ‘assemblage points to re-assembling and disassembling, to dispersion and transformation’ (2009, 566). This aptly conveys the constant struggle inherent to the imperfect contingent camp assemblage. While contingent camps may seem absurd to the onlooker, we may derive sense and significance from these tormented micro-geographies by examining the processes that constitute them in detail. As illegitimate spaces under constant pressure to disappear, an approach that lends attention to detail, multiplicity and change is essential.

The productive, critical potential of assemblage is often overlooked. This thesis is not a deployment of assemblage for assemblage’s sake, but mobilises the approach to critical, political ends. Weheliye observes that the value of an assemblage approach is most generative when ‘put to work in milieus’ beyond ‘the snowy masculinist precincts of European philosophy’ (2014, 47). Deleuze & Guattari themselves invite appropriation of their ideas for the interpretation and generation of new concepts and assemblages: the concepts that constitute assemblage theory itself are, precisely, open for creative deployment and rearticulation (ibid). The assemblage-inspired theoretical approach proposed in what follows takes as a core dimension of study empirical modes of encampment in controversial border zones, taking these sites of knowledge not as anecdotal but as essential departure points for theoretical reflection on these obscure geographies.

The goal of this thesis to unpack discriminatory power dynamics has led me to depart in places from a “classic” assemblage approach, to allow for the crucial study of power relations within this

framework. Several scholars engaging with actor-network-theory or assemblage have in recent years for example argued that in order to fully unlock the transformative potential of these approaches, it is important to break from the flat ontology they advance (Navaro-Yashin 2009, 2012; Kinkaïd 2020; Weheliye 2014). The notion of “flat ontology” emerges from the material turn in the social sciences pioneered by Latour (2005), which places all actors, non-human and human, on equal ontological footing (DeLanda 2016; Kinkaïd 2020). In assemblage-thinking for example, this is well captured in the centring of the rhizomatic over the arborescent and of the horizontal over the vertical. Crucially however, following Grosz (1994, 28 in Müller 2015), within assemblage this does not mean that hierarchy is *inexistent*, but rather that it is the product of modes of organisation that create power differentials through social interaction and practice. As Navaro-Yashin writes, flattening all human and non-human actors within a network risks creating a ‘nonpolitical symmetry’ (2012, 43) which is problematic within grounded ethnographic work that focuses on studying a particular form of sovereignty and its human effects at microlevel. She argues that sovereignty is ‘realized through an enactment of agency (back and forth) between people and things in and on a given territory [...] and is a longterm process of negotiation, contestation, and mediation between various actors within a terrain of materialities and physical properties’ (ibid). This is vital to the assemblage approach that this thesis proposes, which unpacks several contingent camp components to learn about the biopolitics, social processes, and relationships that govern them.

Part II | Governance through dispossession: the biopolitics of imposed precarity

What follows begins to distinguish certain key strands of the contingent camp assemblage, laying the groundwork for the conceptual departures drawn out in chapters five, six and seven, based on a deeper analysis of the empirical findings of this research. After discussing the core dimension of materiality within the contingent camp assemblage and the biopolitical implications of acts of violence against it, I move on to consider the importance of attention to how pace and rhythm are mobilised in dispossessive governance practices, how affect and atmosphere are distorted in these spaces, and how the very border environment is rendered complicit in the project of disassembling and banning the camp. These are in many ways subtle and intangible dimensions which assemblage thinking better enables us to see and grasp; that become visible through a micro-level, horizontal research approach concerned with dynamism, process and struggle.

Dismembering shelter

Events of camp destruction or closure often frame their former residents as undeserving of a place of life: they tend to be made precarious, stuck in legal limbo and excluded from official humanitarian

services (Weima & Minca 2021; Agier et al. 2019). Awareness of the ‘material dimensions of existence’ is essential for understanding ‘the full range of political violence(s)’ (Coward 2009, xiii). Accordingly, taking an assemblage approach to the study of contingent camps is particularly valuable because it calls upon the researcher to pull non-human dimensions of space into focus and consider how they may be manipulated to political ends. Materiality is a primary object of struggle between authorities and the displaced in border zones where these precarious geographies appear: the material construction of the contingent camp always already takes the certainty of its destruction into account. To investigate this particular strand of the assemblage, it is useful to engage with debates on infrastructure, materiality and the implications of attacks upon them. The materiality of the contingent camp is always unfixed, uncertain: the physical development of a camp is stunted beyond a scattering of precarious and short-lived encampments. While “infrastructure” is a generous term for describing the materialities of contingent camps, it conveys people’s struggle for the basic structures which might facilitate their survival and ensure a basic sense of protection. Infrastructure is a primary mediator of urban exclusion or inclusion and may be held as material evidence of various forms of governmentality (Gandy 2006; Larkin 2013). As Amin and Thrift argue: ‘these arrangements are more than a mere “infrastructural” background, the silent stage on which other powers perform. The mangle of sociotechnical systems [...] is formative in every respect, regardless of its state of sophistication’ (2017, 3). Where considerable literature on the slum and communities living in urban poverty has drawn attention to problems of failing infrastructures or their inaccessibility, as well as to the inventiveness of underserved people who strategise to (re)claim them (Gotham 2003; McFarlane 2011), the question of human life where infrastructure is *actively undercut* remains underexplored.

The extended absence of infrastructure where there are humans is one of the most striking aspects of contingent camps. While struggles for infrastructure in informal settlements are most often the result of a neglectful or under-resourced state, contingent camp residents face a situation where infrastructures are intentionally undone by host states at great cost, in a punitive bid for deterring them. Debates on the camp often omit its materiality, focusing instead on the juridico-political nature of the space (Abourahme 2015). In recent years however, a crucial strand of scholarship focusing on the “stuff” of camps and border zones has emerged, scrutinising how materialities associated with displaced people in these places are mediated and the insight they offer to the biopolitical strategies that govern them (ibid, 202-3; Mould 2017; De León 2015; Ramadan 2010). It is not for lack of a camp appearance that border zones in which contingent camps emerge are devoid of camp “stuff” - it is rather that that “stuff” struggles to accumulate and assemble. If displaced people could make these pieces assemble and hold, they would form a unity that redefines them: in their joined state they would create a protective space. If we consider that infrastructure is ‘the urban equivalent of the machinery of breathing’ (Amin & Thrift 2017, 5), then the destruction of material structures that facilitate everyday life, no matter how makeshift or rudimentary, is a fundamental act of suffocation.

Violence against urban infrastructure has evocatively been termed “urbicide” (Coward 2009) a

term Ramadan also uses to describe the ‘deliberate and systematic erasure of the camp’ in reference to semi-permanent Palestinian camps in Lebanon (2009, 153). Hammami identifies similar practices at work against Palestinians living in Masafer Yatta, describing the routine destruction of infrastructure as a process of ‘active “de-development” by Israeli authorities, who prevent even the most basic forms of construction and thwart all attempts at establishing the infrastructures for “liveable life”’ (2016, 172). Similarly in the contingent camp, the gradual improvement of makeshift shelter is stunted: the built environment is not only unprotected by the host state but submitted to its violence. This poses a serious threat to survival with devastating implications for the body and psyche. Mould proposes the concept of “domicide” to describe the precarity enforced on residents of the former Calais Jungle (2017; see also Van Isacker 2020). “Domicide” refers to a devastating process of home unmaking, to material precarity enforced through sporadic demolitions and confiscations working ‘to continually destabilise the lives of the people who try to call it home’ (Mould 2017, 2). While fitting for describing the material precarity of the former Calais Jungle, domicile is even more appropriate for describing the constant unsheltering at work in contingent camps: repetitive acts of destruction hinder the assemblage of a protective space that might humanise and render its inhabitants visible. Delegitimised, the displaced person becomes *homines sacri* (Agamben 1998), whose spaces of life (home, sites of memories and survival) are made vulnerable to attack. At any moment the threshold may be transgressed, the roof torn from overhead. Van Isacker (2019) describes the situation in post-camp Calais as one of “carrot-and-stick domicile”: eviction and destruction operations are carried out in tandem with operations seeking to funnel people into institutional spaces where they might be rendered legible.

This intentional, active dispossession of displaced people amounts to what Aradau & Tazzioli describe as a ‘biopolitics of subtraction’ (2019); a brutal biopolitical mode that works to bestialize the displaced person, ensuring that when life is not lost at the border it is systematically devalued (Gazzotti 2020). Indeed, through dispossession (among other strategies), the displaced person dwelling in the contingent camp is made to inhabit an “othered” subjectivity produced by social and symbolic regimes rather than by any embodied difference. It is important therefore to consider how racialisation and inequality are profoundly entangled with the symbolic regimes that produce and naturalise them (Weheliye 2014; Kinkaid 2020); how they are mobilised to the ends of enforcing a given biopolitical project (ibid), in this case, the degradation of the displaced person through attacks on their living environments. In this sense, this thesis deploys assemblage critically, to scrutinise the relational production of (racial) difference manifest in border zones where contingent camps emerge, and how it underpins the perpetuation of orders of social, material and spatial dominance (Weheliye 2014). This argument is namely extended in chapters five and six, which bring in the concepts of imperial ruination and environmental racism.

Changing pace: refrains of dispossession

‘For me, the point is that things are there one day and then they’re gone the next, and that rate of change is really... quite shocking.’

James, aid worker Calais, 13.01.21

Contingent camps are particularly animated assemblages. Their particularity lies in the *pace* with which the dispossessive practices described in the previous section play out. Rather than eviction or demolition being occasional, spectacular events, they are routine and relentless. This represents a worrisome speeding up of dispossession which generates new levels of shelter precarity: border encampment becomes a hyper-temporary phenomenon. This hyper-temporariness isn’t quite captured in existing readings of the makeshift; we have not gone far enough in our scrutiny of the *intentional* infliction of temporariness to capture the effects of its relentless enforcement. In contingent camp contexts, speedy repetition means that hostility is not only diffused through explicit material attack, but also in the temporal regimes of governance these repeated attacks inflict. The temporal is thus an important strand of the assemblage to unpack.

Scholars have identified the temporal as a constitutive element of precariousness (Sharma 2014; Ayuero 2012); Harris & Nowicki for example observe that ‘precarity is often understood as a temporal or rhythmic phenomenon defined by erratic and uncertain rhythms as well as by a necessitated short-termism’ (2018, 389). The notion of “short-termism” well befits the temporal regime that governs contingent camps. However, although the regulation of these makeshift spaces at first seems unpredictable and chaotic, on closer inspection contingent camps are paradoxically governed through a rather organised temporal logic of repetition; their ability to (re)assemble constantly hinges on these refrains. Even where encampment or eviction operations are unpredictable, they are carried out according to a calculated logic: a dispossessive rhythm is so entrenched in these borderlands that when dispossession may not be predicted, it may often be anticipated by those submitted to it. Thinking about the significance of these destructive patterns, it is useful to draw on the concept of “the refrain”; what Deleuze & Guattari describe as ‘rhythm and melody that have been territorialised because they have become expressive’ (2013, 369). The contingent camp indeed is characterised by the repetition of camp raids or evictions that seek to territorialise border space. Repetition does the territorialising work of the state by making the “exceptional” event of eviction the norm. As a result, both border space and border time are rhythmically governed: chaos is paradoxically orchestrated through rhythmic imposition.

Sharma (2014) describes “temporal architectures” as infrastructures which produce and perpetuate temporal logics and social rhythms to political ends: mechanisms that mobilise time in such a way as to attribute value to certain groups over others, and in so doing reassert certain social hierarchies (see also Bourdieu 2000; Hage 2009). This helps us to understand how temporality may be mobilised as a subtractive biopolitical tool: a particular experience of time may be created within specific contexts to

control a group at microlevel (Harris & Coleman 2020, 606). This is visible and particularly intensive in the contingent camp where, in order to achieve temporal sovereignty over the border, the state invests in employing manpower to carry out destructive practices geared not only at compromising the material structures of encampment which make life possible, but also at exhausting the displaced person, whose time is squeezed as they attempt to build shelter and everyday life around and between repeated dispossessions. This also increases the emotional pressure they feel to cross the border as fast as possible. The implications of the enforcement of dispossessive refrains is further developed in chapter five. Furthermore, the concept of the territorialising refrain is an important one to which I will return later on in this chapter, for conceptualising the resistive refrains of social practice enacted by the displaced and the atmospheric forms of sheltering they work to generate.

Atmospheric rule: experiencing territorial authority in the borderlands

‘We never know when they are coming.’

Tesfa, Eritrean man, Calais 01.02.18

Forms of power territorialised in traditional camp spaces or security architectures are most often read vertically, scrutinised as abstract socio-technical assemblages of surveillance and control. This approach is productive for understanding biopolitical strategies and forces, but tends to overlook how these spaces are experienced, how they operate in intimate affective and atmospheric ways (Adey 2014). The shortcomings of a vertical approach are particularly evident in border zones where the contingent camp has emerged: the absence of protective infrastructures means the presence of displaced people is fluid, and the securitisation strategies that generate that fluidity take on a dynamic morphology. This thesis takes a horizontal approach to scrutinising how a pervasive, punitive logic manifests and is experienced at the border, attempting to grasp the affective impact of securitisation and deterrence strategies at work within the space (ibid). Not only does this offer a more holistic understanding of border control as it is imposed in contingent camps, how it is constantly developing in form and technique, but mirrors the way in which everyday security broadly is becoming more atmospheric, actively producing and distributing immersive hostile atmospheres (ibid) which operate a territorialising force. We have not yet sufficiently scrutinised spaces animated by a biopower which insidiously *seeps out* of institutional architectures, depriving open air places of life in border zones through repeated acts of authority.

In controversial borderlands where encampments are made contingent, tightening spirals of dispossession put constant pressure on them, tirelessly working to efface their presence in the hope that they will peter out altogether. This means displaced people are constantly displaced *within* their displacement: the anticipation or aftermath of one’s unsheltering becomes an everyday concern with drastic implications for one’s survival and well-being at the border. These attempts to make sovereign force *felt* are the reasons for which it is important to recognise not only the practices, but also the roles

of atmosphere and affect within contingent camp assemblages. Indeed, the infrastructures embedded in people's everyday landscapes are entangled with and contribute to their affective dispositions; they affect people's mental and sensory states of being and the forms of social life they engage in (Amin 2014). Naturally, the connexion between infrastructure, affect and lived experience also applies to contexts in which infrastructure is actively *absent*, but the affective implications and social repercussions of this are unclear. Indeed, affect is 'hazy and atmospheric' with a territorialising disposition (Guattari in Navaro-Yashin 2012, 168). The repercussions of the domicidal practices at work in the contingent camp go far beyond material oppression, also affecting the body and psyche as they render fearful and dehumanise.

As a relatively new geography, the contingent camp is revelatory of expanding techniques for the deployment of sovereignty. It is useful here to draw on the work of Diken & Lausten (2002) who understand the camp as a *logic* that combines discipline, control and terror, rather than as a fixed space. They consider that "bare life" extends beyond the confines of the camp, as inside/outside distinctions disappear and a camp logic permeates society (ibid). This builds on the Foucauldian perspective that the carceral system may extend beyond compact institutional spaces through forms of disciplinary control diffused via "carceral circles", which travel into the social body through social practices, spatial regulation and constant unseen surveillance, generating self-disciplinary behaviour in the subject (Foucault 1991 [1977]). Carceral geography scholars have further explored this idea in recent years (Moran, Turner & Schliehe 2018), arguing that a restrictive, punitive logic does not require a "spatial fix" but permeates civil society more broadly (ibid). These perspectives are helpful for conceptualising atmospheric forms of oppression in the contingent camp, for understanding how a punitive logic infuses the everyday despite the absence of a physical space of containment.

The contingent camp is perhaps the ultimate example of how a punitive logic might be unbound and rendered pervasive. The exclusion that these encampments represent is not only expressed through punitive practice, but 'viscerally through the evocation of particular affectual intensities' (Brankamp 2021, 6). This pushes us to attend to the immaterial practices and atmosphere-based qualities of the security dispositif: to how fear and anxiety may emerge in static fences cemented to the landscape, from the debris of dismembered materialities, but also in the pervasive mobile policing of the border. These elements generate constant unease and a sense of surveillance among the displaced, affecting the psyche as they dehumanise. Assemblage has little been applied to the study of absent materialities, or of affect and atmospheres (Dijstelbloem & Walters 2019), yet the embroilment of the material and affective in the contingent camp draw attention to the importance of such an approach. It brings the complexities of border life for the displaced to centre stage, going beyond the migrant-free border vision that the state seeks to impose.

Borderlands: battlefield, playing field, shelter

‘In the forest, we always sleep with one eye open, and our shoes on our feet.’

Landry, Tangier 06.12.19

Encampment seeks to take root and assemble upon and within the borderlands, the muddy grounds upon and within which hope and despair percolate. Affect emerges not only from policing and securitisation, but also from the very landscape at the border in which life is lived. In this sense, the borderlands play a significant role in territorial negotiations and struggle, though their significance might easily be overlooked as static or passive. When thinking through the contingent camp, it is important to account for the border environment as an integral part of this uncertain geography, to consider it an entity within the assemblage, which is drawn into certain roles as it undergoes negotiation at the hands of displaced people and the state. Following political ecologists and in tune with an assemblage approach, this involves reading human and nonhuman communities as contingent and engaged in ongoing interaction; recognising the importance of incorporating non-human entities to the study of the politics of everyday life (Robbins 2003; Sundberg 2011). Such an approach is particularly pertinent for the study of borderlands, where geography and the natural environment are particularly significant by virtue of the frontier they represent. Awareness of the border environment in this sense invites attention to the multiplicity of actors, elements and factors that play a part in border enforcement. As De León asks: ‘how can we begin to understand the structure of a wall of deterrence that is equal parts human, animal, plant, object, geography, temperature, and unknown?’ (2015, 39).

The state resorts to practices of environmental racism in several forms to bolster its deterrence strategy. Environmental racism refers to the enactment of racist violence through attacks on the environments that sustain Black lives, or the mobilisation of environments to those ends, for example through the exposure of certain groups to polluted environments (Pulido 2016; Wright 2018). In border spaces where contingent camps emerge, this happens through authorities’ relegation of migrant people to adverse sites of life, or the reclamation of their sites of life through conservation rhetorics and practices (Ramutsindela 2014; Doshi 2018). The person who inhabits the contingent camp is essentially relegated to a life in nature, perpetually out of doors, or beyond a flimsy threshold that holds no sovereignty. At any moment it may be transgressed, the roof torn from overhead. Acts of dispossession intentionally *expose* the body of the migrant person to the natural environment in a way that compromises their physical and mental health, as well as their ability to survive. Stripping the migrant person of her or his belongings and removing shelter from overhead conveys the racist imagining that it is their *place* to live in nature, to live a savage, animal life. Mbembe describes the colonial project as one that works to racially deny any bond between coloniser and colonised, to imaginatively produce the colonised as ‘something alien beyond imagination or comprehension,’ legitimising lawless rule over them (2019, 77). He cites Arendt, who proposes that it is not so much the difference in skin colour that

the coloniser fears, but rather a fear of those who behave as a part of nature (Arendt in Mbembe 2019, 77-8). In a similar vein, Derrida writes of “zoo-power” describing that ‘the most inhuman violence has been unleashed against living beings, beasts or humans, and humans in particular who precisely were not accorded the dignity of being fellows’ (2009, 108).

Border control has also been known to actively mobilise a hostile environment to necropolitical ends (Mbembe 2019) in other ways. At the Mexico-US border (Sundberg & Kaserman 2007; De León 2015), border control intentionally sets the stage for the natural environment and climate to do part of the work of deterring the displaced and hindering their mobility (ibid). This is an extreme case of border policy weaponizing the environment: clandestine border crossers are intentionally funnelled towards the perilous terrain of the desert where border patrol enjoys a tactical advantage (ibid, 36), and hundreds die annually from their exposure to the harsh environment (US Customs and Border Patrol 2019).⁵ Though perhaps more explicit in the US, the logic behind this strategy is not so different from what plays out in both northern France and northern Morocco, countries whose northern borders both represent a natural as well as a legislative frontier: the sea between the border zone of departure and the desired destination operates as a deadly threat, while also allowing bodies to conveniently disappear. In recent years and at both of these sites, there has been growing willingness among the displaced to take on these natural borders, at great risk in zodiacs or inflatable boats.⁶ As technological border securitisation infrastructures are increasingly spectacularised (Fisher 2018), safer options for crossing become more difficult, and (nonetheless perilous) routes through natural environments becomes all the more attractive. The various ways in which environmental racism is deployed at my field sites shall be explored at greater length and in conversation with empirics in chapter six (part I).

By contrast however with the above arguments, that take the environment to exacerbate the vulnerable and precarious condition of the displaced person, my use of the term “borderlands” also seeks to challenge the assumption that the space at the border is a sterilised, hyper-securitised extension of the sovereign state. This space is *land* in which everyday life plays out and dwelling is negotiated, across and within which assemblages of encampment work to come together. In materially deprived spaces, it is important to emphasise this role of the border environment and to pay attention to its specificities at a given site; to its “fleshiness” and the forms of shelter, resistance or deterrence it enables. Indeed, borderlands are manipulable territory that may be complicit or *rendered complicit*. The natural environment is one of few consistencies that facilitate the presence of the displaced, who inevitably live

⁵ Data collected by the US Customs and Border Patrol records that at least 7,505 deaths occurred at the Mexico-US border between 1998 and 2018, amounting to 375 deaths per year on average: <https://www.cbp.gov/sites/default/files/assets/documents/2019-Mar/bp-southwest-border-sector-deaths-fy1998-fy2018.pdf>.

⁶ Only in the past 3-6 years have boat crossings become popular enough at both of these sites to rival if not exceed former strategies for passage like ‘jumping’ the border fence in northern Morocco, and that of passage by smuggling oneself onto a lorry in northern France.

embedded within it. It may offer a rugged and rudimentary yet vital source of hospitality; the bare basics of shelter in a context so deprived of just that.

This section has emphasised how authorities seek to render border space hostile through actively attacking the material structures that might sustain illicit human dwellers, preventing the camp from assembling and fixing itself to the borderland. These dispossessive practices have taken on a brutal intentionality, as rendered visible by the relentless pace at which they are deployed. In this context, and following a non-representational approach tied to my reading of encampment through assemblage, this section has expressed the importance of close attention to atmosphere and affect as well as materiality in the borderlands, which play an important role in diffusing the punitive logic which governs them. I have also argued in favour of paying close attention to the borderland environment, which is made to play an important role in contingent camp negotiations: it is both at the root of practices of environmental racism, and the physical environment across which the displaced seek to assemble encampment (see chapter six). What follows turns to look at practices of subversion and autonomy by displaced people: how encampment (though fleeting) is claimed, a resistive presence put forward by displaced people and social atmospheres coaxing into being to counter oppressive ones.

Part III | Living the borderlands: rhizomes, desire lines & resistance

‘The territory is first of all the critical distance between two beings of the same species. [...] Critical distance is a relation based on matters of expression. It is a question of keeping at a distance the forces of chaos knocking at the door.’

Deleuze & Guattari (2013, 372)

Deleuze & Guattari’s reading of territory as the critical distance between oneself and the chaotic forces of a hostile party of one’s own species is useful for thinking through the modes of evasion and resistance displaced people enact in the contingent camp. How does the displaced person claim or territorialise a space of life when the very reason for the emergence of contingent camps has been to strip them of just that? How do they establish critical distance with chaos where the state breaks down any threshold beyond which they might physically barricade themselves from its punitive hand? What processes contribute to attempts at making the contingent camp assemble and hold? Part III begins to answer these questions, investigating the mechanisms that enable displaced people to keep “the forces of chaos” at bay and persist at the border, exploring practices of spatial, material and atmospheric reclamation these groups engage in. An assemblage approach to the study of these geographies opens up potential for ‘understanding the simultaneous flexibility and endurance, fixity and fluidity of racializing assemblages, their uneven and differential operations [...] and their potentials for retrenchment and resignification’ (Weheliye 2014 in Kinkaid 2020, 466). In other words, while racializing assemblages

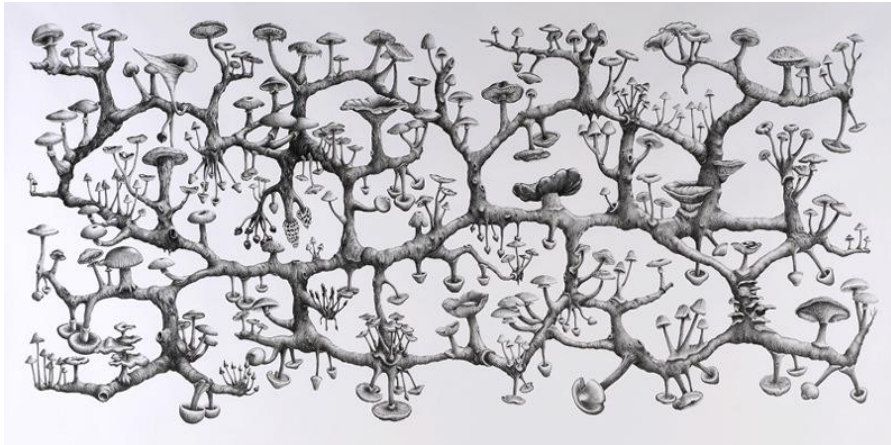
operate a strong territorialising force, they may also be deterritorialised through disruption, reclamation and reinvention (Weheliye 2014). What follows conceptualises the practices and processes that drive the perpetuation of encampment in the borderlands as rhizomatic, enabling the constant regeneration of encampment despite the attacks waged against it. Desire lines, social sheltering architectures and counter-refrains of practice are central here. This argument is extensively drawn out and developed in the empirical chapters that follow, namely chapters six (part II) and seven.

Rhizomatic resistance: the 'subterranean' life of border encampments

To the sovereign state, illicit border encampment poses the problem of *multiplicity* (Deleuze & Guattari 2013). Indeed, inherent to contingent camp geographies is their multiplication over time as a border-crossing route becomes more or less viable, necessary or attractive. Inherent to multiplicity however is development, visibility, increased territorialisation: a tent in and of itself does not necessarily pose a threat to the nation state, but the susceptibility of that tent to multiply does. In this sense, the rationale for authorities' attacks on materialities of encampment emerges out of fear (or in anticipation) of what might happen were that shelter to grow, develop or multiply as people's stay at the border protracts and peers join or relay them in that space. The shelter of the present evokes the potential encampment of the future, the territorialisation that may come when a group of shelters emerge together and take root, threatening state authority. The tolerance of one shelter sets a precedent, whereas destroying it promises to deter. In this sense, the threat of multiplicity, expansion, reiteration, justifies the cruel obliteration of the unit. Attacks on camp materialities thus seek to stunt its development and guarantee that shelter does not grow in *arborescence* as those who inhabit it seek to improve the material and infrastructural conditions of their everyday life, to assemble and fix shelter to the borderland as a camp.

However, if the state held the absolute power to obliterate all attempts at encampment and the presence of the displaced at the border, the contingent camp would not exist. The question is how and why encampment *does* persist (albeit in the precarious form of the contingent camp) even though it comes under constant attack? This calls for us to look beyond power as arborescent, to think about the reactiveness of the displaced, who subvert state strategies which strive to undercut their spaces of life. It is useful here to turn our attention to another of Deleuze & Guattari's contributions: the biological concept of the rhizome (2013, 21-23). In contrast with the hierarchy of arborescence, the rhizome is an unpredictable root-like stem devoid of beginning or end; it has no centre and expands randomly, establishing endless connections according to an unpredictable pattern of growth (ibid). Where a traditional makeshift camp subject to neglect would develop unimpeded and in an arborescent manner, the contingent camp exists as a rhizomatic entity, developing according to a pattern of destruction and re-emergence. What the concept of the rhizome captures is the certainty of the re-emergence of encampment; the rhizome has no centre and may only fall subject to 'asignifying rupture': 'a rhizome may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new

lines' (ibid, 8). The rhizomatic model refutes the arborescent in the sense that it resists hierarchy, chronology and organisation, sprawling out nomadically (ibid): it is within the rhizomatic terrain that the nomad moves and operates, that the contingent camp assemblage sprawls out.



Visual representation of the biological concept of the rhizome | Richard Giblett (2009)

The above representation is useful for grasping this conceptualisation of encampment as multiplying in a root-like, rhizomatic manner across the border landscape. It shows the non-hierarchical pattern of growth and development encampment may take on in border zones that seek to impose hierarchy, stratification, order. Indeed, practices of encampment are rooted and sprawling, expanding and multiplying in connections even when one of its tangents is severed or attacked (ibid). When the materiality of encampment is challenged it physically disappears, but then consistently (if unpredictably) re-emerges at new sites or in new ways. Despite the dynamism of these processes, the rhizome brings home that the contingent camp is less fleeting and ephemeral than it seems; its re-emergence, though not geographically precise is predictable, constantly shifting and reimagined in new “offshoots”. A rhizome mostly grows out of sight, sprawling horizontally beneath the ground; yet at any moment it may shoot up, emerge in plain sight in the form of a new encampment. This conceptualisation brings us closer to the ground reality of these borderlands, to how attacked spaces of encampment have a capacity for regeneration of a biological quality. This concept also helps convey the gusto with which authorities seek to “weed” displaced people out at the border only to find they are rooted there, even when the materialities that would sustain them are absent. The question that remains is how rhizomatic encampment is perpetuated, what animates the regeneration of encampment where the state seeks to undo it at all costs?

When we start thinking about encampment as a rhizomatic phenomenon, multiple new lines of enquiry for exploring contingent camps are pried open, pushing us to see and understand subtle and complex forms of emergence and resistance. We are encouraged to look beyond the border zone as a space in which the vulnerable migrant is submitted to the power of the sovereign, to acknowledge the agency of displaced people who succeed in maintaining their presence nonetheless. Beyond the

materiality of encampment and acts of rebuilding, attention is drawn to relationships and practices among groups that might be described as social and atmospheric forms of sheltering. The roots that drive the reiteration or spread of encampment across the borderscape are subterranean in a figurative rather than a literal sense: the regeneration or multiplication of roots takes the form of connective relations developed between humans, or between humans and environments, as well as with other non-human, atmospheric and affective entities that come together and strive to constitute the camp. State efforts to sever shoots of encampment at the border through attacks on their material expression fail to acknowledge these multiple other forms of sustaining relations and the fact that as long as the border remains strategic and holds the promise of a better life elsewhere, displaced people will be drawn to the border zone. Thinking in terms of resistance in the *absence* of material structures, we are more inclined to acknowledge other dimensions of the camp, the affects and atmospheres at work within them, and how these come together to reinvent places of shelter.

Desire lines: active waiting in the borderlands

Desire is a powerful force that drives the contingent camp assemblage: migrant people's desire for survival and passage constantly runs counter to the state's desire to erase them. Conflicting desires are what render it difficult for the assemblage of encampment to reach a state of coherence, holding it in its contingent state. Deleuze & Guattari's (2009 [1977]) conceptualisation of desire as a productive force and Smith & Walter's (2018) conceptualisation of *desire lines* as a strategy for literally or imaginatively resisting or rethinking hostile space, provide useful threads for thinking about how we might understand and read how desire has the productive potential to alter place or generate resistance to an imposed order in an unforgiving environment. In their most literal sense, desire lines are unrequited inscriptions or routes treaded on the ground by the passing through of footsteps. They are a tool through which the displaced engage in insidious appropriations of border space, inscribing traces of their presence and liveliness on the landscape by treading muddied routes into the earth, along the inhospitable flanks of motorways or fences, in hollowed out spaces between low shrubs, through markings on the cement of the cold urban infrastructure that offers them temporary protection from the elements. These desire lines emerge in a network of strategic, rhizomatic routes which refuse to cease multiplying, regenerating and rerouting when undercut. In an environment of pervasive policing, it becomes imperative to construct such subversive physical routes across the borderlands. Circumventing conventions for navigating border space, these routes do the important work of rendering the borderlands somewhat hospitable. As De Certeau describes: 'if it is true that a spatial order organizes an ensemble of possibilities [...] then the walk actualizes some of these possibilities [...] makes them exist as well as emerge' (1984, 14). Though they are discreet, these traces affirm a real and determined migrant presence in the borderlands.

In the contingent camp, desire lines also emerge in "little tactics" for rebuilding shelter in places hard for authorities to access, subverting the use of public space and allowing for a presence and

togetherness of “undesired” bodies. Metaphorically, desire lines represent ‘a solidarity of users in space, or users taking space beyond its literal intended use’ (Smith & Walters 2018, 2986). Displaced people constantly regroup, rebuild stunted encampments, struggling to rearrange these assemblages so they hold. This amounts to what Vasudevan (2015) describes as spatial occupation through a form of autonomous “world-making” that sits between resistance and creation. The occupied space is cobbled together through assembling materials, sharing knowledge and ideas which enable a group to claim the right to a given space: the environment is appropriated in a bid for emancipation (ibid, 325). The human drive to act, nurture and pull together shelter even in the face of oppression humbly challenges the idea that the presence of the displaced may be obliterated.

Stuck in the border zone, displaced people perform spatial practices which lie somewhere between those of the figures whom Deleuze & Guattari distinguish as “the migrant” and “the nomad” (2013). They describe that where the migrant ‘leaves behind a milieu that has become amorphous or hostile, the nomad is one who does not depart, does not want to depart, who clings to the smooth space left by the receding forest, where the steppe or the desert advances, and who invents nomadism as a response to this challenge’ (ibid, 444). Though embarked upon a migration journey, having left a hostile place and seeking to leave yet another, in border zones the displaced person behaves rather in the manner of the nomad. Like the nomad, the migrant person fiercely clings to their place of life at the border while still stuck on the “wrong” side of it - until an opportunity for passage arises. In this sense, although the border zone is broadly understood as a place of transit, it makes sense to think of displaced people in Calais as a group *across time* who (in their succession) occupy space nomadically, rooting themselves in the borderlands. Displaced people are a constantly changing multiplicity; the core group is splintered and reconstituted as people transit across the border and others arrive. Even if the goal of the individual is not to hold permanent space at the border, as a group united by a common drive for survival and passage, holding onto territory is a core concern. This invites the notion of border space as the shared, illicit “commons” (Amin 2008) of a heterogenous group of displaced people stretching through time. Paradoxically, as a whole the displaced ‘are nomads by dint of not moving, not migrating, of holding a smooth space that they refuse to leave, that they leave only in order to conquer’ (Deleuze & Guattari 2013, 560). These points are drawn out in chapters six (part II) and seven.

Atmosphere and imagination: coaxing the camp into being

‘There aren’t any convivial places anymore, where people can go to find the resources they need to get through their daily lives. I wonder where they go to meet their personal and community needs, to *survive* what they’re living through. I think it’s psychologically more difficult now because it’s no longer possible to anchor oneself anywhere, there’s no space of sharing, no personal space where you can put stuff down, relax. No place you know will still be there tomorrow.’

Medical aid worker, Calais 12.01.21

One of the main characteristics of spatial smoothing is the creation of ‘non-formal space maintained by tactile relations perpetuated [by nomads] among themselves’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013, 410). Hailey conceptualises the camp as ‘spatial production’ which emerges through practice: it combines field and event and emerges at the confluence of mental and social space (2009, 3). Indeed, even when materialities are absent, people living at the border assemble a form of shelter through mental and spatial practice. Dijstelbloem & Walters (2019) propose the concept of “the envelope” for describing protective pockets that emerge along a migration route, spaces that envelop and mark the parameters in which travel is safe, that harbour protective thresholds that stretch through ‘experimentation and invention’ (ibid, 11). While Dijstelbloem & Walters understand the establishment of these envelopes as the remit of humanitarian actors, I would argue that the protective space or envelope rather departs from displaced communities themselves, especially in contingent camp contexts. By carving out protective envelopes which allow for being together in a hostile environment, these groups subvert their encounter with an oppressive security atmosphere, emphasising its malleability. In a similar vein, Deleuze & Guattari offer valuable reflection on the mechanisms that constitute a home place. They write: ‘home does not pre-exist: it was necessary to draw a circle around that uncertain and fragile centre, to organize a limited space. [...] The forces of chaos are kept outside as much as possible, and the interior space protects the germinal force of a task to fulfil or a deed to do’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 362). This idea that home is made through the drawing of a protective circle around a germinal force (in this case the desire for survival and passage and the willingness to wait) resonates in the contingent camp: the protective circle that surrounds it is not fixed but mobile. Imaginatively and socially generated, it marks a threshold that harbours hope and desire.

Contingent camps are socially loaded places where community formation and the crafting of common imaginaries prove essential survival strategies. Affect is ‘produced through the actual encounters and sensualities of [multiple] bodies’ (Saldanha 2010, 2411), and by virtue of clustering migrant people together, encampments ‘enact a literal many-bodiedness that intensifies sensibilities through social sharing of emotions and displacement experiences’ (Brankamp 2021, 3). In this sense, as argued earlier, desire lines are *metaphorical* as well as literal at the border: desire activates the drive that makes endless rebuilding and persistence possible. Smith & Walters describe how ‘desire may work as a subverting force provided that it is enacted socially rather than just individually’ (2018, 2991), and indeed groups of displaced people engage in practices that create safe, solidary atmospheres through their assembly (Anderson 2009). Although they encounter one another as strangers, they find solace in their common status as outlaws or strangers in the eyes of the states between which they seek to pass (Amin 2012). Their resilience emerges in placemaking practices that occur spontaneously and out of necessity, relationally and dynamically between their assembled bodies (Butler 2011; Massey 2013). As Butler writes, when several bodies assemble in alliance a “true” space emerges in their coming together, representing an ‘acting together that opens up time and space outside and against the temporality and established architecture of the regime’ (2011). This enables them to forge powerful,

common rationales for their situations even where the state seeks to drain the border of any glimmer of hope. Although it seems self-evident that a place is not solely constituted of material things, pinpointing the immaterial things that constitute place is not always straightforward.

A core dimension of coaxing a sense of shelter into being in seemingly empty border space is imaginative practice. The power of imagination lies in its ‘capacity to posit that which is not, to see in something that which is not there’ (Castoriadis 1997, 151). Indeed, in the contingent camp, safe spaces are nurtured through *collective imagination* as well as through social practice, performance and material crafting. To stress the importance of imaginative practice is not to suggest that the experience of living the contingent camp is unreal in any way; rather it provides insight into how life in these conditions is made possible and the mental strength it demands. Indeed, in the contingent camp, the ephemerality or absence of material infrastructures calls for greater reliance on the imagination for survival. This helps us move beyond a pure study of the material in context to a study that spans the physical object and the environment more broadly, as well as the imagination and affect with which it is bound up (Navaro-Yashin 2012). It is the study of the nonhuman and imaginative in parallel with the human that allows for a rich narrative of these spaces to emerge, one that highlights the ability to persist in living conditions where the material is always uncertain (ibid). Imagined space occupies a state between reality and common imagination; by being together, sharing practices, rituals and nurturing atmospheres of solidarity, the displaced work to subvert their experience (Adey 2014). Chapter seven, for example, will discuss how when a group of people gather in a non-descript space for prayer, recognised by all participants as a space of worship through the routine of common social practice, the imaginative and performative are reconciled, shaping powerful imagined spaces of togetherness which alter displaced people’s relationship to space, helping them to bear it.

Resistance in counter-refrains

‘Recognising the shared temporal rhythms of displacement, and how these interplay within other hierarchical time structures under contemporary capitalist regimes, is one way through which anthropologists can make these connections, and ultimately strengthen our analyses and critiques of bordering structures.’

Ramsay 2020, 405-406

Returning here to the concept of the refrain helps us to grasp how social architectures are animated in the contingent camp and their strength. As well as common imagination, the ability to evoke social space and coax it to life occurs in part through repetition, in consistently drawing together protective atmospheres that work to produce territory (McCormack 2013). State authorities are not, therefore, the only actors who mobilise temporal strategies to territorialise border space: in response to refrains of dispossession waged against them, displaced people work to establish their *own* refrains, or what I propose to conceptualise as *counter-refrains* which smooth and thus territorialize border space. The contingent camp is a geography of *arrythmia*, meaning a site characterised by conflicting rhythms which

generate ‘a disassembly of times and spaces’ (Lefebvre 2004 [1992]). Deleuze & Guattari speak of rhythm as a way of establishing critical distance, as a territorialising force which is particularly useful for reflecting on resistance in the contingent camp. In the absence of fixed materialities, moments of rebuilding and common social practice are not so much rooted in physical space as in one another’s bodies and presence. Refrains of social practice may strengthen the ability of the displaced to persist at the border, building a socio-atmospheric architecture that punctuates days spent waiting and striving to cross the border. A powerful protective affect may emerge in the repetition of familiar practices, which layer experiences and memories. Hamilakis conveys this well, writing: ‘since every sensorial perception is replete with the memories of previous perceptions, all sensorial modalities are multi-temporal [...] the actualization and re-enactment of specific past affective and mnemonic occasions produce a new affective experience in the present’ (2016, 179).

Refrains mark out blocks of space time by drawing multiplicities together in an otherwise chaotic world (Emmerson 2017; McCormack 2013). In this case, refrains of social practice mark atmospheric intervals in an otherwise chaotic borderland context. These dynamic, malleable socio-atmospheric refrains may emerge in a variety of forms (from meal-sharing to the sharing of music, storytelling and so on) and also serve as a vector to mark territory in reaction to the territorialising refrains of the state. Emmerson (2017) writes evocatively about laughter as a refrain, helping us grasp how it may perform a territorialising role in the contingent camp. He writes that ‘laughter can disrupt the feel of spaces, deterritorialising and reterritorialising them towards different modes of relation between bodies, thus generating space times that have a different atmospheric feel’ (2017, 2087). In this sense, laughter draws out an atmospheric territory that may be *felt* rather than seen, influencing a social group’s corporeal experience of space and thus their capacity for action. Moments of laughter serve as repeated ‘reference points around which bodies, experiences and space times can acquire resonance’ (ibid). This reading of repeated forms of social practice as vested with the capacity to alter or territorialise border space is particularly relevant for understanding social life in contingent camps where territorialisation is little-visible in the material practices of their residents. It is drawn out and empirically illustrated in chapter seven.

While the authorities seek to impose a destructive rhythm on border space, the displaced seek to hold on to it through their own rhythmic response. The border landscape then is constituted of (de)territorialising motifs in the shape of acts of degradation performed by the state, and by (re)territorialising counterpoints through which displaced people counter this motif; what we might, following Deleuze & Guattari, describe as expressive, ‘melodic landscapes’ that mark and smooth the domain (2013, 370). Adey understands atmosphere as a pervasive and dynamic ‘shape-shifting spatiality’ (ibid, 837), and the malleability of atmospheres is perceptible in contingent camps: the displaced subvert their encounter with an oppressive atmosphere by carving out protective envelopes in a hostile environment. They claim significant (yet in appearance unremarkable) spatial splinters of life. Thinking about the dynamics of border struggle in this way offers a clearer picture of the broader

dynamics of struggle at hand and how insidious processes of (re)territorialisation work counter to the striation of the state. It allows for a richer understanding of how ‘places are produced and woven together in both pragmatic and affective assemblages’ (Smith & Walters 2018, 2992). By paying attention to how inner and outer worlds are embroiled in this way, it becomes possible to draw up a cartography, an affective geography of inner selves and outer environments simultaneously, to capture their interrelation (Navaro-Yashin 2012). The ways in which I strove to capture this embroilment in the places of camp contingency I encountered are further described in chapter four.

It is important here to reflect upon the mental force that activates the establishment and perpetuation of these counter-refrains, as well as the tracing of desire lines at the border. In border space, waiting and desire are profoundly intertwined. Waiting is an experience which has, in recent years, often been explored in relation to the asylum seeker submitted to bureaucratic suspension (Debele 2020; Darling 2014a; Haas 2017; Brekke 2010; Jeffrey 2008) or the refugee caught in “permanently temporary” camp life (Ramadan 2013). In these conditions, “bare life” is imposed by enforcing existential rupture on a person largely dispossessed of their ability to determine their own future (Ramsay 2017; Khosravi 2007). In the contingent camp however, waiting has been *chosen* rather than inflicted, a stance borne witness to in the desire line. To overlook this flattens the experience of displacement as passive. Indeed, the border zone is a waiting trap displaced people hand themselves in to; their desire for passage stronger than their fear of the state. The contingent camp comes into being as a result of this desire for self-determination over one’s *time* and migration trajectory. Living outside of state architectures of care and control may compromise one’s survival, but it also allows a person to play a negotiated role in the crafting of their own future. I do not here suggest that it is easy for a displaced person to take control over his or her trajectory, but that to take a clandestine route rather than place one’s trust in legal channels may reflect a dissatisfaction with scarce options put to them to move legally. Thinking about the contingent camp in these terms may open up alternative ways of narrating and conceiving of displacement. This deserves reflection, even if determination to wait on one’s own terms in the contingent camp is often ultimately with the goal of handing oneself into a regime of waiting and or destitution on the other side of the border (Darling 2009; 2014). Chapter six (part II) extends these arguments, bringing in work on Black fugitivity (Harney & Moten 2013; Camp 2014; Sojoyner 2017) to further conceptualise the contingent camp as a (limited) freedom-seeking geography of evasion.

Part III has begun to draw out the rationale for thinking about contested, informal border encampment in terms of assemblage, focusing on the forces and processes that tirelessly seek to *reassemble* the camp counter to the dispossessive practices of the state, refusing erasure and endlessly regenerating the threat which authorities seek again to undercut, holding it in a perpetually contingent state. This approach enables us to better “see” or acknowledge modes of spatial smoothing and resistive practice that lead attempts at encampment to perpetuate. It has emphasised the importance of attention to temporality, to

social forms of sheltering and the parallel affective and atmospheric modes of life they may generate. The complexities that make up the absent-present camp are rich and multiple, subversive, as is captured by the metaphor of the rhizome: the root-like phenomenon constantly severed yet always regenerating in new and unpredictable ways.

Conclusion: refrains of dispossession & resistive counter-refrains

The contingent camp is a profoundly punitive contemporary geography. It unsettles preconceived (if already greatly tarnished) ideals of humanitarianism and hospitality towards the displaced person. This chapter has begun to flesh out the conditions in which contingents camps emerge, dynamics specific to their ontology and the biopolitical rationales that underpin them. These themes will be brought to life with empirics and further conceptualised in the chapters to come.

This framework has sought to theoretically position the contingent camp, emphasising the value of thinking about it in terms of assemblage, conflicting processes of territorialisation, and the concepts of the rhizome and the (counter-)refrain. These offer openings for understanding and capturing the permanence and rootedness of an apparently ephemeral phenomenon. Using assemblage and associated concepts as loose theoretical tools, we begin to see and grasp rhythms of both repeated shelter destruction and the counter-refrains displaced people develop in order to resist them, not only through rebuilding but also through other forms of repeated social and atmospheric practice which smooth or work to (re)territorialise border space. The concepts introduced in this framework are porous and profoundly intertwined. Indeed, processes of de- and reterritorialisation, of smoothing and striation, only ever exist in *mixture*, never the remit of just one actor or another (Deleuze & Guattari 2013, 552). The way assemblage thinking is deployed in this thesis also aims to go beyond the simple identification of dynamism and multiplicity, to stimulate critical and profound analysis of the ontology of contingent camps and the racialised power dynamics they illustrate (Weheliye 2014; Kinkaid 2020). These processes and dynamics shall be further worked through, honed and fleshed out in the empirical chapters that follow.

This framework has conceptually unpacked a limited number of primary strands that I identified from the ground as core to the contingent camp. The empirical chapters have been thought and written along and around these strands, accounting for the material, the temporal, atmospheric and affective. Each chapter makes conceptual departures from a conventional assemblage framework and from what has been fleshed out thus far, bringing in further theoretical thought and concepts intertwined with empirics to further expand the proposed reading of the ontology and implications of contingent camps. These chapters focus first on the dispossessive refrains that animate contingent camps (chapter five) and on the environmental racism these acts exacerbate and cause (chapter six part I). They then turn to consider the resistive traces displaced people inscribe on the border landscape and the Black fugitive

modes they evoke (chapter six part II). Finally, chapter seven considers the specific sociality that emerges in contingent camp spaces, namely the reactive counter-refrains nurtured by the displaced in contexts of routine dispossession.

Though writing conventions and clarity of argument demand form and structure, none of these chapters is truly compartmentalizable nor sequential to the others; the assemblage is a dynamic and fluctuating socio-spatial phenomenon happening all at once. In this spirit, the empirical chapters explore struggle and the *in between* of encampment from various angles: material, environmental, atmospheric, affective and social. Moreover, while I have here fleshed out a general framework through which we might begin to understand contingent camps, dynamics of course play out in different ways in different contexts and where different social groups are involved. This formed part of the rationale for investigating two very different case studies during my fieldwork; at one border internal to Europe and one external, along two migration routes broadly ventured upon by groups of people of different nationalities and migrating for a variety of different reasons and goals.

CHAPTER 3 | **SHELTER DISRUPTED**

HOSTILE BORDERLANDS AT TANGIER & CALAIS

Since the signing of the Schengen agreement in 1995, and as a result of changing geopolitics and border control strategies, the spatial arrangements of migrant life in the northern French and northern Moroccan borderlands have shifted. What follows discusses the recent histories of these borderlands, focusing on the issue of shelter: the sequences of events that have led ephemeral, fleeting forms of encampment to become the predominant form of shelter inhabited by migrant people at these sites, and how the presence of these people and their access to shelter has been tolerated, reduced, then actively hindered over the past decades. These geographies are somewhat absurd in nature, the result of incremental shifts in policy and practice. A solid contextual understanding is thus essential for grasping the microlevel dynamics which form the core empirical work presented in this thesis, in chapters five, six and seven. At both sites, the simple fact of *being* at the border - regardless of the act of attempting to cross it - has been criminalised to the extent that shelter is constantly and punitively removed. The emergence of even the most rudimentary, makeshift places of life are perpetually contingent on the destructive practices of state authorities. I approached Calais and Tangier seeking a ground-level sense of how migrant people experience these borderlands, how incremental political “crack downs” on their presence are lived.

Moving from the broad context of my chosen field sites to their everyday specifics, this chapter unpacks how these borderlands came to be so controversial; how the conditions have been created for the active and routine dispossession of the displaced. I describe the borderland contexts I encountered as moulded by their recent histories of migration regulation in policy and practice, shedding light on how spaces of public appearance for migrant people have shrunk. Probing two very different borderland contexts, culturally and geopolitically speaking, it is intriguing to note the extent to which these two sites resonate when considered through the prism of migrant people’s mobilities and the violent regulation of their spaces of life. Juxtaposing scholarly work that discusses the recent historical and political contexts of these sites with the words of the people I met over the course of my fieldwork, I tell the stories of these borderlands, emphasising my respondents’ interpretations of the hostile environments they found themselves living in.

First, I present the Moroccan context, the approach to migration the country has adopted in recent decades and its inconsistencies, before describing how these policies have resulted in an off-limits Tangier for migrant people. This is followed by a discussion of the pre-Jungle history of Calais and its ‘bulldozer’ politics of evicting and destroying or re-appropriating spaces inhabited by migrant people since the early 2000s. I then present two specific places of encampment in parallel, places where autonomous makeshift camps emerged and prompted a violent response from the authorities, leading to the emergence of contingent camps. These places of encampment (the Spanish Cathedral in Tangier and the makeshift Calais Jungle) were powerful last bastions of visible migrant presence when these

cities became increasingly hostile to transit migrants in the mid to late 2010s. The eviction of the Spanish Cathedral occurred during my fieldwork in Tangier, in autumn 2019. The eviction of the Calais Jungle occurred in autumn 2016, while my fieldwork for this thesis was carried out in winter and spring 2020 (also drawing on fieldwork I carried out in Calais in 2017-18). Because of these differences in timeline, I also discuss the French post-Jungle context and barriers to shelter that migrant people at the border have faced since. This lays the groundwork for the rest of the thesis, which looks closely at how informal, furtive dwelling is negotiated in “zero-tolerance” tolerance contexts where migrant people are targeted with routine attacks on their shelter.

Part I | The making of hostile borderlands

Morocco’s inconsistent migration policies

I met Morel through friends in Tangier. Known as an ‘*ancien*,’ he knew Morocco so well that I only realised he was undocumented when we sat down together at a Tangier café for an interview one afternoon. Now in his late thirties, he told me he had just come to the difficult decision of returning home to Cameroon after nearly a decade in Morocco. After several failed attempts to get to Europe using false documents in 2011 and 2012, he tried to make a life for himself in the country. He worked several jobs, and eventually set up his own successful (though informal) restaurant business in Casablanca. Caught in a bureaucratic maze trying to regularise his status and his business brought to a brutal end, he grew exasperated to the point of making one last traumatic and failed attempt to cross the Strait of Gibraltar in a dinghy boat. His narrative was interspersed with reflections on policy shifts, gaps and incoherencies between state discourse and practice. He traced the effects of political shifts onto his personal experiences, from formal aspects like not being able to access shelter, services or a regularised status, to more affective effects like shifting reactions to him in public space and his ability to navigate Tangier with peace of mind. The following extract from our conversation emphasises his distrust of the Moroccan state, and how aware he had become, after nearly a decade in the country, of being a political object whose status shifts according to government agenda:

‘Believe it or not, there was a time when sub-Saharanans were really valued here. Let me explain: it was around the time the King wanted to re-join the African Union.⁷ They made a lot of propaganda, started making videos with Blacks⁸ and all that. They would invite us to all the events they were organising here in Tangier. They valued us a little bit for a while... But then they received EU money - a huge amount - and everything flipped. Morocco always

⁷ Morocco reintegrated the African Union in 2017 having left it 33 years earlier, in 1984, when the Union recognised the independence of Western Sahara from Morocco.

⁸ In my translations of quotations from French, I have tried to stay as true as possible to the terms and vernacular used by my respondents. This also applies in instances where they refer to themselves in terms that may be considered problematic or derogatory and that I avoid in my own analysis, as I consider the terms my respondent used to be a telling aspect of how their experiences of migration have led them to self-identify to certain labels.

looks North for a model you know... they saw how Blacks are treated in Europe, the police chasing them all the time... That's how the image of sub-Saharans here was spoiled.'

Morel, Tangier 29.11.19

Morocco's active involvement in migration control began in 2002. The Moroccan Ministry of the Interior began to develop an explicit border control strategy, and parliament approved a new migration law (02-03) the following year, criminalising irregular entry to or from Morocco and explicitly illegalising *transit* migration through the country (Hannoum 2019). This marked a new, proactive stance on border control by the Moroccan government (Gazzotti 2019; Natter 2021) after which the country actively engaged its strategic position in the management of migration to Europe, mobilising it as a diplomatic and foreign policy opportunity (Gross-Wyrtzen & Gazzotti 2021). Despite being a primary country of departure itself, with a large diaspora in Europe, the Moroccan state racialised irregular emigration through its discourse and policies, framing it as a predominantly "sub-Saharan problem" (Natter 2014). This marked the beginning of almost a decade of racialised violence against migrant people perceived to be in transit through the country. This violence was effectively rendered legitimate by the new government stance: criminalisation by law was mirrored in street-level practices, with a rise in physical crackdowns by police forces on people racialised as sub-Saharan⁹ (Hannoum 2019). Violent raids on informal encampments in forests near the border fences surrounding the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla by Moroccan security forces became a regular occurrence, often combined with the forced dispersal of these people to desert areas at or over the border with Algeria (MSF 2013). By the early 2010s these practices were widely documented by NGOs (MSF 2013), civil society groups and human rights bodies (CNDH 2013), and publicly condemned as constituting serious human rights breaches. Médecins Sans Frontières for example, after publishing a scathing report on the mistreatment of migrant people in the country and at the border, withdrew from Morocco in 2013 on the grounds that humanitarian provision in response to border violence is not the role of a humanitarian medical organisation (Gazzotti 2020).

To appease diplomatic relations with other African states and redeem Morocco's international reputation in the aftermath of these scandals, King Mohammed VI presented a new migration policy in autumn 2013, announcing a regularisation campaign which saw over 20 thousand migrant people granted residency (MDCMREAM 2018, 72). Migrant associations and Moroccan pro-migrant civil society organisations were also legalised (Magallanes-Gonzalez 2021; Natter 2021); these changes were designed to portray the King as a "liberal" monarch and strengthen his legitimacy in the context of the Arab Spring (Natter 2021, 2). The moment marked a policy shift, from an approach that criminalises irregular migration to a "human rights" approach seeking to settle migrant people in the country to

⁹ The label 'Sub-Saharan migrant' is a racialised and often problematic label (Tyszler 2019a). The term 'Sub-Saharan' came to be used in the wake of decolonisation, to refer to formerly colonised countries instead of the formerly used 'Afrique noire.' The neocolonial association of this label with that of 'migrant' racializes people of Black skin colour as criminal 'undesirables' in an illicit state of movement through Morocco (ibid).

prevent them from travelling northwards (Natter 2014). This shift to an integration approach attracted considerable funding from the European Union and its member states, for whom Morocco becoming a destination state was appealing. Considerable funding was released for integration projects - often at the expense of organisations supporting migrant people *in transit*, as I witnessed during my field research. Moreover, like Morel, many migrant people remain suspicious of regularisation because of how they have otherwise been treated by authorities in Morocco. Several of those I met expressed scepticism of their ability to integrate in the country because of everyday racism and discrimination, as well as because of the shortcomings of the Moroccan state in providing for many of its *own* citizens. They were well aware of such matters as they often found themselves living in closest proximity to Moroccan population groups who, despite their citizenship, are deeply neglected by the state with little access to shelter, healthcare and so on. The regularisation campaigns offered an opening to remain in Morocco, but it also delegitimised the presence of those who had chosen *not* to opt in, or who did not have their request for regularisation granted.

The Moroccan state also co-opted a humanitarian discourse, positioning Morocco (as many EU states have done) as a benevolent transit state willing to engage in political cooperation with other nations with the main goal of preventing loss of life in informal attempts at crossing into Europe. In a speech delivered at the 30th African Union summit in Addis Ababa in January 2018, King Mohammed VI expressed:

‘Since 2015, over 6.200 African migrants have lost their lives in the Mediterranean Sea. [...] It is our duty to act! More than ever before, it is time for our continent to treat migration in a spirit of complete solidarity. Our collective wisdom will be our main asset to roll out the African Agenda for Migration. Union is the key to success and intra-African cooperation is the path.’

King Mohammed VI (MDCMREAM 2018)

However, just a few months later in summer 2018, Morocco let large numbers of migrant people set out into the treacherous waters of the Strait of Gibraltar in plastic boats. Bakary, an Ivorian man in his 50s who was kicking himself for having missed his chance at crossing on that occasion, explained: ‘Morocco is playing a game. If Europe doesn’t fund Morocco, Morocco lets us go. We call it the “*yallah*,” which means “let’s go” in their language. They did it at the time of the Eid celebrations in 2018’. Indeed, in the days surrounding Eid al-Adha that year, over a thousand people made the Strait of Gibraltar crossing to Spain, arriving on its southernmost shores and generating unprecedented humanitarian chaos [interview Tarifeños Solidarios, Tarifa July 2019]. This event, which attracted considerable attention from Spanish and European media, appeared to have been intentional on the part of the Moroccan authorities, a spectacular reminder of their ability to “open the tap” on migration to

Europe at any time by turning a blind eye.¹⁰ On the 26th of July 2018, *El País* reported that shelters in the region were under considerable strain with hundreds left to sleep in the streets or on the decks of rescue ships (Cañas & Saiz 2018). Numbers of crossings remained high throughout the summer. The head of search and rescue operations for Salvamento Marítimo in Tarifa described:

‘I have been working here since 1995, and every month we have some emergencies or alerts regarding migrants. But last summer was much harder work. Numbers were multiplied by ten or more... We usually rescue between 2,000 and 3,000 people in one year, but last year we rescued more than 20,000 people.’

Salvamento, Tarifa 12.07.19

Spain raised the alarm about the increase in border crossings (Refugee Rights Europe 2019, 4) and committed to greater cooperation with Morocco on border control. The effects of this renewed cooperation emerge in the same respondent’s narrative of search and rescue events since:

‘This year the figures have reduced considerably. In that area [the Strait of Gibraltar] we have very few emergencies or alerts regarding sub-Saharan people. At the moment, most alerts are for Moroccan people. Maybe because cooperation between Morocco and Spain and Europe is higher. [...] Morocco is working very hard in the area to control the movement of [Sub-Saharan] migrants at the moment.’

Following investment by Spain and the EU, and in the aftermath of this large number of crossings in 2018, Morocco indeed reinforced its cooperation, performing a massive arrest-and-disperse campaign. These events are colloquially referred to as “*rafles*” meaning “roundups” or “raids”. Through summer and autumn 2018 in particular, violence against Black people was widespread and intense (GADEM 2018a) particularly against those living in proximity to the northern coast or to the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla (namely in Tangier, Tetouan, Nador and Oujda). A respondent working for a non-governmental human rights organisation in Tangier described the situation to me as ‘a constant hunt for the Black man characterised by massive arrest campaigns targeting Black people often regardless of age, gender or administrative status’ [interview OMDH 19.09.19]. Following arrest, people were put onto buses and dispersed to cities and towns of the centre or south of Morocco – far from the strategic border crossing points (Gazzotti & Hagan 2020).

Tangier: Homes without thresholds

‘You know that street in the medina where the Senegalese restaurant is? Yeah, that street used to be a *petite Afrique*. There were loads of great places to eat, all the brothers would hang out there. Ever since the raids though, the place is deserted. You can still see the sign

¹⁰ The Moroccan government again demonstrated its ability to deploy this strategy in May 2021, when over 8,000 Moroccan and sub-Saharan migrants crossed from Morocco into Ceuta unhindered by Moroccan border guards, following a diplomatic crisis between the two countries. The trigger was that Spain received the Western Sahara independence movement leader Brahim Ghali for Covid-19 treatment (Ferrer-Gallardo & Gabrielli 2022).

painted above the other restaurant - Mama Africa. But those shutters haven't been up for a long time.'

Diallo, Tangier 06.11.19

Renewed and intensified criminalisation of migrant people in the northern Moroccan borderlands since 2018 has made their access to shelter a perpetual struggle. This problem has been most visible in cities of the north and namely Tangier, where flats or rooms rented out by migrant people came to be routinely raided by police. 'Nearly all Blacks were living in the same neighbourhoods, Mesnana and Boukhalef. When you would go there it would be like being in Abidjan or Yaoundé because there were Black people everywhere,' Morel described, remembering a time when everyday life in Tangier was easier. He goes on: 'Maybe the Moroccans saw that as a threat'. Police forces were previously more reluctant to intervene, only expelling people after several conflicts broke out between them and the owners of the houses they were squatting, but in the 2018 raids police no longer showed reticence to intervene in landlord-tenant matters. Their raids were active and relentless, often also to the frustration of landlords who saw their properties damaged as police forced their way in. Local authorities reportedly asked landlords not to rent to migrant people,¹¹ and racist, makeshift signs such as the one below emerged, hung in the lobby of an apartment. Morel describes:

'How do you think people have ended up living in the forest? A year or so ago hardly anyone had to. People were renting rooms in Mesnana or Boukhalef. But then the raids started, police started bashing their way into houses to get people out and send them south. [...] Often, when you come back you can't even get into the house again. So even for the Blacks who have the money to rent a room... it's nearly impossible. It's hard enough if you're Black and have papers, so you can imagine that without papers it's very difficult to find a place.'

Morel, Tangier 29.11.19



'It is strictly forbidden to rent apartments to Africans'

Photo shared with author by Diallo, 23.11.19

¹¹ A similar strategy of enlisting citizens to help render the city hostile was apparent in Calais in late 2013, when migrant people and activists had established several squats in the city centre. The city's mayor put out a call on Facebook asking citizens to denounce any attempts by 'No Borders [activists] or migrants' to squat buildings, so the police can promptly intervene and the authorities seal off the building (Van Isacker 2020). This 'not only facilitated the city's goals of spatial segregation, but further encouraged racist stereotyping and populist anti-migrant sentiment' (ibid, 80).

However basic the houses that migrant people in Tangier managed to rent or squat were,¹² they offered relative safety and, quite simply, a place in which to be. However, they were far from immune to the hostilities waged against their residents beyond its doors. Aware of the criminalisation of migrant people, landlords could easily manipulate their lodgers. Charly, a young Ivorian man who after great difficulty managed to find a room for him, his partner and their new-born baby described:

‘The landlord is a drug addict, I swear. He’s been asking the Black girl who just moved into the other room to pay next month’s rent already. He got her to pay a cash deposit too. I thought I’d made it clear he shouldn’t mess with us like that. We’ve only been in the room for 2 months and he’s crazy - he even took our doors! Until yesterday the new girl didn’t have a bedroom door, then he took the door to the shower room, then the one to our kitchen - at one point we found the door to our bedroom had even gone! We had to go out and find old bits of doors left out on the street to patch something together.’

Charly, Tangier 29.11.19

This removal of doors is a striking image of how the most basic threshold is compromised in Tangier, even in the context of a brick-and-cement room. Migrant people seemed most able to hold down a room when their landlord was an unsavoury character eager for discretion. After a room was raided once however, the illusion of safety would wane. Olivier from Cameroon explained how he got to a point where he considered that living according to the rules of a landlord wasn’t worth the effort:

‘I was living in a house but eventually decided not to bother trying to rent a room anymore. In the last place, the landlord would tell us to leave the house at 6 am every day because he didn’t want the police to break the door down after seeing us go in and out. So we had to get out at 6 am - sometimes even earlier - to hang around in the forest until it was safe to come back, at 11pm or midnight. If that’s how it’s going to be, what’s the point in paying for a room in the first place?’

Olivier, Tangier 16.10.19

By early summer 2018, shelter was so difficult to access and hold down in the city, and policing so intense, that many migrant people resorted to taking shelter on the grounds of Tangier’s Spanish Cathedral, which we will return to later on. Turning now to France, the gradual squeezing of shelter solutions for migrant people in Tangier is similar to the gradual squeezing of options for shelter that migrant people underwent in Calais. The following section discusses the pre-Jungle history of shelter at the Calais border.

¹² The homes I visited during my fieldwork were very basic, from an underground car garage to a windowless room (formerly a large storage cupboard), a former corner shop, and a former laundry/storage room on the roof of a building. Only in some cases were these spaces equipped with water or kitchens (residents usually brought in gas stoves for cooking), and scarce renting possibilities as well as rent prices above the norm meant that people would live several to a room. Sheets and blankets were often draped from ceilings to divide areas off from one another and establish some privacy.

Calais: Bulldozing shelter in a hostile borderland

Calais has been a key point of passage to the UK for migrant people in large numbers since the early 1990s. An emergency shelter¹³ for migrant people was opened by the French government in the village of Sangatte, eight kilometres west of Calais, in July 1999. This marked the first (and one of the only) explicit infrastructural acknowledgments of the crisis at hand at this border. The camp at Sangatte was set up in a former Eurotunnel warehouse (Courau 2007a; Thomas 2011), ironically the cross-Channel company whose activities were complicated by migrant people attempting to board their shuttles or cross the tunnel under the Channel on foot. Although the warehouse, under the management of the Red Cross, was initially envisioned as a short-term, temporary shelter solution for undocumented foreign families and people who had been living on the streets of Calais until 2002, it sheltered migrant people fleeing conflict situations like Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran (ibid). Locally, the centre was controversial from the moment it opened, with some signposts to the area reportedly modified to read “Sangattistan” (Courau 2007b). Designed to shelter 800 people, numbers gradually rose to as many as 2,000 by the time it was shut down in December 2002 (ibid). Sangatte was a town of just over 4,000 residents at the time. Over the three years of its existence, an estimated 75,000 people passed through the centre (Walters 2008). It was closed under pressure from the United Kingdom; as a non-Schengen country, the UK considered the space to be a reservoir of clandestine immigrants that France had chosen to tolerate by sheltering.¹⁴ Then-Minister of the Interior Nicholas Sarkozy said the closure was intended to send a message to the world that there’s no longer any point in ‘miserables from the end of the world’ coming to seek a place in this warehouse (Dupuy 2002).

The particularity of this camp, and what makes it so important to note in the history of migrant response in northern France, is that it offered a form of unconditional shelter to people in transit. This was not a camp seeking to control and contain its residents, or to sort and funnel them into the state system. French Red Cross management staff constantly reaffirmed its humanitarian rather than political role, reiterating that it was not there to “solve” the migration issue but to offer humanitarian support (Courau 2007). The Sangatte centre effectively operated as an exit point, a waiting area for those seeking passage from France to the UK, with no strings attached. The experiment has never since been repeated, and such a model of unconditional shelter is unimaginable in the political climate that has come about since. In 2003, the warehouse was demolished altogether, as though to raze not only its infrastructure but also its memory and any possibility of it reopening, setting the tone for the future of shelter at the border.

¹³ Centre d’Hébergement et d’Accueil d’Urgence.

¹⁴ In exchange for the closure of the Sangatte centre, which happened ahead of schedule, the UK committed to taking over a thousand Kurdish asylum seekers and 200-300 Afghans who already had family in the UK. The list of candidates was drawn up by the UNHCR. These groups were provided 3-month work visas and offered a job in line with their qualifications. The 300-400 other camp residents were to receive a residency permit from France and a work permit, along with hundreds of others living outside of the camp (Gas 2002).

Traditionally a working class, socialist-voting city, Calais underwent a political shift in 2008, when communist mayor Jacky Hénin (2001-8) was replaced by right-wing candidate Natacha Bouchart (2008-present), renowned for her hard-line on migration control. Bouchart actively contested squats in the city and attempted to rid it of all humanitarian infrastructures (Gueunebaud 2015). Following the closure of Sangatte and up until 2014, migrant people sought shelter in abandoned houses, warehouses and forests across the city. Many physical buildings were destroyed or bricked up, in what seemed to be ultimate, prohibitive acts for forbidding migrant people from taking shelter (for a detailed account see Boutinova 2016, 50-60 or Van Isacker 2020). The bulk of aid provision fell to local citizen organisations, namely *Association SALAM* and *La Belle Étoile* who organised daily food distributions despite their criminalisation by authorities (Rigby & Schlembach 2013). At the end of 2014, there were between 1,000 and 1,500 people living informally in Calais across eight or nine different squats and forest encampments (interview Auberge 18.10.17). However in March 2015, local authorities evicted migrant people from the city centre altogether, and forced them to gather instead on a *terrain vague* in an industrial area that was to become the Calais Jungle. Once again, the sites they had occupied in the city centre were cleared, fenced off or transformed into social housing, a sports hall, an eco-neighbourhood, while formerly squatted buildings were either demolished or sealed with metal sheets (Boutinova 2016; Van Isacker 2020).

With the very possibility of presence and shelter at the border rendered so challenging for migrant people in Tangier and Calais in recent years, the borderlands more than ever become places of discomfort and threat, both at policy and street-level. While the antagonism of local people may be understandable, when it is reinforced by the hostility of public authorities and police, it is legitimised and exacerbated. In such contexts and without shelter, the visible presence and being of migrant people at the border further becomes problematic. Safe spaces are few and far between and migrant people cluster within them. Two such relatively safe spaces where migrant people have gathered and been able to occupy space in defiance stand out: Tangier's Spanish Cathedral and the notorious Calais Jungle.

Part II | Last bastions of migrant presence

The Calais Jungle

'I saw the Jungle for the first time in 2015 and I can tell you it didn't look anything like France. I thought I'd landed in the streets of Dakar or something... all these little dirt-road alleys. It was like another country. [...] People didn't have much, but it was lively.'

Anas, volunteer Calais 15.01.18

The site the Calais Jungle emerged on was effectively designated as a tolerated site of encampment to segregate migrant people from Calaisian life. It was a place where migrant people might live out of

sight, perhaps even out of mind. The piece of land of around 20 hectares, five kilometres from Calais's city centre, had just been given to the Conservatoire du Littoral (the French equivalent of the UK's National Trust) as compensation for natural areas that had been destroyed in the process of expanding Calais' port [Conservatoire du Littoral interview 10.06.20]. When migrant people were directed there in spring 2015, their settlement was intended as a temporary solution: the site was destined to undergo 'renaturing' under its new conservation owners, to ironically be restored as a natural place of transit for migrating birds. In an interview, a representative of the Conservatoire described the site at that time: 'some parts were a former landfill site, another was an asbestos-infected recreational centre which was destined for destruction anyway' [10.06.20]. The land the Jungle emerged on was marshy and, ironically for its name, for the most part sparse of trees. The 'asbestos-infected recreational centre' operated as a day centre where *La Vie Active* organisation, commissioned by the state, served a daily meal, offered showers, phone charging facilities and accommodation for women and children.¹⁵ A sprawling, village-like camp emerged to the south of the centre and, without adequate infrastructure, conditions were terrible. A Médecins du Monde employee described:

'Considering the emergency situation that was playing out in Calais, we deployed our emergency desk on French soil for the first time ever in the history of Médecins du Monde - it usually only intervenes in international conflict settings like Yemen or Sudan. We deployed the desk with all that that implies in terms of financing, security, protocols and procedures. It was a striking thing to happen. [...] Everything [that happened in the Jungle] had immediate repercussions in the media and in international politics.'

Medical aid worker, phone interview 11.07.18

The Jungle was a grey space (Yiftachel 2009): neither totally autonomous nor a state-governed or official humanitarian camp. During an interview, I asked a UNHCR field officer if the agency had ever considered establishing a humanitarian camp in Calais. They replied:

'You know, a humanitarian camp is in a *failed* country. You cannot have a humanitarian camp in a country that is capable of providing accommodation. A camp is... it was not adequate here'

UNHCR field office 03.07.18¹⁶

Even when thousands of people were living in the camp, France did not declare a humanitarian crisis on its soil and the European Union did not intervene, leaving migrant people in France to live in extreme and inhumane conditions for a protracted period. Calais falls into a middle ground where shelter is *actively not provided* by the state, and specialised agencies are unwilling to fill a gap which the state could fill itself (interview, UNHCR 2018). The lack of authority on the part of any humanitarian agency

¹⁵ This EU-funded centre came after Calais mayor Natacha Bouchart threatened to close the city's port in September 2014 if no further support was offered to the city on managing its migrant population (Bosworth 2020)

¹⁶ This interview was carried out as part of collaborative fieldwork for an article with Prof. Dorothea Hilhorst.

in the Jungle, along with its rapid increase in residents (estimated at 8-10,000 by summer 2016) meant that the place of life evolved quickly and organically, as residents sought to adapt it as best possible for their survival. Davies et al. (2017) fittingly read the makeshift camp as a space of ‘violent *inaction*’, in which undesired communities are governed through neglect, left to live in degrading conditions. In reaction to this neglect, the number of NGOs and grassroots groups present on the ground multiplied; student organisations, activists, faith-based groups and so on came to offer their support in the camp alongside established national organisations. As the numbers of ‘volunteer humanitarians’ (Sandri 2017) or ‘citizen volunteers’ (Anghel & Grierson 2020) multiplied, the camp became a unique site of unrestricted encounter between European citizens and migrant people. The camp took on semi-permanent characteristics over time, as its infrastructure improved and gathered political and social significance through international media coverage, which reinforced its identity and, more than ever before, created a platform for migrant peoples’ political expression and visibility.



Orthodox Church & the ‘Ecole Laïque du Chemin des Dunes’ | Photos by author, Calais ‘Jungle’, August 2016

The camp came to have a mosque, an Orthodox Catholic church, language schools offering English and French, sports groups, a Wi-Fi bus, community kitchens, and many migrant people ran their own restaurants (well documented by Plotain 2016), barbers or grocery shops. These constructions were makeshift, yet contested the “violent inaction” of the state by independently making the camp a space of social life in which the presence of migrant people is explicit and visible. Mould highlights the city-ness, the *place-ness* of the Calais Jungle, describing it as ‘a site of cultural and social richness’ (2015, 4) with ‘ingeniously designed shopfronts, the impressively sacred churches and mosques’ (ibid, 15). He qualifies the initiatives carried out in the Jungle, led by camp residents assisted by volunteers, as a ‘collaborative place-making process’ (ibid, 11), referring to Lefebvrian ‘autogestion’ as the moment when a group rejects passive acceptance of its conditions, preferring instead to master them. It was also a place of explicit political protest. For example, seven Iranian men sewed their lips together to protest their deplorable living conditions and the violent demolition of their makeshift homes that day (Hayden 2016), in a powerful performance of injustice that attracted media attention and prompted debate.

In the Calais Jungle, migrant people had clear ownership of a space marked with boundaries and

thresholds, unofficial as these may have been. While police were numerous in the area, they would rarely venture into the camp (Tinti & Reitano 2016). The spatial appropriation by those living there and the illicit activities playing out in the camp unsettled the authorities, as emerges in the following description:

‘Amid fears that the Jungle had become a den of organised crime, the French government began regular patrols throughout the camp searching for weapons and suspicious persons. The patrols, in which heavily armed police cautiously move their way through the Jungle, look more like an occupying power trying to send a message to natives than a local force trying to police its own territory.’ (ibid 2016, 246)

Encampment at the Spanish Cathedral

‘No joke, [in late 2018] we would just be sitting at café terraces and we’d see Black Africans running away from police through the streets and up to the Church.’

Mehdi, Tangier local, 12.11.2019

Up a hill, between two crossroads busy with turquoise taxis and along the road that marks the beginning of Iberia, the Spanish quarter of Tangier, lies Notre-Dame-de-l’Assomption. Though often referred to as “*L’Eglise*” (the Church), the blocky modern, pastel-yellow and grey construction is a Cathedral. The building is imposing; tall and wide with a high bell tower and black gates surrounding its grounds. These gates operate a protective function yet are a symbolic reminder of the carceral threat that lingers over migrant people in this city. There is a strangeness about the place when you first encounter it: a place visibly dominated by Black people in a city where Black bodies are otherwise reduced to a shadowlike presence. This site was (and is) a last bastion of migrant presence in the northern Moroccan city. Although some other churches in the city also offer support to migrant people, namely Tangier’s French Church and Evangelical Protestant Church, the Spanish Cathedral is the most visible in its support. It has long been frequented by migrant people who visit its basement, which serves as headquarters for an organisation often referred to as ‘*la Caritas*’ but officially called the TAM (Tanger Accueil Migrants), which offers cultural mediation, administrative support, cultural activities, showers and washing machines to those in need. In the context of raids and fierce policing, some migrant people began living on its grounds. It was the only place in Tangier in which migrant people were safe from arrest. While the encampment that took root at the Cathedral was on a much smaller scale than that of the Calais Jungle, it played a similarly important symbolic role in a similarly hostile border context.



Spanish Cathedral | Photo by author, Tangier, Oct. 2019

Bakary spent several months living at the Cathedral. He described: ‘all we Blacks had the same problem, so there were loads of us sleeping there. There were guys from almost all of the communities - Guineans, Senegalese, Ivorians... but most of them were Cameroonian because they got there first’ [20.11.19]. Similarly to the Calais Jungle, the Spanish Cathedral is a place widely known as somewhere people can offer assistance to the displaced if they wish to. Koumen described: ‘Travelling Moroccans [those based in Europe who travel home in the summer] or European associations would drive up to the Church in 4x4s to drop off blankets, sheets and mattresses for us.’ It was a space of social interaction and aid, but also a protective space. Bakary explained: ‘the police problems turned the Church into a sort of Spanish Embassy - everyone knew, just make it through those gates, and you’re safe. The police won’t go in there’ [20.11.19]. A TAM employee, formerly an undocumented migrant seeking passage to Europe himself, confirmed the protective role that the space of the Church took on: ‘you see, the grounds of the Cathedral are pretty much Vatican territory. One time, when the authorities tried to kick everyone off the grounds, the whole hierarchy was at the gates: the police, the prefect [*préfet*],¹⁷ the King’s prefect... The archbishop of Tangier was sitting on the ground he was so overwhelmed. But the authorities couldn’t do anything against his will because it’s Vatican territory.’ He went on, ‘the lowest they ever sunk was sending plain clothes police to the area around the Cathedral, to catch people right after they passed the gates out into the city’ [28.10.2019].

People would not sleep inside the building of the Church itself, but on its grounds and within its

¹⁷ The *préfet* is the state representative in a department or region; the *préfecture* is the administrative headquarters of that department or region.

gates, making the space rather a peculiar form of shelter, one which offered no roof overhead but *did* offer a protective threshold. Some people would take shelter on the grounds by night only, and for those who lived there, the nature of the encampment on the Cathedral grounds was hyper-temporary. One of few women living there, Nora from Ivory Coast, described: ‘We could put out our blankets and everything after the evening mass, around 8pm or so, but we had to make sure we had packed it all up again before the morning mass’ [20.12.19]. Koumen, from Cameroon confirmed: ‘The archbishop would give us a big sheet of plastic to cover all of our stuff with. We would unpack it all at night and pack it all up again early in the morning, so the camp would turn back into a church again during the day.’ Within this safe space itself then, there was clear pressure on limiting the visibility of the encampment by preventing materialities from gathering there; to prevent it from becoming more permanent. The sense of security of those living there was undercut by the ephemerality of their encampment, pre-empting the even more precarious forms of shelter they were soon to experience in contingent camps.

Both the Calais Jungle and the Spanish Cathedral encampment, though on different scales, shared the characteristic of being very public, even performative places of migrant presence - which also made them threatening to the authorities who sought to get rid of or invisibilise them. By occupying these places, migrant people engage in spatial smoothing: they challenge the hierarchy and order seeking to deter and invisibilise them (Deleuze and Guattari 2013). These spaces produced ‘counter visibilities’ (Hammami 2016) which expressed a desire for the visibility and recognition of the migrant person. By appearing in contexts hostile to them, migrant people become ‘subjugated and empowered actors who seek to wrest legitimacy from an existing state apparatus that depends upon the public space of appearance for its theatrical self-constitution’ (Butler 2011). Both places of life allowed migrant people to contest the frames attributed to their otherwise shadow-like or running bodies in urban space. The very visibility and performativity of these spaces however made them particularly threatening in hostile borderland contexts, and both were short-lived.

Part III | Striating space: spectacular evictions

The Calais Jungle and the camp at the Spanish Cathedral in Tangier were both bare spaces of presence and survival, sought out and negotiated by migrant people to whom other shelter was refused. These places had clearly defined thresholds and posed a threat to sovereign power. The inevitable state response was destruction. Determined acts of striation (Deleuze & Guattari 2013) were set in motion, undoing these places and rendering them off-limits to the displaced who appropriated them. In the following sections, I discuss how the evictions of these places were carried out and what their implications were for the criminalisation of migrant people and their modes of dwelling.

Expelled from the Cathedral

Through informal conversations with people working onsite, I learned ahead of the eviction that rumours of illicit activity at the Cathedral were creating serious dilemmas for the employees of the TAM and the Cathedral clergy, for whom the protection of migrant people was a core concern, yet who did not want to facilitate exploitation or smuggling. As an informal place of life for people largely dispossessed of economic means but benefitting from immunity from the authorities, the Cathedral encampment had come to be rather a lawless place. Although the TAM organisation and the clergy were in constant interaction with the community, seeking to maintain a peaceful and cohesive social order, by night dynamics could be violent and uncomfortable for some of those living there. Bakary described:

‘We were *there*, we saw what was going on but we couldn’t do anything [about it]. It took the priests a while to figure things out because they don’t sleep there. During the day it’s a church, an association, everyone goes in and out, hangs out on the steps. But after nightfall nobody would see what was happening except us. [...] At one point, people were so free at the church, so at ease. The priest would hand out donations every evening after seven o’clock mass. Sometimes we’d get 100 or 50 dirhams each. But the Cameroonians got bold, thought they could get away with anything and decided every new person had to pay 200 dirhams to sleep at the church. Refuse? Then they’ll beat you up. They’re thugs. They have their boss, they split the money between them. People gave them what they wanted because they were more afraid of the police than of them - and they needed some place to sleep didn’t they?’

Bakary, Tangier 20.11.19

At three o’clock one morning in October 2019, the clergy finally authorised the arrest of the 35 or 40 people living on its grounds. This followed the clergy making several direct requests to them to leave of their own volition. The authorisation for police intervention was exceptional, marking a symbolic rupture because the Cathedral had heretofore always protected those living on its grounds. This extract from an interview with Olivier, who lived on the grounds for six months, describes how the expulsion played out:

So how did it happen?

Hundreds of police came and circled the Church. No one noticed because they came in the middle of the night, at three am. They must have studied how things go on here for a while to know exactly what time most people are sleeping. They arrested our brothers who were begging at the traffic lights ‘round the corner first, so they wouldn’t warn us what was about to happen. Then, they stationed their vans everywhere, *everywhere* around the Church, but a bit hidden. Even if you got up in the night to piss you wouldn’t have seen them coming. I can’t even pretend we tried to run or defend ourselves.

It doesn’t sound like anyone could escape.

Everyone was taken. No one escaped. It was premeditated, an ambush. Stuff like that happens, often even. But... not at the Church. We couldn’t imagine something like that happening, that’s why we were just sleeping there like that, not even on our guard. We thought that in a hundred years, they would never enter the Church.

Olivier, Tangier 16.10.19

For those living onsite, the forced eviction represented a serious betrayal and the end of the Cathedral as a safe and trustworthy place. They were forced to leave without any of their possessions, handcuffed, brought to the police station, put on a bus and dropped near Safi, 500 kilometres south of Tangier. About 20 of them, who had a little money or were able to source some fast, managed to travel back to Tangier, while the others travelled to Marrakesh or Casablanca to find money to travel back or to rest for a while, usually with friends living in these cities where the policing of Black people is less extreme. It is with those who returned in the days and weeks following their removal that I carried out the core of my ethnography.¹⁸

The End of the Calais Jungle

‘[The demolition] was a good thing and it was a bad thing. On the good side, leaving people to live in the mud was a scandal. On the bad side, it wasn’t handled very well - people’s homes were destroyed and they were just shoved on to buses without knowing where they were going, told “you’ll have a better life there” [...] For a lot of people, it wasn’t really a sustainable solution. They had a rest yeah, gathered their strength, but it wasn’t long before they started coming back.’

Anas, Calais 15.01.18

As mentioned in the introduction, the Calais Jungle was one of several spectacular manifestations of the “European migration crisis.” No matter the side of the debate you were on, Calais was a national issue and place of crisis in the eyes of the public. The Jungle was an intolerable reflection of how France was handling the situation. Though informal settlements of people have existed in France for decades and very much still do (namely Roma groups living in shantytowns across the country),¹⁹ the visibility of “new” migrant groups brought about by intensive media coverage during this period, along with the importance of migration issues on political agendas at this time, pressed the government to act.

Nearing the end of his presidency in September 2016, François Hollande announced that the Calais Jungle would be dismantled. Addressing an audience of civil servants in the northern French port city, he stated three main goals: ‘guaranteeing the safety of Calaisians, maintaining public order, and providing refugees with dignified living standards’ (Hollande 2016). His speech is rich in references to noble republican ideals: ‘France is a state of rights. A state of rights protects its people,’ and ‘those suffering a difficult situation who require solidarity’ (ibid). Many perceived President Hollande’s framing of the destruction of the camp as an act of humanitarianism in line with French values as hypocritical considering his inaction up until that point. The authorities arranged the dismantling as a

¹⁸ Their peers waited until the spring or summer to return to Tangier, with my respondents telling me numbers around the city centre had risen to pre-Cathedral eviction numbers by July 2020.

¹⁹ In an article for *Le Monde* published in October 2017, Baumard writes that a census found there are 571 known shantytowns (including encampments) in France inhabited by a total of approximately 16,000 people of whom 36% are minors (2017b). The ‘myth’ that shantytowns have disappeared from the French landscape is false (Gastaut in Baumard 2017b), and not only a concern for northern France and Paris.

media “performance”: 700 journalists from around the world came to Calais to see how France would handle the eviction. In Britain, the story made the front page of every daily newspaper (*Le Monde* 2016).

Considering the sprawl of the Jungle and its density, its ‘cityness’ and role as a primary place of shelter, survival and solidarity for so many people, its demolition was experienced as a violent act of urbicide (Ramadan 2009, 156) by many. Many resisted the demolition while others sent their own shelters up in flame. Others were glad to be able to access state-provided shelter while they waited out their asylum process at last. A UNHCR field officer explained that the agency considered the Jungle in large part symptomatic of an accommodation crisis for asylum-seekers in France: though many of those living in the makeshift camp were seeking passage to the UK, many others were simply living there while waiting out their French asylum application process (interview UNHCR 2018; Agier et al. 2018). In the absence of a state-provided place to live, they chose to live in Calais, among people who shared their situation and nationality.

After the demolition of the Jungle, the government dispersed its inhabitants to CAOs (Welcome and Orientation Centres) scattered across the country. These centres were opened at short notice, causing panic in some localities under-prepared for the arrivals. Centres were set up in retirement homes, disused army barracks or summer camp accommodation, where the same staff was often kept on though the population group at hand had rather different needs (Agier et al. 2018, 127). This constituted a hasty disperse-contain-process strategy according to which migrant people were brought to accommodation centres for administrative processing. Similar to the arrest-and-disperse operations rolled out in northern Morocco (Gazzotti & Hagan 2020), though less brutal and delivering people to accommodation centres, the main goal of these operations appeared to be to physically and forcefully remove migrant people from the border, forcing them to enact what Tazzioli describes as ‘convoluted geographies,’ whereby containment is performed through enforced mobility (2018, 2768). Crucially, former camp residents were promised that their cases would be considered regardless of the Dublin III Regulation:²⁰ that their asylum requests would be processed in France regardless of other European countries they may have passed through before.²¹ To manage these asylum seekers the state began to invest in the processing system, and the number of accommodation centres nationwide gradually increased. This complexified system of dispersal to places of containment where a migrant person’s

²⁰ The Dublin III Regulation is an agreement between European member states whereby the first country an asylum seeker arrives in is responsible for processing her or his asylum claim. This means any country an asylum seeker proceeds to beyond the country of first arrival has the option of sending them back there. In 2000, the Eurodac fingerprint database was set up to determine the country of first entry: authorities must take migrants’ fingerprints when they arrive and submit them to the database, or risk facing European sanctions (Babels 2017, 15). It is because of this system that many migrant people are afraid to claim asylum in a country that is not their country of first entry: for fear of being sent back to a country overburdened with applications and offering few opportunities for their future.

²¹ These promises however were not always kept, with some *préfectures* circumventing the promise and attempting to relocate asylum seekers to their first recorded country of entry to the EU according to the Dublin III Regulation. This led many asylum seekers to leave the centres they had been placed in to travel back to the border (Baumard 2017a).

administrative status might be assessed marked a shift towards a desire for greater control over migrant people. The possibility of accessing state shelter was presented as “unconditional” – so long as that shelter was away from the border and allowed for a person’s administrative status to be read (see also Scott-Smith 2020b).

The Cathedral encampment and the Calais Jungle were both evicted in determined acts of spatial obliteration, depriving the migrant person who inhabited them of any sense of safety or rootedness in the borderlands. In France, the eviction was justified on humanitarian grounds: those who chose not to seek a formal status in the country were framed as criminal and intolerable, ungrateful for the hospitality of the state (Hagan 2020). The following section briefly discusses the Calais border context in the aftermath of the demolition of the Jungle in late 2016, the political landscape and strategies in place to regulate migrant presence at the border since.

Calais: a crisis of accommodation

‘In all this country, there is no place for us to be safe from the rain’, an Iranian man writes to me over *WhatsApp* one night in January 2020 on the Utopia56²² mobile phone. It was around 9pm, and I had just informed him that there wouldn’t be any emergency shelter available for him for the night. Driving through the industrial zone where the majority of displaced people in Calais were living at that time, shuttling those for whom we had managed to secure shelter to their pick-up points, I contemplated the dark, the rain, the cold beyond the windscreen of the van, bundled up in coat, hat and scarf. ‘I’m sorry,’ I type, ‘we can try again for you tomorrow?’ Expressions of a sense of abandonment on the part of the displaced we worked to support were not uncommon. Generally, it was not so much anger that shone through as unsurprised resignation to a life without shelter in a borderland stripped of just that.

While shelter provision has been controversial in northern France since the demolition of the Sangatte camp in 2002, it has been even more so in the aftermath of the demolition of the Calais Jungle. Migrant people’s attempts at establishing shelter at the border have since been attacked by police forces on a near-daily basis and in a number of ways, as shall be described in detail in chapter five. Following investments in accommodation for asylum seekers, an ultimatum was effectively put to migrant people in Calais: leave the border zone and be sheltered, or stay at the border and suffer an absence of shelter enforced through relentless and intrusive policing. This approach was taken on and reinforced under Emmanuel Macron, elected President in spring 2017. This extract from a speech the French President gave to police forces in Calais in January 2018 is particularly telling:

‘If migrants don’t accept the propositions for shelter that are systematically made to them by state services, if they refuse that their fingerprints are taken according to the Dublin

²² Utopia56 is the main humanitarian group whose activities I took part in during my field research.

regulation, if they commit offences, notably by damaging lorries or private property, then they do so actively and are held responsible. [...] We owe them this truth: to stay in Calais, building makeshift homes in the undergrowth and marshlands, sometimes squats, is a dead end. The alternative is clear and open: to be hosted in accommodation centres where each person's situation will be examined with great attention.'

Emmanuel Macron, Calais 16.01.18

This speech marked a turning point in the regulation of migrant presence at the border, and one which is central to this thesis: people would no longer be neglected and tolerated, but actively policed. The Macron government committed to a “zero point of fixation” border policy: the re-emergence of a makeshift camp would under no circumstances be tolerated. The violence targeting these spaces of encampment is designed to force the displaced into ‘traps of humanitarianism’ and containment (Tazzioli 2019; Van Isacker 2019) embodied by the ambiguous institutional-humanitarian camp. Yet migrant people have continued to travel to the northern French border in their hundreds (2017-2018) and thousands (2019-2020). With no real change in European asylum policy and namely the continued enforcement of the Dublin Regulation, zero camp tolerance has not led migrant people to disappear, but rather to live furtive lives in the borderlands in scattered encampments around Calais, Grande-Synthe and along the northern coast. The strategy of dispersing people to centres that deliver humanitarian assistance on the terms of the state and in exchange for a person's administrative legibility resonates with the Moroccan shift in humanitarian approach described earlier in this chapter, whereby considerable funding is released for projects for migrant people to integrate in Morocco, at the expense of organisations supporting those in transit.

Three years on from the demolition of the Jungle, at the time of my doctoral field research, accommodation opportunities for migrant people in the border zone (with the exception of the few hosted by local people) were short term and scarce. Part of working with Utopia 56 consisted of facilitating migrant people's access to accommodation provided by the SAMU Social or “115”, a nationwide service offering emergency shelter for homeless people or people in a vulnerable situation. As a public service that does not discriminate on the basis of administrative status, this has been the one consistent service available in Calais where migrant-specific ones have been undercut. A person could benefit from this shelter for 3 nights every fortnight, but requesting the shelter could be a lengthy phone process, and accommodation would often be full. Through the winter, demand almost always exceeds the number of beds available, and people are kept wondering all day if they will have a place to sleep. Those unable to speak English or French, or who did not have a phone, were very much disadvantaged.

Any migrant-dedicated, state provided shelter is devised in such a way as to make it undesirable to those seeking transit through France. Other than occasional nights in 115 accommodation, the only formal option in the Pas-de-Calais region is to be hosted in a CAES (Reception and administrative situation examination centres). A group of employees from the French Immigration Office (OFII) and

an organisation (AUDASSE) maraud through the encampments on weekdays to inform people of this option, and direct them to buses departing daily from the industrial zone they live in. After fifteen days however, a person must either commit to applying for asylum in France or leave the centre. Like much state accommodation for asylum seekers across the country, these centres are in isolated areas far from the border, which can be alienating for those they are designed to shelter (Tazzioli 2020; Bhagat 2020a). When I went to a CAES set up in a former retirement home in the Pas-de-Calais town of Nédonchel, the centre was 70 kilometres from Calais and over two hours walk from the nearest train station. The centre did not offer Wi-Fi, nor was there much phone coverage. While some would embark on an asylum process from here, the great majority would use the “no-strings-attached” fortnight of shelter to rest before heading back to the border to attempt crossing again, afraid of being stuck in such a place for several months throughout an asylum process.

Despite investments to expand the number of places made available via the national accommodation scheme (DNA) for asylum seekers in France over the past years, to a capacity of 100,000 places, one in two asylum seekers in the country is not provided with shelter at the time of writing (Pascual 2020). Ribémont (2016) considers the French government’s efforts to multiply accommodation opportunities as consistently half-hearted, seeking perhaps, above all, to discourage and exhaust asylum seekers (see also Bhagat 2020a). Exclusion from shelter may be motivated in a number of ways, for example, any person who has been in France for over 90 days before asking for asylum is denied “material reception conditions”: shelter, a monthly allowance, administrative and social support throughout the asylum process, access to healthcare and so on, that might sustain and support them (Gisti 2020, 6). This is problematic for people in Calais who may have decided to try and stay in France after several months (if not years) living in terrible conditions at the border without succeeding at passage. As a result of this punitive legislation, they find themselves without shelter despite asking for asylum in France. This happened to a group of Afghan men with whom I carried out fieldwork in 2017 and early 2018, who decided to ask for asylum when life at the border became particularly violent. Having been on French territory for over 90 days before applying however, they were left to their own devices in terms of shelter and did not receive a stipend for food and other basics. When I met up with the group in Paris in April 2018, they had set up camp amid several hundred other tents, rampant with rats on the Quai de Jemappes beside the Canal Saint-Martin. It looked worse, if anything, than their Calais camp had - embedded in the urban landscape of the capital rather than a relatively forested area, and these encampments too face frequent eviction (Bhagat 2020a). In that moment, I better understood why several people living at the border had applied for asylum in France but were waiting out the process in Calais. It both offered a safer, cleaner environment than Paris in some ways, and the possibility of seizing opportunities to cross if they presented themselves.

Conclusion

This chapter has begun to trace shifting forms of securitisation and humanitarianism at work in the northern French and northern Moroccan borderlands. It touches on the biopolitical implications of the advent of border zones which are near-devoid of shelter solutions for migrant people, and where the informal solutions they cobble together come under constant attack. The administrative legibility of a person precedes their fundamental rights, and the very notion of the protective threshold becomes obsolete, attacked so repeatedly and in such a variety of ways. I have sought to convey the loaded spatial, atmospheric and social contexts that every migrant person seeking clandestine passage at either of these borders is confronted with.

Those who inhabit contingent camps today - the people I will introduce throughout this thesis - tend to be people who, for a variety of reasons, have “chosen” to live outside of state-imposed spaces and frames of “deserving hospitality” while seeking passage to a more favoured destination. This appears to justify violence against them to the extent that their bodies are the object of constant tension, capture, dispersal. While scholars have long read refugee camps as spaces for containing and excluding “undesirable” population groups (Agamben 1998, 2005; Agier 2010), the contingent camp emerges as the last space of life for those even *less* desired because of their unwillingness to submit to containment or legibility. As this chapter has emphasised, although the Spanish Cathedral grounds in Tangier and the Calais Jungle were lawless and violent places of life, they were visible places which were semi-permanent and tolerated, in which outspoken solidarity and humanitarian assistance were possible. In the aftermath of their evictions, migrant visibility and presence in these border zones has become even more obscure, and humanitarian action been compromised. The following chapters scrutinise the biopolitical implications of an active rather than accidental shelterlessness, resulting from active violence against shelter on the part of the state.

These histories are important because of what they tell us about the collective imaginaries of these border zones as ideally “migrant-free” spaces. In the contemporary context of global movement and conflict, rendering these border zones migrant-free is little more than a fantasy, yet it is a fantasy that must be invested in and worked towards regardless. As elaborated in chapter two, my choice of the term “contingent camp” to describe the space at the heart of this research is in part designed to draw attention to the migrant encounter with the *lack* of a camp; to emphasise an unsettling absence of shelter where the protective structure once was or could have been. At the time of my research in 2020, most of the migrant people with whom I spoke about the former Calais Jungle had not heard of the place. In the context they encountered, the idea of a semi-permanent makeshift camp was unthinkable. In 2017 however, a fixed place of life was something some of the people sleeping rough at the border *did* feel they had just missed out on. An Afghan man, Noori, explained his surprise upon arriving in Calais: ‘We didn’t expect Calais to be like this. We thought the English would come and build shelters for us, that we would have a roof. We saw the place they had before on YouTube, we watched videos and heard

stories from our friends. There used to be a lot of big tents and stuff, even a woman's centre, a school, and generators in the shops where you could charge your phone' [16.10.17].

CHAPTER 4 | NAVIGATING PRECARIOUS FIELD SITES AN ASSEMBLAGE APPROACH IN PRACTICE



Camp remains | Photo by author, Tangier October 2019

There is something uncanny about encountering spaces of communal life in which materialities have become an absent presence; in which infrastructures and objects are never dependable and thus without which life is organised. Without explicit thresholds and certainties in which to anchor a field strategy, studying contingent camps is a slippery endeavour and does not translate to a straightforward methodological approach. The strangeness of these places is part of what drew me to exploring them, yet it is difficult to read spaces and the people who inhabit them when so few material elements are present as clues to their way of life and experiences. This chapter describes the methodological approach that I put into practice, departing from the conceptualisation of contingent camps as assemblages elaborated in chapter two. Following this description are moments of reflection on these methods, on the ethics of the research process, my positionality at my field sites and the study's limitations.

Part I | Research questions & strategy: a grounded theory approach

This doctoral research departed from work carried out for my master's degree, and the continuity between the two projects reflects the grounded theory approach I took to this research (Glaser & Strauss 1999). My master's work (focused solely on northern France) followed a predominantly inductive approach: I adopted an open style of data collection, generating theory from the empirical material gathered and the patterns that emerged from it, and tailoring my focus and theoretical reflection before gathering further data (ibid). Throughout this process, I began to develop a theorisation of contingent camps based on ground reality. Departing from this theorisation, my doctoral work pursued this approach through both inductive and deductive approaches: I drew on the theoretical work I had done

previously to further explore contingent camps empirically and theorise them. In this vein, choosing the case studies for my doctoral research resulted from a process of “theoretical sampling”, whereby I decided to both carry out more fieldwork in Calais (where I could see the ground situation was developing in interesting ways) and incorporate the case study of northern Morocco (where I felt similar routine camp eviction practices were at work). The rationale was to test, refine and elaborate my initial conceptualisation of contingent camps (Strauss & Corbin 1990; Glaser & Strauss 1999). Departing from my master’s findings and initial theorisations of the contingent camp, the doctoral research upon which this thesis is based sought to answer the following questions:

RQ1/ What entities are at work in contingent camp assemblages and what can we learn from their struggle and dynamic interaction?

RQ2/ How is life in contingent camps lived and what can we draw from the narratives, practices and experiences of those who inhabit them?

RQ3/ What do contingent camps reveal about shifting forms of securitisation and humanitarianism, and what are the biopolitical implications of their emergence?

RQ4/ What racial assumptions underpin these geographies and how do those targeted challenge them?

These questions invite a qualitative research approach, placing attention on both lived experience and spatial, material configurations. Each of the methods elaborated in what follows feeds into each of these research questions.

Part II | Three strands of ethnography: an assemblage-inspired methodology

Based on an initial theorisation of contingent camps, this doctoral research was driven by a desire to further unpack and expose the discriminatory biopolitics that govern these geographies and their implications in detail. Departing from an anti-racist perspective, it aims to ‘understand social oppression and how it helps to construct and constrain identities’ (Dei 2005, 2) as well as to identify and ‘change the values, structures and behaviours that perpetuate systematic racism and other forms of oppression’ (ibid, 3). As emerges in Stoler’s work, when investigating racialised relations and uneven claims to space, rights and resources these entail, it is important to read imperial formations as a material and sensory regime ‘gouged deep in sensibilities of the present’ (2013, 3). This interest in the material and sensory resonates with the theoretical conceptualisation of contingent camps as assemblages developed in chapter two, and the methods I drew upon to study these spaces are rooted in assemblage thinking. However, though rich as a conceptual approach, studying contingent camps through assemblage poses practical challenges: the approach is notoriously imprecise in its attentiveness to a potentially infinite multitude of human, non-human and more-than-human components in dynamic interaction. As McFarlane & Anderson observe: ‘whether used as a descriptor, concept or ethos, assemblage thinking opens up questions of method. How to sense and bear witness to the diversity of parts or elements that

might make up specific assemblages as well as the agency of assemblages themselves?’ (2011, 164). Along with the opacity of assemblage comes room for creativity, openness to the unexpected, a methodology and analytical approach that are emergent (ibid; Kinkaid 2020).

In its most basic form, an assemblage methodology entails great attention to microlevel details of assemblages of practice, experience, material culture and affect. Research questions 1, 2 and 4 all evoke the need for microlevel scrutiny. An assemblage approach strives to look beyond the ‘event’ of the camp to see the dynamic multiplicity of elements and relations upon which the emergence of encampment is dependent. This demands longitudinal attention to the everyday, to processes and events of camp struggle, emergence and destruction, to the atmospheres and affect that surround and emerge from them, to which an ethnographic approach are particularly well-suited. Mirroring the multiplicities of assemblage, the methodology I pursued was geared at rendering a rich and textured understanding of contingent camps attuned to their human (experiential; practice), nonhuman (material) and more-than-human (affective, temporal) dimensions, through which a larger political argument might be made (as called for by research questions 3 and 4).

As described in chapter two, rather than adopting a “flat ontology”, this methodology centres the human and subjective, while also taking the material, affective and atmospheric into consideration. In this sense, this research combines a non-representational epistemological stance with an interpretivist one: the chosen methods place value on the non-human and more-than-human dimensions of contingent camps (research question 2), but nonetheless centre human interactions and experiences. Indeed, as research questions 1 and 2 suggest, the study of subjectivity and discourse are essential for grasping the textures, politics and symbolisms of spaces and objects that might be conveyed by a respondent to the ethnographer, as well as spaces and objects themselves (Navaro-Yashin 2009). This allows for a study of assemblage components in their interrelation: ‘my informants’ subjectivities were shaped by and embroiled in the ruins which surrounded them’ (ibid, 15).

In what follows, I describe the specifics of the methods I put into practice, organised around three simultaneous “strands” of ethnography. First, I describe how I endeavoured to put into practice a *secondary ethnography*, focused on gleaning a deep sense of the experiences of those who directly engage with or live in these spaces through semi-structured interviews. Second, an *ethnography of rhythms and atmospheres*, through which I worked to develop an awareness of immaterial place-making practices and atmospheres through a gradual ethnographic approach. Third, I elaborate on the *material strand of ethnography* I pursued, or what I describe as a ‘forensics of encampment,’ scrutinising and documenting the processes of material destruction and rebuilding at work in the contingent camp. Finally, I reflect on my early embodied encounters with contingent camps and the forms of knowledge earned from these encounters, as well as on the ethics of this research, before briefly describing how my research was impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Secondary ethnography: situated narratives of life in contingency

As research question 2 emphasises, the question of experience is central to this thesis, which attempts to account for the practices, affect, atmospheres and emotions that constitute place, for which situated accounts of everyday life are essential. The knowledge related in this thesis was in large part gathered through interviews and casual conversations with those who inhabit contingent camps, as well as with those who regularly interact with them.²³ Interviews were crucial to my understanding of contingent camps, their effects, dynamics, how they are lived and what to tune into ethnographically. I carried out extensive semi-structured interviews with several respondents living in contingent camps, and with humanitarian workers in regular interaction with these spaces, posing questions designed in such a way as to collect rich, detailed accounts of experience which served as what I propose to call a form of “secondary” ethnography. In referring to this method as a secondary ethnography I do not pretend that I can or wish to speak *for* these people, but rather that I have sought, through drawing on a close study of their own voices and narratives, to be able to write about and bear witness to their experiences from the position of ally.

After taking the time to find groups of displaced people who were open to my presence among them, I purposefully identified individuals to ask for an interview (Creswell & Plano Clark 2010, 175). Carrying out ethnography alongside interviews meant that I devoted several weeks to simply spending time with these groups before asking anyone for an interview. I took the time to observe and have small conversations with people, which initially helped me to identify who might be willing to speak to me in a more extensive manner. Carrying out these interviews could sometimes be tricky, considering the clandestine lives of the displaced at the border, the lack of private space in the camps and the heightened suspicion circulating within and around them. To remedy this, I took to going on walks with respondents or speaking to them over the phone as well as in person, offering a privacy and intimacy inaccessible in the encampments. Phone conversations made methodological sense in these contexts where intimate spaces are few and far between, peers constantly watch one another, and individual mobility is restricted by intensive policing. Moreover, within a lifestyle where people live an intensely communal life (see chapter seven), taking occasional distance to speak through one’s situation and experience seemed to come as a relief. I always held interviews away from the camps, at locations I asked the person being interviewed to suggest (this usually turned out to be outdoors away from the gaze of locals, or at a café).

²³ In Tangier, I carried out extensive sit-down interviews with 12 displaced people and with 7 humanitarians and activists. I also carried out 11 (short) interviews with displaced people in Agadir, Tiznit and the Souss-Massa region, 4 humanitarian workers and 2 researchers. Preceding my fieldwork in Morocco, I also carried out a series of interviews at various sites in Andalusia with 1 displaced person who had made a successful sea crossing a year earlier, 5 humanitarians and 3 institutional actors. In Calais, I carried out interviews with 7 displaced people and 7 humanitarians and activists, as well as with 2 representatives of state-appointed organisations and 1 local authority representative, in addition to interviews with 15 displaced people in 2017-18, and 16 humanitarians [5 of these interviews with humanitarians were carried out with Prof. Hilhorst as part of a collaborative research trip].

These more in-depth, private discussions were invaluable and usually lasted for several hours. My previous research experiences enabled me to develop refined interview guides, which I continued to hone throughout the research process as new themes of interest arose. In the questions that I posed, I placed focus on the situated experience of living in contingent camps, seeking to understand the symbolic value of the space for respondents, its social and material dimensions, strategies for negotiating it, the imaginative mechanisms communities develop to persist at the border, and their routine everyday experiences. That said, I adopted a loosely structured interview approach, eager for my respondents to take the conversation in new directions. I paid particular attention to accounts of the emotional and affective charges emergent from living in contingent camps, and specific to the subjectivity of those who inhabit it. This approach lends texture and depth of insight to the experience of contingent camps conveyed in this thesis.

I selected humanitarians or activists to interview purposefully, based on what I knew about their work from online research or word of mouth. These interviews tended to be more accessible, and most were fairly open to sharing their knowledge and experiences, particularly those working on human rights issues. In Calais, where researcher requests for interview are common, my access was definitely facilitated by pre-existing connections and my long-standing commitment at the border. These interviews also helped address research question 3, concerned with how forms of humanitarianism and securitisation have been shifting in these border zones.²⁴

Embodied ethnography: affect and atmosphere

Chapter two discussed the importance of attention to affect within the contingent camp assemblage, which plays into research questions 1, 2 and 4. Affect goes beyond the self or subjective feeling and emotion; it is something emotive that may be felt in materiality, in the environment and space (Thrift 2000; Navaro-Yashin 2009; Deleuze 1996). As Müller writes: ‘affect and emotion are the *tertium quid* of the social and the material, making the socio-material hold together or fall apart. They are what pulses through assemblages and actor-networks and what constitutes their power’ (2016, 36). Questions through which I sought to learn about affect in interviews made a good start, but I often found my respondents too close and accustomed to their situations to explicitly reflect on them, and language not always the best medium through which to grasp affective dimensions. Affect is non-discursive, it is ‘hazy and atmospheric’ (Guattari 1996, 159 in Navaro-Yashin 2012) and yet it has ‘territorialising dispositions’ (ibid, 160). In trying for example to learn of the affect that arises from relegation to a life out of doors, confronting the risks of border passage on a daily basis while staying hopeful at the

²⁴ The interview extracts from Morocco cited in this thesis have all been translated from French, the language in which the interviews were conducted. The extracts from interviews with displaced people in Calais were carried out in English, while interviews with humanitarians were carried out in English or French. I here acknowledge that much of the interview material is presented in translation, and that any errors are my own.

prospect of passage, the combination of ethnography with interviews was crucial. My direct inquiries were often met with comments like ‘you can see for yourself we don’t do anything all day, no work, no family nothing,’ or ‘we’re just waiting for our chance.’ Near-daily visits to the camps and the development of relationships are what allowed me to flesh out a better understanding, iteratively complementing semi-structured interviews with camp residents with a study of ethnographic compositions (Vannini 2015) that constitute their places of life, everyday practices and social routines. Capturing the affective dimensions of spaces is described by Navaro-Yashin as being about studying an *excess* through ethnography: ‘something in space, in material objects, or in the environment, that exceeds, or goes further and beyond the human imagination, but that produces an affect that may be experienced by human beings all the same’ (2012, 18). This amounted to sharing in the boredom and unpredictability of life in these places, the constant fear of police raids, or the weak humour that emerges from being caught in such an absurd struggle for presence. This was also essential in developing a sense of the hauntedness of border space elaborated in chapter six. As Navaro-Yashin writes: ‘affect is a charge that has a part to play in the sociality of the human beings who inhabit a space. Consequently, it must also play a part in the analysis produced by the anthropologist’ (2012, 20).

Interwoven with the study of affect is that of atmosphere. Over time and through an embodied approach, I tuned into the pace and atmospheric resonance of the oppressive refrains of violence enforced on contingent camps by state actors, which offered insight to the shifts in securitisation strategies sought in response to research question 3. In relation to research question 4, this also led me to notice how the displaced reactively nurture *counter-refrains*, structuring their everyday lives around communal routines and practices that generate protective atmospheres. In borderlands where encampment is materially precarious, place-making in large part emerges organically, through social architectures coaxed into being through refrains of social practice that mark out atmospheric intervals in an otherwise chaotic context (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013 [1980]; Emmerson, 2017; McCormack, 2013). This became clearest to me while ‘doing *with*’ those living at my field sites, getting a sense of the affective counter-refrains around which life is organised (see chapter seven). In both Morocco and Calais, many of the communities I met had spaces of common social practice within or near their areas of life which were not immediately obvious to me; unremarkable spaces which emerged only in atmospherically rich moments when their function was performed. Gathering insight to these small-scale, everyday rhythms and practices through ethnography enabled me to better ‘cultivate an affinity for the analysis of events, practices, assemblages, affective atmospheres, and the backgrounds of everyday life’ (Vannini 2015, 318). In this sense, places are nurtured through *collective imagination* as well as social practice, altering people’s relationship to hostile border space and enabling them in some ways to reshape affect and atmosphere.

I strove to document my own sensory experiences of these practices and atmospheres through thick description, to capture these intangible modes of social being and convey them in such a way as to ‘evoke rather than just report’ (ibid). Through the vignettes included throughout this thesis, I hope to

draw the reader phenomenologically closer (De León 2015) to what everyday life in the contingent camp is like, to how a distinct sense of place and modes of social being may arise in places of such material uncertainty.

Bearing witness: a forensics of encampment

Objects constitute the most tangible dimension of contingent camps, and methodologically this is where the value of centring materialities and socio-material processes within an assemblage approach is particularly evident. This is one of the focuses of research question 1. Thinking through and beyond Deleuze & Guattari, critical scholars have in recent years pointed out the importance of the material as revelatory of the racialised and racialising dynamics of a given assemblage (Kinkaid 2020; Puar 2017; Chen 2012), the focus of research question 4. As Chen argues, the material often reveals ‘intensified condensations (affective intensities) of race, geography and capital’ (2012, 206 in Kinkaid 2020). One of my main goals in studying contingent camps has been to problematise their emergence by bearing witness to the detail of how the materialities that constitute them are attacked, and the racialised violence of which they are symptomatic. This approach is inspired by Forensic Architecture (2014), who propose that in situations where it is difficult for the testimony-bearing witness to speak out, human rights abuses may be scrutinised through traces of violence on the built environment. Thinking in terms of a camp forensics within an assemblage approach emphasises that through close attention to injured material offshoots of encampment, we may derive information about the political, conditioning relations which animate it (Nail 2017). As described in chapter two, migration scholars have taken increasing interest in camp and border materialities, and the governmentalities they reveal (Abourahme, 2015; Mould, 2017; De León, 2015; Ramadan, 2010). Weima & Minca (2021) observe that the study of the remnants of a camp after its closure is critically important, though exactly *how* this may be achieved remains challenging: only ruins and traces tend to remain, while witnesses (former camp residents) are often scattered far and wide (see also Kourelis 2019). In contingent camp contexts, where evictions are always imminent, studying camp destruction requires presence at a given site over the course of several months, during which it becomes possible to witness the process of building encampment, its destruction, the ruins that remain, associated atmospheres and emotions, as well as the rebuilding of shelter multiple times. Material ethnography of this nature offers insight to the racialised biopolitical strategies and subjectivities that govern these spaces, bolstering arguments in favour of a politics of social recognition and justice (Amin, 2014, 19).

The proximity earned through the gradual ethnographic approach described above was crucial for documenting the violence that governs contingent camps. In 2017-18 in Calais, my presence in moments of raid was made possible by close relationships with certain communities, who would call upon me or the humanitarian groups I was working with at that time to bear witness. By 2019-20, these evictions would play out every 48 hours, making them easier to observe. In practice, I embarked on

mapping trajectories of fleeting camp materialities and scrutinising, collecting, touching the ‘stuff’ of encampment, participating in shelter construction, being present for ‘events’ of camp emergence and destruction (see chapter five). At both sites, I used digital photography, disposable cameras, video and drawing in addition to interviews with camp residents. This amounts to what Tazzioli (2020) and Tazzioli & Garelli (2018) respectively describe as a “counter-mapping” and “archiving” of encampments to preserve the memory of their existence. I take this idea of ‘counter-mapping’ loosely (see Van Isacker 2020 for a more literal approach), not so much concerned with pinpointing the specific movements, dwelling sites and routes of displaced people, but rather with bearing witness to the patterns and modes through which they are made, assembled and rhizomatically perpetuated; in identifying, unpacking and recording paces of eviction and erasure. The aim is to document and preserve the ‘memory of spaces that are invisibilised and whose traces get lost’ (Tazzioli 2020, 150). Even in a context where encampment dynamics are such that these places are barely fixed before they are again disrupted, they leave the border landscape altered. This requires a counter-mapping that not only takes note of the inscriptions of the displaced, but also those of the state as it works to disrupt, fence off, conceal or erase (see chapter six).

Moments of presence during raids or evictions were confronting but rich, in that they offered me a first-hand sense of the affect of these moments, of the unsettling effects of spectacular policing and the impact of a governance strategy geared at violently enforcing fear and precarity. These were particularly valuable for responding to research question three. Following Edensor, ruin-scenes are laden with affect: ‘what emerges is not empiricist, didactic, or intellectual knowledge but an empathetic and sensual apprehension, understood at an intuitive and affective level’ (2005, 847). As an outsider with the ability to *stay* in tense moments, to question and document violence against the encampments, bearing witness was not only a responsibility but an act of solidarity towards camp residents who themselves had no choice but to flee.

Close readings of ethnographic findings

I opted for manually coding and analysing my research materials instead of feeding them into a software programme. I did this by printing hard copies of my interview transcripts and fieldnotes and annotating them by hand. I worked through these materials reflecting on interactions, experiences and spatialities before tentatively borrowing and building on concepts which allowed me to propose a theoretical analysis of what I encountered throughout the research process. I came up with key themes related to the ongoing theorisation of contingent camps I was developing. Rather than quantifying these themes, close textual analysis allowed me to analyse and theorise in context. I was reluctant to risk reducing words to numbers, to quantify issues that came up in interviews, which I feel inadvertently would have further distanced my analysis from my empirics. This method is also truer to the way that I constructed my theoretical analysis throughout the research process: taking note of key insights as they emerged

during interviews and participant observation, following up with close textual analysis of interviews in the mid- and post-fieldwork periods. As St. Pierre & Jackson argue, the analytical process is rhizomatic and occurs ‘everywhere and all the time,’ with analysis emerging as a result of interactions, encounters and experiences (2014, 717). This reflects a creative analytical process which is emergent and experimental, in tune with my own encounter with the fieldwork process as a lived and embodied experience.

Part III | Reflections on ethics and the study of contingent camps

‘You know to me, a PhD is just a piece of parchment.
Harvard, Oxford, Stanbridge - whatever!’

Diallo, Tangier, July 2019

Sounding out contingent camps thresholds

My own discomforts and emotions in the initial process of approaching and encountering contingent camps became an important part of my ethnography, as well as a point of departure for developing ‘situated judgments’ (Darling 2014c) and what Pink (2012) describes as ‘sensory knowing’. While I sought out risk and ethical approval prior to this research, which was granted by the University of Cambridge, my reflections on these issues developed in scope and precision throughout the research process. In what follows, I discuss and reflect on my positionality at my field sites and the ethical considerations that emerged throughout the research process.

Gaining intimate proximity to contingent camps is crucial for learning about these spaces, their dynamics and the lives of those who dwell in them. However, this can be challenging because these spaces are characterised by racially driven routine violence and struggle, putting those who inhabit them in a precarious and anxious state which exacerbates weariness of outsiders. As Brankamp observes, scholars often face the challenge that ‘by inserting ourselves in refugee camps, we are inevitably touching nerves, stirring anxieties, and are drawn into emotional force fields with unpredictable effects’ (2021, 6). The very practice of seeking out and rendering these sites visible gave rise to ethical considerations, namely the preservation of the anonymity of their residents and the imperative not to exacerbate the oppression they face by drawing more attention to them (Noxolo 2020). For this reason, I limited my field research to contingent camps in urban spaces *already* hypervisible to the authorities, where my presence was unlikely to exacerbate routines of eviction already very much underway, and with groups who invited my presence. Although my initial plan in Morocco had been to seek access to forest camps at the border fence with Ceuta, I abandoned the idea once I became aware that my presence at these (far more secretive) sites would likely make them more liable to raids.

A key difference between carrying out research in a fixed camp space and contingent camps is that one cannot simply “insert” oneself into these places because they are not fixed, bounded spaces and do

not fall under humanitarian or institutional oversight; those inhabiting these geographies have agency over who may enter them, spend time in, study and write about them (see also El Arraf 2017). While initially daunting, this was useful from an ethical perspective, as I gained access directly from those inhabiting contingent camps. While at both of my sites some groups wished to remain unseen, others were more open to my presence. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that in contexts where illicit border-crossing plays out, the protection of people's visibility and territory is always sensitive; thresholds are socially determined rather than physically, and as such opaque to newcomers. I constantly felt uneasy that my presence might be disturbing to some of those with whom I spent my time, or that I was overstepping precisely *because* these thresholds were socially defined. The work of sensing and attuning to these thresholds was crucial for navigating them safely and ethically, requiring me to develop 'situated judgements which exceed procedural modes of ethics' (Darling 2014c, 203). This involved spending considerable time at my research sites (Rodgers 2004) and demanded humility in sitting with my difference from my respondents and state of not-knowing (Cabot 2016). Following Malkki, it often also meant developing a willingness to 'leave some stones unturned' (1951, 51). This required me to constantly regulate my presence, question the parameters and impact of my own presence and sense when to stay or leave.

My initial encounters with contingent camps and their residents began the work of feeling through the racial, gendered and geopolitical dynamics that govern them (Laliberté & Schurr, 2016). This is important within an assemblage approach because it amounts to sensing the thresholds of these hard-to-grasp places, offering insight to the affective tensions and boundaries that define them. As feminist geographers have argued, our bodies are not only "sensing organs", but inevitably anchored in political, social and symbolic power relations that elicit certain responses and as such produce valuable knowledge (Ahmed 2014; Madison 2012). A number of scholars have emphasised that using a feminist approach within assemblage thinking is intuitive and valuable (Grosz 1994; Kinkaïd 2020), pushing the boundaries of the common use of assemblage as a predominantly socio-material tool of analysis among urban geographers (McFarlane 2011; Dovey 2010). The knowledge put forward in this thesis reflects such an approach in many ways, in its attention to embodiment, affect and emotion in their intertwinement with broader geopolitics (Dowler & Sharp 2001; Hyndman 2004; Massaro & Williams 2013). It is moulded by insights drawn from my own encounters with contingent camps and their residents, and reflexivity on those encounters. As Brankamp urges, greater attention to the 'affectual entanglements' that usually accompany qualitative research in refugee camps is needed, as well as to the 'affectual geographies' of these camps themselves (2021, 2).

As a white, British-French female researcher in a situation of relative privilege, my encounters with displaced people in their places of life were affectively charged and not always instantly fluid. The blatant distinction between my respondents and myself was always palpable, often uncomfortable. I felt this particularly vividly in Tangier where, as illustrated in the citation above, the Cameroonian group

who accepted my presence among them initially challenged or tested me on the grounds of my research rationale, privilege, and suspected neo-colonial intentions (Smith 2013). As described earlier, I chose Morocco as a case study through a process of “theoretical sampling” (seeking an additional case through which to develop my theorisation of contingent camps), rather than because I was particularly well positioned to do so, which would perhaps have been a more noble rationale (Cabot 2016). Regardless of the fact that I approached this research from an anti-racist stance, carrying out research in a country whose history and present have been marked by the colonial presence of one of the countries whose nationality I hold, with a group of people from yet *another* country whose history had been marked by the colonisation of both of the countries whose nationality I hold,²⁵ is an endeavour entangled in nested and “sticky” (Ahmed 2004) colonial and neo-colonial power dynamics. Not to mention the historical complicity of geography as a discipline with the colonial project and its devastations (Noxolo 2017; Radcliffe 2017). The Cameroonian men carried this visceral, racialised history and present with them which, exacerbated by the racial violence of their attempted journey to Europe, led to emotions of retribution and frustration. This was amplified by the context: as Hannoum describes, *Tanjawi* (people from Tangier) tend not to identify as African, preferring to see themselves as closer to Europeans and the Spanish in particular (2019). The Europeanised self-image of Tangier is reinforced by the state’s criminalisation of Black people, which encourages locals to distance themselves from their “Africanness”. While I, by simple virtue of my whiteness, was unquestioningly privileged (Faria & Mollett 2014) and for the most part well received in Tangier, it was clear that Black people in the city ‘have been relegated to one of the lowest rungs of the racial hierarchy’ (Hannoum 2019, 172), entrenching the sense of inequality between us. The fact of being able to navigate Moroccan space easily and to communicate (both with many Moroccans and with the Cameroonians) by virtue of our shared (colonial) language of French, only worked to confirm my privilege.

This privilege was something for which the Cameroonians sought to hold me accountable. As Faria & Mollett write: ‘Whiteness and the colonial pasts and presents that give it meaning certainly engendered admiration and entitlements, but could also evoke negative, less-well explored reactions’ (2014, 86). Although on the first day I spent at the cemetery suspicion was rife and exacerbated by the fact that I introduced myself as a researcher, the men invited me to sit with them and talk and were happy for me to return the following day. There began my morning visits to the cemetery: I would prepare a batch of sweet coffee to bring to them in a thermos most mornings, to help them shake off some of the brutality of nights spent between the graves. I felt this to be a fair but small gesture of support, which gave me purpose without creating a sense of indebtedness that I was, for ethical reasons, cautious to avoid. Despite accepting my presence as a group, some of the men continued to meet me with confrontation, touching on many of my own lingering uncertainties about the legitimacy of my

²⁵ Morocco was under French protectorate from 1912-1956. From 1916 to 1960 the majority of Cameroonian territory fell under French mandate, while a northern area and a southern area fell under British mandate from 1916 until 1961.

field research. In the first days, one of the younger men referred to me repeatedly as '*La Blanche!*' ('White girl!'), seeking to provoke or unsettle me until I challenged him to the sniggers of his friends. I had anticipated being met with scepticism if not hostility in the field, and a certain discomfort always lingered. However, the head-on approach the Cameroonians met me with was telling and productive, prompting uncomfortable discussions from the first days (often in cutting jest) which forced a teasing out of perspectives and intentions, laying the groundwork for what was to become a productive, intimate research process.

Valuable insights to the social compositions of my sites and relationships to outsiders were earned through these discomforts. As Gökarıksel et al. argue, within a feminist approach it is important for geographers to *engage* with discomfort, to recognise how 'comfort normalises our relationships with control, power and even the status quo' (2021, 291). This also held for instances in which I derived knowledge from how my presence often brought out tangible discomfort in others, for example that my (white) presence evoked discomfort in Moroccan police officers who found me at the cemetery camp during some of their raids, seconds after the Cameroonians had all darted off in different directions to avoid arrest. In Calais too, police officers would often express visible discomfort in instances when I, along with a human rights observation group, would watch the police carry out evictions, positioning our citizen bodies as allied with the criminalised bodies of the displaced. The clashing social codes evoked by my/our body/ies worked to disrupt the dynamics of camp destruction, the act of bearing witness from a position that evokes discomfort and effectively undermines the logic of these practices. Reflecting on my presence in the field offered important insight for critically unpacking how race, class and gender are territorialised *onto* specific bodies and how entrenched inequalities are sustained, thinking through differential deployments of power and the production of difference (Saldanha 2010; Kinkaid 2020).

At both sites, building up relationships and trust took time, but was incredibly valuable. After all ethnography is most fruitful insofar as the person carrying it out is able to establish a relationality with the people about whom she or he is conducting research (Navaro-Yashin 2012, xii). In Calais, my access to contingent camps was somewhat easier because I was already familiar with many of the sites of life and entered the field working as a volunteer with various grassroots humanitarian groups with whom I have worked regularly since 2016. While taking on the role of volunteer-researcher comes with certain drawbacks and ambiguities, it also lends the researcher a "culturally definable" role in these contexts often rife with suspicion (Jordan & Moser 2020). Indeed, this role gave me purpose and meant I was immediately in daily contact with displaced groups at their sites of life, with whom I was able to build a relationship, introducing myself as a researcher over time. Approaching these sites was also made easier by virtue of the different affects that tended to accompany the migration journey of those in Calais, and the fact that they already found themselves on European soil. Although informal refugee camps in Europe, as in Tangier, are 'distinctly postcolonial' entities (Davies & Isakjee 2019, 216), these groups, who tended to be fleeing oppressive regimes or violence, seemed to harbour a less explicit sense

of migrating as an act of colonial retribution. This is not to say that their countries did not suffer colonial ruination, nor that they did not face constant, daily and racialised frustration at the border, but rather that this was not projected onto me, the researcher, in quite the same way. Working with humanitarian and activist groups, I was more quickly identified as an ally. I developed relationships with groups of several different nationalities in Calais, but most respondents were either Iranian, among whom many had a good level of English, and among the Eritrean community, with whom I had worked closely during my fieldwork in 2017-18. My familiarity with certain aspects of their cultural way of life, basic knowledge of Arabic and a few sentences of Tigrinya facilitated initial contact. I was also put in touch with certain individuals by friends and relatives of theirs who had crossed the border before them, and with whom I remain in contact from previous fieldwork, creating an immediate bond. I was well embedded in the field in Calais in the sense that I had more purpose than in Tangier, working with organisations which gave me a wide range of perspectives on the sites of encampment and rhythms of life in contingency; from accompanying people to doctor and hospital appointments to bearing witness to evictions with a human rights observation team, going on night marauds around the city and delivering wood supplies to the very heart of the encampments.

Reflections on ethics in interviews

In preparation for my master's research I drew up consent forms in several languages, in an effort to ensure the informed and willing participation of my respondents (Sales & Folkman 2000). However, these were off-putting for many displaced people I interviewed: most were so concerned with protecting their identity along their journeys that they used nicknames or pseudonyms, not only with me but often also with each other. The formality of the consent form was unsurprisingly suspicious and dissuasive. Following this experience, for my doctoral research I opted for explaining and discussing consent and the goals of my research orally, always promising confidentiality. Considering the ethnographic approach I took, I also followed the principle of making sure to engage in an ongoing, inter-personal process of ensuring that consent held as my relationship with people developed (Guillemin & Gillem 2004). I have changed the names of all of my displaced respondents, occasionally altering identifying features to ensure anonymity, following guidelines designed by Berg & Lune (2012). At both sites, I also draw on conversations recorded in field notes with people who were reluctant to agree to sit-down interviews, but who gave me their consent to write about them and their experiences in my findings. Throughout the writing process, I have constantly reflected on the value of exposing points of information and the potential harm it could do, making considered choices about what to include or exclude (Noxolo 2020). All other actors I interviewed (namely humanitarian actors) were asked to sign consent forms, in which they could indicate their desired level of anonymity. In many places I have anonymised them even when they did not request it out of caution, uncertain of the possible implications of revealing their identities in my writing.

A key set of actors I would have liked to have interviewed but struggled to are the authorities carrying out attacks on encampment, to have been able to provide a more nuanced portrayal of police forces at both sites. I do not wish to present them as cruel and faceless characters, though this thesis emphasises their performance of the orders of institutionally racist systems in which ‘orders are orders’ and there is little to no room for negotiation. In Morocco, I decided not to try to request interviews from the police, preferring to keep a low profile: several researchers and journalists I spoke to who have worked on migration in Morocco had faced problems with intimidation and surveillance by the authorities (Gazzotti 2018; Richter 2018). I did try speaking to the police informally when I happened to be around during camp raids, but the person in charge would usually try to intimidate me by asking me questions and requesting to see my ID, forbidding me from spending time with these “dangerous” men. In France, I have tried several times to obtain an interview with various police branches, but they are frustratingly shut off. I asked in-station at Calais, called, sent emails, wrote a letter, but these requests were sent up the chain to the ministry of the Interior who just politely rejected it. I also reached out to one of the main police unions but never heard back. I had anticipated this, aware that when it comes to law enforcement in France ‘secrecy and opacity are the rule, disclosure and transparency the exception’ (Fassin 2013, 14; see also Gendrot 2020). However, as Fassin writes, ‘what is at stake in the ban on social science research on the police [...] is indeed the disappearance of an external gaze on the action of the main institution to which the state delegates the legitimate use of force’ (ibid, 18). Over the years, local officials (the mayor and *préfecture*) in Calais have also either rejected my requests for interview or met them with silence.

‘Locked out’ of the field: pandemic as a moment of periscoping

The Covid-19 pandemic disrupted my research, though not to the extent that I had to make big changes to my focus. I cancelled plans to travel back to Tangier in late spring of 2020, but had gathered sufficient material and kept in touch with several respondents over the phone. I was less than halfway into six months of planned field research in Calais when the French state declared a national lockdown in March 2020. The thought of what might happen in the border city, where around 1,000 displaced people were sleeping rough with little access to hygiene and sanitation infrastructures, was unsettling. Having used a major part of my time in the field thus far to build up relationships with people, to observe and lay the groundwork for interviews, lockdown regulations meant that I carried out fewer sit-down interviews with displaced people than I had envisioned, as I found myself physically separated from them. However, I had recently started living-in at a safehouse for women in Calais when lockdown was announced, where I decided to stay with the house residents of Ethiopian, Iranian, Eritrean, Sudanese and Kurdish origins. As it became clear that the pandemic would not be resolved in a matter of weeks, I felt compelled to put the rich experiences I was living through at the safehouse towards my research. Although I regularly felt concerned about the ethics of research in these conditions, I discussed my role

as a researcher with the house residents repeatedly, and only those who chose to actively participate in my study did so.

Living with these women so intimately over the course of several weeks offered a valuable, unanticipated prism through which to understand social structures at the Calais border. The experience shed light on many dynamics and atmospheres in the encampments that I, from my position of privilege and as an outsider, could not fully sense nor see. Retrospectively, this amounted to a methodological approach Hiemstra describes as “periscoping”, whereby the researcher is able to ‘see things out of her direct line of sight’ through ‘a careful arrangement of mirrors and prisms’ (2016, 329). Indeed, the women with whom I lived refracted a vital account of female subjectivities at this border to me, offering me their perspectives and experiences of the encampments. It lay bare cracks in what I myself had thus far encountered as predominantly masculine visions and narratives of border space; with women present, but always occupying a peripheral and dependent role.²⁶ I have not included an extensive account of their experiences in this thesis due to its focus on the encampments.²⁷ However, I have included the voices of these women throughout this thesis, and here acknowledge that their situated accounts of the encampments greatly enriched my understanding of these spaces. Though ironically stuck inside while trying to study outdoor encampments, I was able to pursue my study, speaking to respondents over the phone and continuing to provide support to some of the communities living outdoors (preparing food and charging people’s mobile phones and power banks at a time when services were considerably weakened).²⁸ Through late 2020 and 2021 I also carried out interviews with humanitarians whom I hadn’t had time to interview because of the pandemic, by video call and over the phone. Due to this shortened time physically in the encampments, I also draw in places on the six months of fieldwork that I carried out in Calais in 2017-18.

Conclusion

Taken together, the ethnographic strands I put into practice offered inroads for understanding both the precarious contemporary geography of the contingent camp and the biopolitics it reflects. Embodied presence made these methodologies possible, from carrying out semi-structured, in-depth interviews and implementing a camp forensics in practice to sensing the effects of my simple presence. These

²⁶ Women in Calais are strikingly underexplored in academic literature. This disinterest in women’s border experiences also applies to the northern Moroccan border zone, with the exception of Tyszler’s important work exploring the experiences of displaced women seeking to cross the border into Spain (2018a, 2018b; 2019b, 2020), and the work of Mekki-Berrada (2018) looking at these women’s traumatic experiences and sense of invisibility in Morocco.

²⁷ I wrote a separate article on displaced women’s border experiences, titled ‘Under one roof: strategic intersectionality among women navigating the Calais border under lockdown,’ currently under peer review for inclusion in *Environment and Planning C: Politics & Space*.

²⁸ Based on this experience, I wrote an article titled “‘They tell us to keep our distance, but we sleep five people in one tent’ The necropolitical governance of migrant people in Calais during Covid-19’ which is currently under its second round of review for *Social & Cultural Geography*.

chosen methodologies, implemented over several months at each site, allowed for scrutiny of the dynamism of encampment assemblages and processes of how they are unmade and remade across space and over time. The findings presented in the chapters that follow emphasise the value of going beyond static or distant encounters with geographies of precarisation to scrutinise them deeply and respectfully in their most dynamic, lived forms.

Contingent camps are slippery geographies, yet their constant changeability and social dimensions are also rich, inviting methodological flexibility to actively see and bear witness to their existence and unpack their ontology. The above discussion outlined how the peculiarities of contingent camps call for a deep ethnographic approach, centring both human subjectivity and the study of the non- and more-than-human dimensions of these geographies. This methodological approach is particularly well-suited to a conceptualisation of contingent camps rooted in assemblage thinking. Moreover, unpacking and exploring these multiplicities at two otherwise rather different empirical sites offers valuable insight to the specificities of this particular ontology of encampment. Not only conversations, but also sensing and witnessing become essential tools for “seeing” the contingent camp assemblage and the biopolitical logic it expresses, as well as for scrutinising the negotiation of that hostility by displaced people. These methods enabled me to begin to grasp the peculiar status of materialities in the contingent camp, to get a sense of the atmospheres, practices and social dynamics that enliven them. A place’s material and affective dimensions are always intertwined (Anderson 2009; Navaro-Yashin 2012; Adey 2014), particularly within a contingent geography where the absent-presence of compromised materialities draws particular attention to this entanglement.

The range of methodological and ethical questions as well as points of reflection brought up by the fieldwork upon which this thesis draws are far more than just a backdrop to my analysis of contingent camps, but integral to the forms of knowledge that emerge from this ethnography. The question of method has been particularly important to this project, in that it is not only essential for theory-building, but also in terms of the means those methods provide for actively rendering these places visible; recording their nature, existence and documenting the dynamics that govern them.

CHAPTER 5 | RUINATION THROUGH REFRAIN SIFTING THROUGH THE DEBRIS OF ENCAMPMENT



Coming home to an eviction | Photo by author, Calais 07.02.20

‘Living in this place, I’m like a sieve. As soon as I get my hands on something - it’s gone.’

Lamar, Tangier 27.11.19

A migrant person with border-crossing in mind must never take the simple fact of possessing something for granted. Or so it seems from the material struggles migrant people face in borderlands where accepting one’s constant dispossession is key to physical and psychological survival. Chapter three detailed how the building of incrementally more fearsome securitisation infrastructures in the borderlands of northern Morocco and northern France has come hand in hand with the routine material dispossession of those who strive to build and inhabit makeshift shelter in their shadows. These are fragile assemblages of encampment that emerge furtively and tentatively in wooded areas or industrial zones near immovable border fences or natural frontiers. Chapter two offered a conceptualisation of contingent camps as rhizomatic assemblages (Deleuze & Guattari 2013), and this chapter focuses primarily on the material components of these assemblages and the practices that animate them. I place the material struggles in which the contingent camp is intrinsically bound up at the centre of this chapter, taking these non-human elements of border life as the most visible and tangible components of these dynamic spaces.

As the infrastructures that represent the securitarian state are built up and optimised, discreet migrant expressions of material presence are relentlessly cut down. Dispossession practices have

come to take on a central role at these sites, as a mobile addition to static barriers. The chapter tells the story of migrant dispossession through routine attacks on their places of shelter; scrutinising the rhythms through which they are deployed and the sense of uncertainty they generate. Bringing Stoler's work on imperial ruination to the analysis (2013) to build on the conceptualisation of dispossession as a biopolitical tool elaborated in chapter two, I argue that the way these dispossessive repetitions target the humanity of the displaced sheds light on the racialised violence that the French and Moroccan authorities perform in the name of border sovereignty. The contingent camp is a prominent example of why we should pay attention to ruinations of imperial power in the *present*, not just in the past, and not only in territories where imperial power was directly imposed but also in the context of the home territories of those powers (ibid). Following Mbembe, imperial interventions of the present are not wholesale variations of colonial technologies, but rather 'reformulations and deformations of the crafts of governance in the management of people's lives' (in Stoler 2013, 4-5).

The spatial relations at work in these borderlands are not organic; they are produced by the sovereign powers at whose frontiers they have emerged. What Foucault describes as racially-motivated biopower is exerted: every attack on materiality serves as a reminder to migrant people that they represent a form of life over which the sovereign asserts its power to kill, let live, or expose to death (Foucault 2003). The first part of this chapter focuses on the "deterritorialising refrain" that animates the contingent camp; the temporal, rhythmic deployment of dispossession. Identifying *repetition* as central to this border hostilisation strategy and to the ontology of contingent camps, it analyses how repeated practice works to normalise and even legitimise routine violence and its biopolitical effects. The second part of this chapter sifts through the material debris of shelter, putting the method of material ethnography elaborated in chapter four into practice. It details the types of objects that come under attack in these contexts, how they are targeted and the sense of self these practices give rise to, before proceeding to an analysis of the forms of violence they reveal.

Part I | The brutality of routine dispossession

Conventional brick and mortar forms of shelter have been made inaccessible and unviable for migrant people in the cities of Calais and Tangier. As described in chapter three, this has in recent years led them to resort to makeshift spaces of life like the Spanish Cathedral or the Calais Jungle, bounded spaces momentarily 'territorialised' by the displaced until their spectacular, hard-handed eviction. Contingent camps are the form of dwelling that has emerged in the aftermath of these events; encampment persists across border space but is repeatedly undercut through eviction. Where the former sites offered thresholds beyond which, despite living precariously, the displaced benefitted from some protection and geographical togetherness from which claims of legitimation might be made, displaced people at both sites found themselves reduced to a life out of doors, facing constant eviction from their makeshift places of life and in the necessity of reconstituting them.

Chapter two began to describe how one of the main particularities of the contingent camp is the *pace* with which the dispossessive practices that target it play out. Rather than eviction or demolition being occasional, spectacular events, they are routine and relentless. Drawing on Deleuze & Guattari, chapter two conceptualised evictions as ‘refrains of confrontation’ (2013, 380); repeated acts which mark attempts by the state to striate their territory by generating a ‘chaos’ of migrant life at the border. As Lefebvre writes, it can be important to try and isolate particular rhythms which may be telling of power relations: ‘once one discerns relations of force in social relations and relations of alliance, one perceives their link with rhythm. Alliance supposes harmony between different rhythms, conflict supposes arrhythmia: a divergence in time, in space, in the use of energies’ (2004 [1992], 69). In this chapter I begin to scrutinise the “arrhythmia” of the contingent camp, and unpack the deterritorialising refrain that governs it: one that not only generates a precarious state of material dispossession, but also inflicts a brutal temporal regime that bears heavy on the minds of those targeted. It is a mode of ruination which marks ‘the visceral senses in which the effects of empire are reactivated and remain’ (Stoler 2013, 11). After narrowing in on the frequent, random raids targeting the informal cemetery encampment in Tangier, I pull this case into comparison with the random evictions deployed in the Calais borderlands in 2017-18. I then describe and reflect upon how these practices have been refined and proceduralised since 2019, with people at the border facing near-mechanical evictions from their sites of life every 48 hours. By contrast, chapter seven will elaborate on the rhythms that run counter to these refrains, feeding into this arrhythmia, by devoting attention to the resistive refrains that displaced groups develop in response.

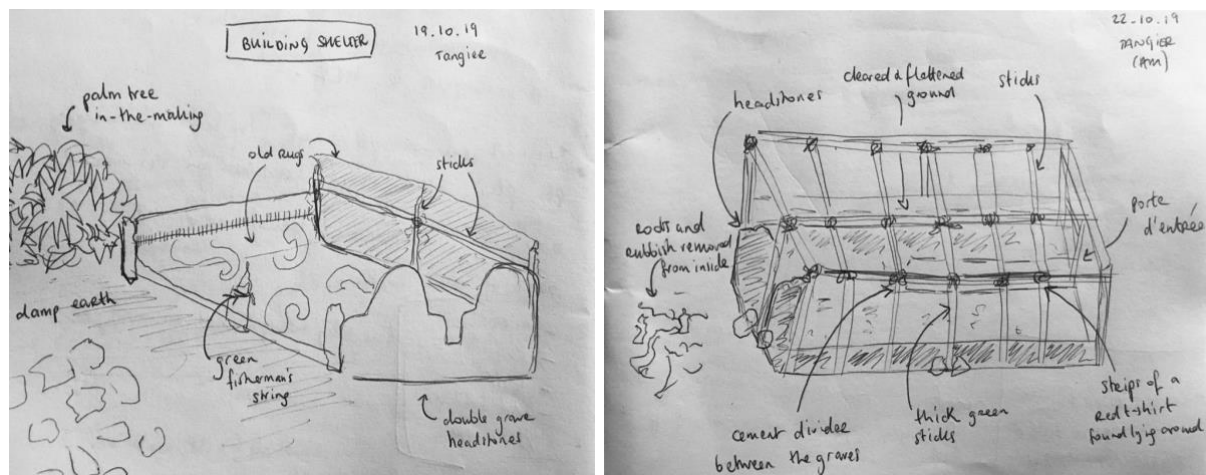
Tangier: material precarity at the cemetery

After their eviction from the Spanish Cathedral (described in chapter three), the Cameroonians were removed to Safi, a city over 500 kilometres south of Tangier. When they returned, they set up camp in a sloping, abandoned cemetery behind the gleaming white *Sidi Bouarrakia* marabout. Although this placed them within deafening proximity to a megaphone delivering five daily prayers to the neighbourhood, it also offered the men a place of life in the city centre, with a view over the Strait of Gibraltar. ‘At least from here we always have our goal in sight’, Idriss told me. It seemed a silver lining of little solace for living without the protective threshold the Cathedral had offered, let alone walls and doors. The lowered area the men occupied was strategically chosen, concealing them well from the view of passers-by along the busy roads that flank the unwallled cemetery. This discreet position however also limited their view of the roads from which police would later launch destructive raids against them. Bitterness at the expulsion and shame at these new living conditions were palpable among the men in the early days. They were hesitant to build shelter in the cemetery, telling themselves that to do so would distract them from their goal of finding solid shelter in the city. It seemed that to build makeshift shelter, however temporary, would confirm the reality of the cemetery as their new place of

life and reinforce their cast-out status. As the days passed however, the group had no choice but to come to terms with the fact that this would not be as temporary a place of life as they had hoped. As nights of poor sleep accumulated and tensions rose, they carried mattresses they found on the streets, or given to them by locals, into the cemetery. It was in these early days that I started to bring sweet coffee to the cemetery in the mornings. During the first week or two, I would arrive to a row of six or seven mattresses lined up beside one another and covered in blankets, laid out on a huge sheet of plastic the men would fold back over themselves as they slept, as though enclosed in a large envelope. This was designed to protect them from the rain as well as from the stings of the insects with whom they co-habited. During the day, they would pile the mattresses up and wrap them in the plastic sheet, forming a tower of bedding in an attempt to keep it dry. It wasn't long, however, before the camp was raided by police for a first time, and it became clear that trying to hold on to any material things at the cemetery for more than a few days would be a naïve ambition.

'It's hard to face sleeping on the graves', Koumen said to me the day he showed me how to build a shelter in the cemetery camp. The soil was wet with the previous night's downpour and, moving deeper into autumn, temperatures were dropping. The men decided to use the graves as a base structure because though eerie, claustrophobic and crumbling, their structures offer relative protection from the elements. Overhearing our conversation from where he sat, perched on a headstone, Idriss sourly remarked: 'With this cold, all we can do is hope the good Lord doesn't send us into our own graves next.' In a study of makeshift architectures of encampment in the US-Mexico borderlands, Grabowska (2016) describes the makeshift shelters built in this border space as anxious architectures; 'an anxious entity born out of contested terrain' (2016, 115), which nonetheless bear witness to adaptive spatial tactics for coping with the conflict and trauma of the border experience (ibid). The uncertain forms of shelter that emerge in contexts of camp contingency are fundamentally anxious. In Tangier, the men referred to their shelters as "bunkers", a term with a long history of use by migrant people living in makeshift structures in Morocco (El Arraf 2017; Richter 2018). The term evokes warfare and the pared-back, muddy living conditions faced by soldiers in battle. It made me wonder if the use of the emotive, culturally familiar term to describe flimsy shelter was designed to lend purpose and dignity to the men's undignified, muddy living conditions, in which violence is a feature of everyday life. This terminology was reinforced by the men speaking of themselves as "soldiers", and their perception of themselves as sacrificing their present lives for better futures for themselves and their families. Despite the terminology, the bunkers the men built were anything but solid, made of whatever they could find in the natural and urban environments around: tree branches, flattened cardboard boxes, old rugs and blankets, sheets of plastic, string or ripped strips of old clothes and so on. The architecture of the bunker represents a state of non-fixity; of inhabiting a space without being associated with a fixed place. Always pre-empting destruction, these architectures were basic, functional and speedily built up. 'This is how we build our bunkers when we're out in the forests near the border fences', Koré explained. He had spent long stints in the border forests over the previous years, and was the quickest to build his

bunker that day.



Building bunkers | Drawn by author Tangier 19.10.19²⁹

Accounts of forest camps inhabited by migrant people seeking passage from Morocco to the EU being violently raided have been numerous over the past decade, as the EU has worked to incentivise the Moroccan government to curb migration through financial investment (Alexander 2018; Belguendouz 2003; MSF 2013; Ávila Laurel 2017; Sidibé 2016). These accounts, in different formats (academic articles, reports, a novel and a documentary) describe countless situations in which encampment is rendered contingent: a dedicated police force (*la police auxiliaire*) routinely detect and raid forest camps, be it on Mount Gurugu at the Melilla border (MSF 2013; Amnesty International 2018; Sørensen, Christensen, Sidibé et al. 2016; Jesuit Migrants Service 2016), around Oujda (Alexander 2018), at the border fence with Ceuta (Refugee Rights Data Project 2019), or in forested areas of the Boukhalef & Mesnana neighbourhoods of Tangier (GADEM 2018). Despite these camps and raids often being mentioned in reports, their nature remains obscure.³⁰ A notable aspect of the Tangier cemetery camp is its location, not in the mountains nor tucked away on the fringes of the city but right at its centre. The encroachment of obscure, often lawless bordering practices into the heart of urban spaces of citizenship is significant, marking the escalation and normalisation of these violent practices against migrant people. While the makeshift urban encampment and associated modes of life differ somewhat from those in forest encampments, the Tangier cemetery and raids occurring within it serve as a microcosm, an example of how raids play out across the borderlands more broadly. What follows delves into the specifics of the dispossessive raids with which the Cameroonians were routinely targeted in Tangier, how they are performed and experienced by the displaced, before bringing this into contrast with the strategies and practices at work in northern France.

²⁹ See El Arraf (2017) for a selection of photographs of similar constructions at a makeshift camp in Rabat.

³⁰ Details of everyday life within them are perhaps best conveyed in novels like Juan Tomas Ávila Laurel's novel *The Gurugu Pledge* (2017).

Tangier: random camp raids

I smell the fire smoke before I see it, rising from between the trees as I walk through the graveyard up towards the camp. I hesitate – I know the Cameroonians would rather bear the cold than draw attention to their camp by lighting a fire. Koré spots me from a distance and waves me over. I move closer and encounter the wreckage: cardboard boxes flung across graves, sticks bound with string bent backwards on the ground and feeding the angry fire. Idriss sits shredding a twig between his fingers; Koumen has his head in his hands. Koré kicks angrily through the debris of their bunkers: ‘they came before we even slept a night in them!’ I’ve never yet dared bring a camera out in the graveyard and hesitate before asking if I can take a few pictures of the destruction. ‘Yeah, show people what we suffer here!’ As I move through, taking in the detail of the debris, I’m frustrated. I was here with them just yesterday as they built the camp, working with Koumen on his bunker: we dug holes in the ground with a pointed piece of wood, cleared rubbish from a pair of abandoned graves, flattened the earth, built the structure to go over it by binding thick sticks together with torn strips of an old red t-shirt. Then, we covered the structure with flattened cardboard boxes from behind Carrefour, followed by blankets and a sheet of clear plastic, paid for with money pooled by Koumen and the friend he shares with. We weighed the whole thing down with rocks. Koumen knew this shelter-building routine by heart and worked quickly, but the process was long. As we worked, he talked me through the weather conditions you’d need for a decent shot at passage in a dinghy boat. When the job was done, the sun was low and we sat and joked around in the illusion of security created by the small cluster of bunkers. By the time I left, everyone was looking forward to sleeping under a roof, never mind how precarious. Only Lamar had refused to work on a shelter. For hours, he sat aside on the crumbling headstone he has made his own and watched the rest of us at work, one earphone in and a smirk on his face: ‘Now tell me, what would the point be of me building a bunker if I know, without a doubt, that it’s only a matter of time until the boumboula [police] come and wreck it?’

Fieldnotes Tangier, Morocco October 2019³¹

I encountered this scene of destruction the day after I watched and helped the men build their first proper bunkers in the cemetery. I had stayed among them a little later than usual, enjoying the light-hearted atmosphere and sense of safety that the small assembly of shelters had created. The men were set to spend a night under their cover, and I left free of the uneasy guilt I usually carried with me on my way to my own, infrastructurally sound home less than a kilometre away. When I arrived to witness the destruction in the morning, I sat with the remaining men around the fire into which they were feeding bits of shattered wood. As we looked out over the camp debris, Idriss said to me: ‘You feel it too don’t you?’ Indeed for me, this was an important moment of sensory knowing (Pink 2012) - even just sharing in the camp building process doubled my frustration at its demolition, while my growing connection to the men exacerbated my annoyance that most had not only seen their shelter demolished, but been caught and put on buses south, to a destination we had yet to find out. The false sense of security we had basked in just hours earlier was one I did not experience again over the course of the months that followed.

³¹ This vignette has been published in an article published in *Area*. Hagan, M. (2021). ‘Precarious encampments in hostile border zones: The methodological challenges of and possibilities for studying contingent camps.’

One Saturday afternoon a few weeks later, ten or so of the Cameroonians and I were sitting on and between the headstones when a Moroccan cemetery resident came to warn us: 'The police are behind the mosque, on the corner - they'll come for you.' He brought his wrists together in front of him, miming handcuffs, to make sure he was understood. The men looked at one another but didn't budge, unsure whether or not to heed the man's warnings: relations with Moroccan cemetery residents were often tense. We stayed put, but everyone remained on their guard. It wasn't until half an hour or so later that a dishevelled man in a cap and loose clothing emerged, staggering along the path that runs above the camp, around the back of the marabout. He called down to us and approached the group, asking for a cigarette in Spanish: '*Cigarillo?*' Unfooled by the man's disguise Omar, who was very much the leader of the group, immediately shouted 'Run!' and everyone took off without hesitation. Within seconds, six other officers arrived - four more in plainclothes and two in khaki uniforms - running down past the marabout and into the area of encampment where I was still standing among the headstones. Those with enough at stake took the risk of running by their shelter first, to pick up a bag of possessions or wake friends asleep in their bunkers. The rest simply ran, leaving the grass covered with scattered pairs of shoes or clothes drying on a headstone or tree branch. Koré left a trail of things behind him, tumbling from his half-open rucksack as he ran. It struck me that I was standing in a landscape of doomed objects, soon to be removed, confiscated, left behind by their owners. I slipped two jackets and a pack of cards into my bag and picked up a pair of black trainers - the sun was out and Koumen had removed them to dry them and air his feet, peeling from the constant damp of his shoes. He ran over the rubble of graves and out into the city barefoot.

Police boots treaded and kicked possessions in front of me. The staggering officer who had been sent ahead as a lure suddenly had all his wits about him. One of the men in uniform looked over at me collecting things and said 'that's enough' in French. He hesitated, then in an accusatory tone added '*gowria*' [foreigner in darija] before telling me to leave. I took a route around the cemetery and down towards the city to catch up with the men. Some of them were sitting, crestfallen, in a park from where they could look up at the sloping cemetery and watch its destruction and pillaging play out. Koumen sat nursing a bloody gash on the sole of his foot that took weeks to heal. I handed back his trainers and the little else I was able to gather, and sat with them to contemplate the scene. As soon as the police moved away and the clean-up agents moved in wearing high-vis vests, local rough sleepers emerged with a trail of prowling dogs, seizing the opportunity to pillage. The Cameroonians' possessions and the materials that made up their homes became a free for all, and the next day the huge orange plastic sheet that formerly covered two of their bunkers now constituted the outer layer of a shelter inhabited by local homeless, 100 metres further into the graveyard. This material ecology of the "stuff" of encampment illustrates the same racial hierarchy performed through routine eviction operations: regardless of the fact that many Moroccan graveyard residents also actively aspired to Europe, they faced far fewer evictions while capitalising on the Cameroonians' dispossession. This emphasises the racialised nature of the Moroccan migration deterrence project, performatively targeting hyper-visible

Black border crossers even though far greater numbers of Moroccans migrate informally to Europe from the country.

These events emphasise how, cast out of the protective fold of the Spanish Cathedral and having dared return to the forbidden city and its cemetery, the Cameroonians had to fend for themselves more than ever before. There was no safe place left for them to run and take refuge. Long frustrated by the existence of the Catholic safe haven for migrant people in the city, the authorities now brought home to the men their demoted, criminalised status in a place of life where no threshold is immune to police transgression. Cities like Tangier would once have been places to retreat to from the brutality of the forest camps at the land border with Ceuta. As passage attempts by sea have risen however, Tangier has been incorporated into the landscape of places to be made as hostile as possible, leading many to retreat further south, namely to Rabat, Casablanca, Meknes or Mohammedia, returning north only at the time of a passage attempt (see also Bachelet 2018; El Arraf 2017). This illustrates how the border is no longer exclusively situated at the frontier, but spreads outward from it through the enforcement of dispersal and dispossessive practices against the Black, migrant body across the nation state (Gazzotti & Hagan 2020; Tazzioli 2018).

Langegger & Koester (2017) conceptualise the homeless experience as one of living a spatiotemporal camp: ‘an indistinct space wherein autonomy is curtailed, and self-reliance is punished [...] a time-space of hegemonic control’ (ibid, 455). This resonates with the experiences of migrant people forced into living an experience of camp contingency: deprived of material fixity, they cannot act autonomously but are forced to constantly *react* to an environment over which they have little control (ibid). The experience of being caught up in repetitive, destructive cycles is both physically and psychologically violent. At the cemetery, with every destruction, the camp configuration would shift, moving to prioritise certain vantage points or others. The bunker designs would also change: building fewer shelters in which more people could sleep together compromised any sense of privacy, but helped preserve and maximise the heat of assembled bodies, while saving on materials the men knew would need to be replaced again at great speed. In a context where dispossession, though unpredictable must be anticipated, the precarity of material things is a constant point of concern, thwarting attempts at leading a predictable and autonomous daily life. The men could do nothing to defend their territory from police, meaning every raid exacerbated their material precarity. Indeed, the threat of capture and removal south was almost always considered a greater threat than the loss of shelter and objects in a raid: not only were these removals time-consuming, but also expensive. So aware of the costs of movement across the country were the men that when I enquired about distances between places, they most often used not kilometres or time as a measure, but the cost of bus or *grand taxi* fares. For example, to give me an idea of the distance between Safi and Tangier, Lamine explained: ‘From Safi to here? Well, Safi-Casa is 50 dirhams, Casa-Rabat 15 dirhams, Rabat-Tangier 90’ [24.10.2019].

In the aftermath of raids, most of the men living at the cemetery camp would devote time, energy

and resources to rebuilding their bunkers over and over again. Some, however, infuriated by the routine repetition of their dispossession and the effort required to rebuild, would save themselves the frustration of the next raid by settling for a shelterless life for a few days or weeks - until they could bear it no longer. This gave them the impression of not buying into the system of dispossession they were caught up in, but the implications of deciding not to build were drastic: How to protect one's body from the rain and cold? How to change out of wet clothes without a dry place to store an extra set? These men would sacrifice their bodies for the sake of their minds, preferring to sleep without shelter than set themselves up for the mental torment of having their roof torn from over them again. Some would give up on genuine attempts at sleeping at night, instead roaming the city under the cover of darkness when they felt safer, or visiting what Koumen described to me as 'homeless cafés', perhaps some of the most inclusive places in the city and open until two or three in the morning. He and his friends would buy sweet mint teas for a few dirhams to justify their presence, then slowly sip them through the coldest, darkest hours of the night. 'We meditate there, drift in and out of sleep. There's a TV. I'm interested in everything now, from just sitting there night after night - cartoons, documentaries, the news, whatever...' [04.11.19].

It is troubling to observe how the biopolitical strategies deployed in contingent camp contexts seek to stop migrant bodies in their desired trajectories by physically and psychologically weakening them. Police attacks on camp materialities are a form of political power that targets biological essentials. Sleep for example is disrupted; the patterns and rhythms crucial for survival are unsettled by a destructive rhythm designed to exhaust the migrant body into submission. El Arraf proposes that to inhabit a space is first and foremost to place one's trust in it through sleeping (2017, 137), yet this *inability* to sleep emphasises the extent to which police harassment compromises the very possibility of dwelling at the border. This is what E. Fassin (2014) describes as an attempt at generating "auto-expulsion": the idea that by making life unbearable people might grow so psychologically and physically exhausted that they leave of their own accord (see also Guenebeaud 2016). By contrast, an attempt at border passage often requires great strength, be it by scaling border fences into the Spanish enclaves or crossing the Strait of Gibraltar. Writing about encampments at the border with Melilla, Alexander describes: 'they camp, subsisting on what little food they can scavenge, and knowing that the longer it takes for them to grow 500 strong [the number required for a passage attempt], the weaker their bodies will be and the less likely it is that they will be among the few who master the physically gruelling feat ahead' (2019, 161-2). Optimal health and fitness are essential, yet routine dispossession and protracted insecurity make keeping the body physically and mentally strong a struggle. Following Mbembe, this emphasises how dispossession is mobilised within a brutal biopolitical process that compromises survival. It dehumanises the displaced person who is forced into a role and frame set by the mode of policing enforced by the state. The physical and psychological disorientation inherent to this experience is clear. Rodric described:

‘I was in the forest [at the Ceuta border] for two months, maybe three? Being in the forest messes with your head, with your memory... Only seeing trees, trees every day for weeks and weeks on end... I came out of the forest two months ago now and I’ve been taking remedies and medicines to get back in shape because I lost a lot of weight in the forest. All we eat there is couscous with sugar mixed in, and sometimes some canned sardines.’

Rodric, Tangier 01.12.19

Biological consequences are further visible in the habits the men I spent time with in Tangier would resort to in order to deal with the stress of their everyday existence, their sleep deprivation and shelterlessness. Most of those I met smoked hashish several times daily; a collective ritual that began upon waking up and punctuated the days. Olivier explained: ‘smoking helps me escape the stress’, and Koumen described hashish as helping him ‘meditate’ through the long hours of the night. Over time, it became clear that others resorted to stronger substances to warm or numb their bodies. Having found out that it was easy to source prescription medication over the counter from pharmacies in certain neighbourhoods of Tangier, some of the men would regularly drink codeine cough syrup with *Sprite* or crack open tramadol pills and swallow the powder, both of which substances pose the threat of addiction and overdose. In the coldest, bleakest winter weeks, it was impossible to miss the empty glass bottles and silver tabs caked into the mud of the earth at the cemetery.

Though unpredictable in their timing, the raids ironically constituted a predictable refrain of confrontation (Deleuze & Guattari 2013): the men were always certain in the knowledge that their own shelter-building practices would lead to another raid against them. This plays on the mind; a game of gradual wearing down. Shelter-building becomes a relentless, time-consuming preoccupation yet it is constantly absent. As Frers writes: ‘the experience of absence derives its peculiar power from its embeddedness in the body, in bodily practices, sensual perceptions and emotions’ (2013, 432). The experiences and testimony presented here have begun to explore the physical and mental toll of living the contingent camp, an analysis added to in the following sections that explore the similar yet different processes at work in the northern French borderlands.

Calais evictions: from random to routine

In the years since the demolition of the Calais Jungle in late 2016, life in the border city has revolved around an industrial zone a few hundred metres away from where the former camp stood, as well as several other wooded areas scattered around the fringes of the city. None of these places are equipped with permanent shelter or humanitarian infrastructures,³² and people live in makeshift encampments to

³² One exception is the Calais PASS (Permanence d’Accès aux Soins de Santé), a local health clinic offering care to all people in a situation of precarity. They are the primary healthcare service for migrant people at the border, and medical organisations working in the encampments facilitate their awareness of and physical access to the clinic.

which mobile aid is either brought according to a set schedule, or which migrant people must travel out of their camps to access. Even the provision of water and toilets onsite was only earned once human rights advocates took the case to the Conseil d'État (the French Council of State) to enforce the provision of sanitation on the grounds that displaced people in Calais face inhumane and degrading treatment against the principle of human dignity (Conseil d'État 2017).³³

In 2017 and early 2018, camp eviction operations in Calais unfolded in a similar way to how they did in Tangier at the time of my doctoral fieldwork: the state, under incumbent President Macron, introduced a strict “zero camp tolerance” policy, keen to avoid the return of a large makeshift camp. This effectively turned the Calais borderlands into a cat-and-mouse playing field for police and displaced people. The ability of the displaced to assemble and maintain a place of encampment was constantly, actively and brutally undercut, through destructive attacks enforced by police officers (usually CRS/riot police) alongside a clean-up team tasked with removing objects and materials from the sites of encampment. The intensity of these evictions is documented in a 2017 IGPN (General Inspectorate of the National Police) report, which states that in May 2017 police carried out 16 “anti-squat” operations in Calais, with 33 sites dismantled and 20,900 kg of objects destroyed. By August 2017, these figures rose to 26 “anti-squat” operations, with 103 sites dismantled and 31,000 kg of objects destroyed (IGPN, IGA & IGGN 2017, 32). This active quantification of confiscated materials emphasises the explicit goal of the authorities to materially dispossess the displaced. To gather these quantities, these evictions would occur at any time of the day or night, and would often be violent, carried out with an often-indiscriminate use of tear gas. Life was a permanently anxious affair; migrant people lived in perpetual fear that their shelter might be viciously claimed from over them at any moment (for a detailed account see Hagan 2018, 2020).

An investigation into these raiding practices by the IGPN didn't go so far as to condemn police practices outright, but did recognise an excessive use of tear gas, as well as a problematic inconsistency in eviction procedures and operations.³⁴ In the aftermath of this report (though not until the end of summer 2018 and following many more complaints), the eviction procedures changed: the *sous-préfecture* delivered an official statement to organisations in August 2018, stating that from then on, people would be allowed to keep any belongings they carry away from their encampment with them during an eviction operation (HRO 2019). This came hand in hand with a reimagining of the eviction format: what had been sporadic and unpredictable evictions became routine, regular and near-predictable, lending them a semblance of lawfulness.

³³ https://www.ldh-france.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/D%C3%A9cision-anonymis%C3%A9e_CE-6e-31-juillet-2017-Minist%C3%A8re-de-lint%C3%A9rieur-contre-M.-A-et-autres-n%C2%B0412125.pdf

³⁴ “We [the IGPN] were not made aware of any written instructions on practical procedures for carrying out encampment dismantling operations (the presence or not of a bus to bring people to accommodation centres, the establishment of security perimeters [during these operations], procedures for waking people up, leaving migrants the possibility or not to collect their belongings, identity checks, behaviour to have, namely in case of incidents, etc.) Insufficient instructions on a departmental or local level make the execution of the operations more difficult for law enforcement” (own translation, IGPN, IGA & IGGN 2017, 37).



The tent dance | Photo by author, Calais 14.02.20

The police are late arriving and we worry they've switched up their routine. It's half past eight on a cold Tuesday morning and Lucy and I are expecting them. We're working a human rights observation shift, documenting how authorities interact with migrant people who live in the makeshift camps during the eviction that's about to happen. They too are anticipating the police's arrival and getting ready: the road is in colourful motion with two or three-man tents and their residents. In the short time we've been here, the normally empty, grey road that runs through Calais' industrial zone has become a noisy place where the life usually tucked away among the trees, mud, sand dunes and industrial waste heaps of the area pours out onto the road. Navigating between and around one another, the tent owners carry their bulky loads, tarped undersides sagging to the ground with the weight of bedding and possessions. Some are growing impatient, standing around amid the dense crowd of tents in defence of their homes though they have other places to be. Others yawn, eager to get back to sleep once the event is over. When the spectacular convoy of police officers, clean-up agents, interpreters, border police and their vehicles finally arrive, we're standing in the middle of the crowd. The police are quick to spot us and ask us to step back, to keep our distance at the 'security perimeter' formed by their strategically aligned vans and bodies. Though this largely conceals the eviction from our sight, we witness the clean-up agents collecting tents, logs, a chair, clothes, a rucksack and lift them into a van and an open rubbish truck. Two unlucky men are escorted to the large white border police van and driven off in the direction of the detention centre. Once the police move on to their next site, the dance continues: people in pairs lift the weight of their shelters and possessions back onto the muddy patches of ground they've claimed as "home" for the next 48 hours.

Fieldnotes, Calais February 2020

Witnessing the eviction process for the first time is an absurd, uncanny experience. By the time of my doctoral field research in the first half of 2020, people would still camp in unsanitary industrial and forested areas, but their location was known to police and their eviction routine and procedural. As described in the vignette above, I was able to observe eviction operations closely by taking part in the

activities of a human rights observation team who bear witness to and document evictions on a daily basis. In early 2020, there are four main sites of encampment in Calais, two of which would be visited by a convoy of authorities every day and evicted. The convoy is spectacular in proportion, made up of between two and four large gendarmerie vans (sometimes replaced by the CRS), a French national police car including French technical and scientific police, vehicles for employees of the *préfecture* (translators) and a municipal services (clean-up) team with two disposal vehicles. The dreaded white French border police van would sometimes join the convoy. The officers present at these operations would carry arms: generally CS gas, batons, guns and sometimes flash-balls (HRO 2019).

Every 48 hours during these evictions, people would be made to move their personal belongings beyond a certain perimeter - usually to a nearby road up to 350 metres away (ibid). Whatever is left on the former site of encampment is cleared. As described in the above vignette, before rather an intimidating display of police presence, migrant people engage in the absurd process of lifting and moving their tents out of the area they camp in only to move them back 30 or so minutes later, with more or less commotion in between. Usually, people don't pack up their bedding, saving time by shifting the tent with its contents still inside. Anything that has been left unattended is removed from the site. The absurdity of the process reflects the reluctance of the state to make any genuine change to their mode of operation, adapting their practices only as and when required to by law.³⁵ The video below offers an idea of the performativity of these eviction operations, and how they play out in practice.



QR code 1 | Calais evictions footage 2020 (videos by author)³⁶

³⁵ Even the legal framework that justifies this new eviction procedure is unclear and inappropriate, as criticised by the French ombudsman who has reiterated that evictions may only occur within an appropriate legal framework, preceded by a social diagnostic allowing for appropriate accompaniment to shelter for those evicted, their provision with a full understanding of the operation at hand and the possibility of contesting it (2018, 58). The ombudsman considers authorities fall short of justifying evictions according to a convincing legal framework, evicting people on the basis of 'flagrant délit' and complaints issued by public or private owners of places of encampment (Défenseur des Droits 2018, 58). 'Flagrant délit' refers to "a crime that is being committed at present or that just occurred" and is a mechanism of criminal law, where civil law would be the appropriate framework for issues relating to property rights in France (Van Isacker 2020). Evictions occurring through 'flagrant délit' are not evictions in the legal sense, because to be evicted one must first be recognised as residing somewhere. Instead, people are arrested under the pretence of a criminal investigation, most often on charges of illegal occupation or criminal damage (ibid, 77).

³⁶ To watch the video on an iPhone, activate camera mode on your phone and point it at the QR code. A message will automatically appear inviting you to open a "vimeo.com" page in your browser. If you tap on the message, it will take you to the webpage on which you can watch the video. To watch with an Android phone, follow the same steps using a QR code scanner app instead of camera mode. Otherwise, watch at the following link: <https://vimeo.com/686303421>.

While in 2017-18 shelters in Calais were often built from tarp, blankets and branches as well as tents, the policing strategy now demands mobility every 48 hours, so forms of fixed, hidden makeshift shelter have become rather obsolete. Makeshift encampments emerge in the form of gatherings of tents organised around and between campfire areas, surrounded with logs, barrels or old pots for sitting on and, where possible, sheltered by a piece of tarp strung between trees. The modern construct of the tent, the epitome of the portable, movable structure, is the most feasible solution, easy to lift and move at a moment's notice. Although the situation in Calais since August 2018-20 is rather different from how it was from 2017 to mid-2018, the camp is no less contingent; simply, the *means* by which the camp is held in a contingent state has changed. The policing strategy in Calais from 2017-18 operated by creating an atmosphere of constant fear and anxiety, similar to the situation in 2019-20 Tangier. The strategy that has emerged in the wake of legal action has rendered it routine and procedural. Dispossession through eviction persists, simply its violence is more "organised", less explicit. Evictions are predictable, but their frequency inflicts psychological distress of a different type. Javid from Iran describes:

‘On the days the police come, people are very stressed. People are nervous, and each person does something to try and deal with that situation. If it's cold and we can't sleep at night, we want to sleep until 9 or 10 o'clock, but the police come early in the morning. Some people move their tent to the street and sleep in the street, so when the police come, they have already moved and can still sleep a little longer - but the road is much colder than the forest. Other people wake up and move their tents just before the police come. And some people just sleep, and when the police come, move their tents. But people don't like this situation, they are stressed about it. Some people want to go to sleep in 115 for example so they can have a shower, wash their clothes and sleep inside. But if they know that tomorrow the police will come, they can't do that. So they just go to 115 on days when they think the police will not come.’

Javid, Calais 14.03.20

Javid conveys how constant violence against essential material structures for survival creates a mental load and schedule that may prevent people from accessing crucial infrastructures like emergency shelter (115), medical services or showers (located at a distance from the camps and requiring a person to queue for an NGO-run bus to bring them there). It also raises the stakes involved in attempting passage: one might attempt and fail, going via the detention centre or staying stowed away in a lorry for several hours before being detected and returning to camp only to find their possessions gone.

More than events of explicit violence, these evictions constitute a relentless harassment which many migrants perceive as purely spiteful and do not understand the rationale for. Even after 11 months in Calais, the reasoning behind the routine eviction operations kept Raziah and her husband Alborz, also from Iran, guessing:

Why do you think the police do this to you?

Alborz: We have no idea why one day the police comes and does this routine. My friends think maybe the police want to count us, because when they come everyone moves their tents to the street so the Jungle is empty. Or maybe they want to know how many people have left for the UK. Or maybe the police think if they don't come to show they are observing us, controlling us, some people would bring brick and cement and start building a proper home.

Raziah: Maybe people would not be afraid of the police otherwise. Maybe we would think we can do anything we want here. The police come here to watch us and arrest people to show us we can't do anything we want, that we shouldn't fight too much - they want to show us they exist.

Alborz: Yes [...] maybe they are counting people, and if people don't like that we refugees are here, the police can show they are arresting us sometimes. They can say: 'We arrest them, but they just keep coming back - we are doing our best.'

Raziah: All of these ideas are just maybe, maybe, maybe, because really... we don't know.

Raziah & Alborz, Calais 22.04.20

Although their analyses are tentative, Alborz and Raziah express an acute awareness that police want their presence to be felt in the camp; that the evictions constitute an expression of territorial ownership on the part of the state. The state desire to exercise an uncomfortable, anxiety-inducing presence has embodied and affective effects; being subjected to routine harassment of this legally imprecise nature is disconcerting and violent. One is disempowered through subjection to seemingly senseless rules of which the cost of disobedience (the loss of one's shelter and possessions) is high. No matter how absurd the rules may seem, they serve to make the displaced person feel *subject* to a higher authority on a near-daily basis, to see and experience the state and live in the awareness that its sovereignty may intervene to dispossess them at any moment.

Where the situation in 2017-18 was of such spectacular violence that it was easy to denounce, so blatant was the disregard for human dignity and rights, the violence of 2018-20 is far more insidious. 48-hourly evictions and the *removal* of materialities from sites of encampment in Calais by police and clean up teams (as opposed to visible attacks on them), mean that evidence of the violence at hand is harder to come by, and that the 'residual affects' that linger in the aftermath of acts of ruination are undercut (Navar-Yashin 2009, 5). The embeddedness of this process in legal frameworks (albeit vague ones) also works to disempower advocates, even though the harassment of migrant people remains brutal from a human rights perspective. This demonstrates the worrisome implications of evictions that follow a predictable pattern, marking a normalisation of dispossession as a border control strategy through routine practice and attempts to gradually, legally, justify them.

These routine evictions are also punctuated by larger, more spectacular evictions that occur every few months and attract more media coverage; events where everything is cleared from a given site and its residents are brought to accommodation centres. On these occasions, migrant people lose any possessions (namely tents and bedding) they can't carry with them. While the immediate outcome of

these evictions may be transfer to shelter, perhaps legitimising the removal of the materialities migrant people leave behind in the process, a longer-term de-sheltering of these people is in fact facilitated: most of these people are likely to return to Calais from the accommodation centres within days, only to find themselves without even the most basic shelter, and organisations struggling to replace the massive losses (Javey, Guiho & AFP 2020).

Caught in confrontational refrains

These detailed accounts of the dispossessive practices that generate and govern modes of encampment in Tangier and Calais draw attention to the material ephemerality of these spaces and the cyclical nature of their emergence. Whether sporadic or routine, the eviction operations described are bound in nature by the biopolitical intent that governs them; one of constant and relentless dispossession of the undesired, weakening them physically and psychologically while reminding them of the power and omnipresence of the state. The effects of this are further explored in chapter six. Attacks on materiality are not occasional and spectacular, but frequent and routine, anticipated and feared as constitutive of everyday life. They mark a strategy switch from violent inaction towards migrant people (Davies et al. 2017) to active violence against them. While makeshift camps have long been understood as temporary socio-spatial formations characterised by their liability to demolition, a *temporal* speeding up, an intensification of the pace of camp destruction is a specificity of the contingent camp. Pace and repetition are used as dispossessive temporal technologies, imperial interventions that settle into ‘the social and material ecologies in which people live and survive’ (Stoler 2013, 4). Refrains of eviction, be they regular and predictable or sporadic, put constant pressure on encampments by drawing them into tightening spirals of destruction that seek to efface them altogether. Hostility therefore is not only diffused through explicit material attack, but also in the *temporal regimes* of governance these repeated attacks inflict. Scholars have identified the temporal as constitutive of precariousness (Sharma 2014; Ayuero 2012); Harris & Nowicki for example observe that ‘precarity is often understood as a temporal or rhythmic phenomenon defined by erratic and uncertain rhythms as well as by a necessitated short-termism’ (2018, 389). The notion of ‘short-termism’ well befits the temporal regime that governs contingent camps; it is where temporal dispossession meets material dispossession. Being caught up in these dispossessive refrains is physically and psychologically destructive, yet this violence tends to occur out of sight and through the indirect means of *objects*, making the suffering inflicted somewhat more insidious and challenging to capture.

The rationale for routine camp raids or evictions seems to be that the faster makeshift shelter is made precarious, the less likely it is to re-emerge and grow visible, the less quickly it will materially be replaced. As a result, material units of shelter and their (real or imagined) multiplicities struggle to grow in magnitude, in arborescence: individual shelters will not improve vertically in terms of their infrastructure, nor consolidate as a durable camp. Conflicting acts of destruction and rebuilding are

caught in a cycle within which each act guarantees the repetition of the other, *ad infinitum*. The state's striating practices are thus always reactive: in 2019 Tangier and 2017-18 Calais, refrains of eviction respond to the rhizomatic nature of border encampment by simulating its unpredictability, while in contemporary Calais the state seeks to tame and structure the rhizomatic phenomenon in order to better manage and exhaust the possibilities for its regrowth and multiplication.

Part II | Sifting through camp debris

'Technologies of destruction have become more tactile, more anatomical and sensorial, in a context in which the choice is between life and death.'

Achille Mbembe 2003, 34

Ruination is an act through which imperial power manifests itself in the present (Stoler 2013). Indeed, microlevel ruinations described in this chapter eerily echo broader economies of ruination through extraction performed by several European states through colonial and neo-colonial policies and practices. De Boeck & Balaji (2016; 2017) write vividly of the postcolonial city as a place of material ruination, as a place of "holes" which its inhabitants are left to constantly patch up and over. De Boeck describes how in Kinshasa, 'colonial infrastructure is mainly present through its degradation, and its "absent presence": as a splintering conglomerate of decaying fragments' (2015, 748). This resonates with the histories and present of many of the countries from which the displaced encountered in Tangier or in Calais have come. Ousmanou describes the decaying legacy of colonisation in Douala: 'the colonial built remains [...] are a testimony, tangible traces of the colonial past in Cameroon' (2019, 65). Well aware of the colonial past written in the decaying infrastructures of their home city, many of the Cameroonians I met in Morocco expressed feeling that their migration journey was one of post-colonial retribution. And yet, they found themselves stuck in a state of constant ruination just 14km from the southern coast of Spain, due in large part to EU investment in Moroccan border securitisation (Fisher 2018) designed to keep them at bay.

Although instinctively, violence against infrastructure may seem a lesser injury than direct violence against the human body, having one's shelter demolished or removed might feel equally as painful as a gash to the head to the person on the receiving end. The remainder of this chapter pays attention to camp materialities themselves, not merely as objects of negotiation, but for how their vulnerability and impermanence play on the minds of those dispossessed of shelter and objects. Crucially, it also scrutinises the racist imperial logic visible in the acts of those who inflict this violence. Stoler (2013) argues that colonial ruination is a political project that lays waste to certain peoples, relations and things that accumulate in specific places, and that it is therefore essential to study the debris of actively violent places of shelter; to think about the implications of border crossers being made to live a life of constant ruination. Drawing inspiration from the work of the Forensic Architecture

movement (Weizman et al. 2010), who propose that human rights abuses may be scrutinised by looking at attacks and traces on the built environment, as well as on Azoulay's work on photography as civil contract (2008), what follows considers materialities that bear witness to violence against migrant people in the northern French and northern Moroccan borderlands. As described in chapter four, this ethnography of camp "stuff" contributes to the movement towards an 'object-oriented juridical culture,' according to which the testimony-bearing witness may be replaced (or bolstered by) a forensics of objects (Weizman, et al. 2010, 14).

Ruined shelter: ethnographies of material violence

In brief moments when displaced people would set up shelter and inhabit it, I would rarely feel it was appropriate to visually document them. To photograph or film these humanising places of life felt intrusive and inappropriate considering their residents were not proud of their living conditions. In the aftermath of a camp raid or during an eviction operation however, there was often a strange shift in the status of the place of encampment. By transgressing the informal thresholds these groups endlessly worked to establish, the authorities stole the essence of these places. No longer vested with intimacy and the cornerstones of shared life, they become violated places, crime scenes of sorts, brutalised ruins worthy of public consideration. In these moments, it was as though contingent camp residents were, again, forced to *see* and acknowledge the dehumanised nature of their life places, a reminder of their position within the state's biopolitical hierarchy. Indeed, 'an environment of ruins discharges an affect of melancholy' (Navaro-Yashin 2009, 14), and in these moments people would often either encourage me to document the debris of their encampments or share their own images with me. Violence seemed to transform a semblance of a private home place into brutalised, haphazard debris worthy of public consideration, symbolising attacks both on their presence and their attempts at survival. It is useful here to bring in Azoulay's work (2008) discussing the crucial role photography may play in establishing a line of belonging between the victim of violence and its spectator, a relationship of accountability. She writes: 'In their act of photography, the photographers and the photographed person assumed the existence of a hypothetical spectator who would take an interest in the image and be aroused by it to show responsibility' (ibid, 20). Photographs of violence have the potential to break down the illusory shield that divides citizen from noncitizen, in deterritorialising moments of perception that draw the governed into a form of civil contract prompted by the moment of bearing witness (ibid).

The criminalisation of border-crossers means migrant people are often wary of their image being captured, aware that the space of appearance may be a dangerous one. While Azoulay focuses on the potential power of the *gaze* of the photographed person in earning acknowledgement from the person who beholds an image (ibid), power may also emerge in images of ravaged shelter or possessions and the absent-present border crossers they evoke. Gathering evidence seemed therapeutic for those whose encampment had fallen victim to violence, even if just to convey their grievances to me, representative

of a potential broader audience. I took the images below at the instigation of the Cameroonians in Tangier: snapshots of the debris of their place of life, bearing witness to an entrenched and racialised hostility (Stoler 2013).



Bunker debris | Photo by author, Tangier 22.10.19



Broken structure | Photo by author, Tangier 22.10.19

The image on the left, showing the mess of the post-raid site, reflects the destructive, brutal logic according to which the raid was conducted. In the image on the right, the care devoted to building shelter infrastructure from sticks is apparent: various sticks bound with string or old clothes, torn into strips for tying. This image of the work of human hands undone is understated yet violent. The videos linked to the QR codes below further illustrate such moments of encounter with the aftermath of camp raids. They illustrate the debris of shelter and the vicious disregard for migrant people's possessions by the authorities, as well as emphasising how images of injured objects might be used to bear witness to a violence difficult for the clandestine border crosser to denounce. I took the first video (QR 2) one morning I arrived at the cemetery camp to find it had been raided. In these images, the migrant person is absent, yet the nature of their experience is vividly illustrated in the material ruins that remain. The cardboard, the plastic, the broken sticks - these are the rubble, the ruins of fleeting places of life that illustrate the attacks waged against those whose living conditions at the border they illustrate.



QR 2 Camp debris, Tangier Oct. 2019 (video by author)³⁷



QR3 Forest raid, December 2019 (video shared by Amadou)³⁸

³⁷ Scan the QR code or watch the video at the following link: <https://vimeo.com/671984225>.

³⁸ Scan the QR code or watch the video at the following link: <https://vimeo.com/686314965>.

The second video (QR3) was sent to me by a Senegalese respondent living in a forest on the fringes of Tangier when I met him, shortly after which he and his friends faced the destruction of their makeshift camp. While the stone structure at the base of his shelter stands fast, we see the mess of what used to be a living environment: scattered sticks, charred bits and pieces of wood, scraps of waste and so on. The man filming calls out the violence waged against them: ‘Look what the *boumboula* did to us. [...] This is the house we sleep in, the wood where we built to be able to sleep. [...] The forest. Look. It’s where we sleep. The *boumboula* came behind us and burned everything, look.’ He describes the anatomy of the former, perished shelter, calling on the spectator to *look*, to bear witness. He enumerates what he has lost and will need to find a way to replace: mattresses, sheets, plastic (tarp), and the state of dispossession they are left in: ‘Today.... We can’t do anything. Nothing, nothing. We can’t say anything.’ The following images from Calais in 2017-18 tell similar stories:



Images from left: burned migrant possessions (photo by author 26.01.18); destroyed forest shelter (author’s image 15.12.17); slashed & tear gassed tent (image shared by Shahpur 12.17).

These videos and photographs reveal the constant fragmented state of shelter at the contested border, instances in which the shoot of encampment has been brutally severed; the rhizome metaphorically pushed back underground. We may think of these destructive processes as *shelter dismemberments*, of disparate vital organs of sheltering being taken apart and attacked. These images draw attention to the visceral impact of material violence, to the importance of not underestimating rubble as ‘shapeless, worthless debris,’ but rather to ‘explore rubble as textured, affectively charged matter that is intrinsic to all living places’ (Gordillo 2014, 5).

Part III | Dispossession through confiscation

‘This is going to be like looking for a needle in a haystack,’ Camille mutters as we stand on the threshold of the white shipping container. The man we brought with us is about to step inside. Iranian and in his early forties, he wears black, thick-rimmed glasses and speaks little English. He approached us at the edge of his camp half an hour earlier, explaining through gestures and an impromptu translator that his rucksack was taken during the morning eviction. We offered to drive him to the thrift shop charged with storing belongings confiscated during evictions, for a week or so, so people can retrieve them before they are thrown away. We were eyeing up the second-hand clothing, dishware and books neatly

stacked on the thrift shop shelves when the usual man appeared with a set of keys and ushered us out onto the carpark, over to the container. He clicks the key into the padlock and the door creaks open. From where we are standing, we can smell the mud and damp off the stuff piled into the huge and dark, windowless box. Hesitant, the Iranian man steps towards, then into the container, taking in the enormity of the task at hand. He looks back at us and points, checking he's meant to search through the mass of bikes, spokes, tarp and blankets for his bag. I nod apologetically and he steps forward, then out again shaking his head. The man with the keys sighs, shuts the door and clicks the padlock shut. We make for the car. I'm suddenly embarrassed we brought the man here, acting as cogs in the dispossessive system he's caught up in.³⁹ 'I still have my dignity,' he writes to me in English via Farsi through Google Translate on his phone. 'I know, I'm sorry,' I write back, in Farsi via English. We drive back to the camps in silence, and don't have the heart to object when he cracks open a beer in the back seat.

Fieldnotes, Calais February 2020



Needle in a haystack | Photos by author, Calais 12.02.20 & 06.03.20

While material precarity has been a serious issue in Calais for decades, until recently it was never possible for people to retrieve confiscated belongings: once taken, objects were brought straight to the dump. In late 2017-18 however, humanitarian groups began to contest the evictions on the grounds that it is illegal to confiscate a person's personal belongings during an eviction without allowing them the opportunity to reclaim them. Following the publication of the aforementioned IGP report, a change was eventually made. It did not however put an end to senseless evictions, leading instead to a farcical process of storing migrant people's belongings after their confiscation for potential recovery. The core question then became the rather arbitrary one of whether or not a given object qualifies as a "personal

³⁹ It is a regular topic of debate among humanitarians at the border whether or not to engage in a system they perceive as fundamentally dehumanising and designed according to a twisted logic. On the other hand, the routine evictions mean that organisations' stock of material supplies is often low, making the recovery of items potentially valuable, not to mention attenuating the large quantities of waste these evictions generate.

belonging”. In a report, the Ombudsman questions the authorities’ care in determining what does or does not constitute a personal possession and separating objects accordingly (2018). Indeed, the fact that making the distinction between someone’s possessions and “pure stuff” falls to the discretion of police and the clean-up teams who carry out the evictions is problematic. They might decide that a tent does not qualify as a possession, then dispose of it without checking what is *inside* the tent and whether or not those things do qualify (UNHCR interview 2018).

The logic that emerges here has internalised a delegitimization of the displaced person’s very right to *possess*. The unfortunate task of storing confiscated possessions in a large shipping container on its grounds fell to *La Ressourcerie*, described on its website as ‘a citizen initiative, social, environmental and artistic’ operating as ‘a place of exchange that facilitates recycling and the revalorisation of rubbish (like furniture, knick-knacks...) and to reinsert people into professional life.’ Clear irony emerges in a social insertion initiative focused on recycling being subcontracted to keep socially stigmatised people’s possessions in a cyclical state of uncertainty. The tents that did end up in the container rather than the dump were often found in an unusable state, put into a van and then the container as such (without being taken down and packed up), so often too dirty, wet or broken under the weight of bikes and soaked blankets to be worth taking back. In terms of valuables like mobile phones, wallets or power banks, a report by the Human Rights Observers states: ‘in reality, we have never been able to retrieve any valuables. In the rare cases where we have been able to find them, the mobile phones are smashed and the wallets empty’ (2019).

This convoluted system is significant because of the delay in destruction and dispossession it creates. By rendering dispossessive practices less spectacular, they are made to seem more humane (scenes of explicit material violence are rare as objects are sorted and removed on the spot). In practice however, violence against materiality persists: the tempo of the refrain has simply been made more regular, attenuating the outward appearance of the violence. This shipping container at *La Ressourcerie* is a glaring, material reflection of the lack of consideration granted migrant people in Calais. Although the container is posited as the ‘benevolent’ face of deterrence at the northern French border, it operates as a convoluted infrastructure of dehumanisation through dispossession under the guise of legitimate practice. Symbolic of a neoliberal world order and the global flow of goods, it pokes fun at the immobility of those who rifle around inside it for possessions that merely enable their survival in stuckness.⁴⁰ As emerges in the opening vignette to this section, accompanying people to the shipping container was an uneasy activity because of the dehumanisation inherent to moments during which people would have to sift through piles of dirty stuff carelessly thrown together. On one occasion, I accompanied a young Sudanese man to the container to look for asylum claim paperwork that had been

⁴⁰ Returning to Calais in January 2022, personal belongings confiscated during evictions are no longer brought to or managed by the *Ressourcerie*, since the volunteer team who used to coordinate collection decided to stop engaging in such an absurd process. This has however led the state to set up another ‘site for the restitution of personal belongings abandoned on the encampments’ at another location (Préfet Pas-de Calais Twitter account 13.01.22), and to mediatise it once again as the benevolent face of its border politics.

confiscated from him along with his tent and bag one morning. All he cared about retrieving was the paperwork. He said: ‘I put all of the papers in a plastic sleeve to protect them...’ Together we scaled the mess of tent spokes, rusty bicycles and blankets in search of it, but to no avail, leading to the upset and frustration of the young man. As Darling observes, within a dispossessed existence, asylum letters are affectively loaded objects: ‘losing a letter was an issue of disorientation, of losing track of one’s own position, of the one thing that tied one to the state’ (2014, 491).

Confiscating materialities for passage

Dispossession acts in these border zones crucially also target displaced people’s materialities for crossing the border. In both Calais and Tangier, acquiring equipment for sea passage is an illicit market that is targeted by police. Border-crossers face a restricted and competitive market for acquiring prohibited materialities, and as a result of the constant removal of their shelter have limited spaces in which to conceal and protect the materialities they do acquire.

A September 2020 news feature by French broadcast network *TF1*, about police patrols working in the “fight against” migrant departures from France by dinghy boat, offers insight to how police agents search for and uncover materialities for passage along the coast (TF1 2020). As an employee of a land conservation agency explained: ‘the smugglers hide the boats in the sand dunes or beneath beach huts until it’s time to go, then use the GPS location to dig them out’ [informal conversation 18.01.20]. The news report shows how objects concealed in the natural landscape (usually in the sand dunes) for safekeeping until the moment of passage are searched for by police agents and removed from their hiding places amid the dunes and stored. The journalist explains how the Oye-Plage gendarmerie store objects they find in the police station garage, which the accompanying video shows to hold canisters of petrol, inflatable boats and motors, which a gendarme adjutant describes are worth ‘hundreds if not thousands of euros’ (TF1 2020). The door to a storage cupboard is opened, showing jarring images of shelves stacked with confiscated orange life jackets. The display of these materialities and the act of their removal are here framed as illustrative of a “job well done” in the fight against clandestine passage.



Confiscated life jackets | Screenshot *TF1* [23.09.20]



Confiscated boat motors | Screenshot *TF1* [23.09.20]

In a broader landscape of active dispossession, the removal of lifejackets perhaps becomes a thoughtless

act. However, this trove of proudly displayed objects symbolises the brutal, active dispossession of those for whom they constitute essential equipment for safe passage. Considering the precarity in which migrant people live at this border, many nearing the end of a long journey in pursuit of asylum, the scene brings home the necropolitical implications of a border control system that mobilises dispossession as a core strategy, and the extent to which government humanitarianism is turned on its head at the frontier. As objects that may mean the difference between life and death, life jackets in particular represent the frailty of human life. This is a vivid example of how ‘through marginality [...] we might witness the affective power of materials, for it is here that the relations they enact have the most impact in shaping lives and futures’ (Darling 2014, 496). More than other materialities for passage, life jackets no doubt for this reason have attracted the most attention as symbolic debris of the migrant crisis, from harrowing reports of migrants losing their lives in the Mediterranean after having been sold lifejackets filled with paper or bubble wrap instead of the expected buoyant filling (World Health Organisation 2016), to the harrowing images of a place in northern Lesbos known as the “Lifejacket Graveyard,” where hundreds of materialities for passage (abandoned boats and namely orange life jackets) accumulated (Vehkasalo & Riki 2019), bearing witness to the precarious means by which migrant people reach the island, and evoking the many who do not.

Since summer 2018, many migrant people stuck in Calais have been attempting passage to the UK from Calais by sea. While this was initially a smuggler-dominated and expensive option, costing between £1,500 (for a single attempt) to £3,500 (for unlimited attempts until successful passage), the success rate of passage by boat has, over time, also rendered the sea route more visible and conceivable for people unable to afford a smuggler. Passage by sea (at the time of my fieldwork) had not shown a higher death toll than that of passage by trying to clandestinely smuggle oneself onto a lorry, with deaths occurring both on the road and within lorries, where people have been crushed by merchandise or died of suffocation (Galisson & the Institute of Race Relations 2020). Some people, unable to afford a smuggler, have begun to pool resources to purchase the materialities for passage together. They acquire materials by buying second-hand equipment identified online and available for pickup locally, or at the Calais *Décathlon* sports megastore. French authorities have however been making this incrementally difficult. As Tymerman & Van Isacker note: ‘local authorities have [...] severely restricted the sale of these items to anyone without valid ID, requiring purchasers’ details to be recorded’ (2020). While such confiscations and restrictions make sense, they also create space for the development of informal markets for such goods, where quality is no guarantee. Unable to stop people from seeking passage, authorities actively make it more dangerous for them, as passage will undoubtedly be attempted nonetheless. Moreover, while for a first attempt people might invest in life jackets and good quality equipment, they may not be able to afford to do so again on second, third, fourth tries at passage, skimping on potentially life-saving essentials like life jackets, a GPS-equipped mobile phone or power bank. In contexts of routine dispossession, people’s perception of essentials slip. In an interview Irem, a Kurdish woman, explained to me how she and her husband had teamed up with five others to buy a

boat and motor, none of them owning enough money to pay for a smuggler. Her narrative emphasises the challenges they faced, with limited access to the materialities they needed:

What is it that you're missing?

We need safety jackets. Well - my husband says if we can't get safety jackets, it's OK we can go without them. If the waves are good it's no problem, he says, no water will come inside the boat. But I am afraid, you know? My husband says we just should make sure we don't go in the water, that if we go in the water a safety jacket can't help us anyway...

Can you swim?

A little bit, but not in the ocean. In the ocean, everybody cannot swim... I'm talking about the *middle* of the ocean, not the seaside. Some people - my husband for example - know how to swim very well. But I don't know how to swim in the ocean... The ocean is dangerous. But we *have* to go this way because we don't have any money left after this try. Maybe we don't need the lifejackets? I am afraid, I don't know.

Yes of course -

We don't have any chance! Everybody else has gone, gone, gone. We are not afraid of the police, we are just afraid that if they catch us they will take our boat. If we lose the boat, we lose our chance. If we had money it would not be a problem if the boat is gone - we could buy another. But we don't *have* any more money. Any money we have is money we borrow. The motor for the boat we have is second hand. We don't even know if it works. We can't go and test it you know, we have to just... go.

Irem, Calais 21.04.20

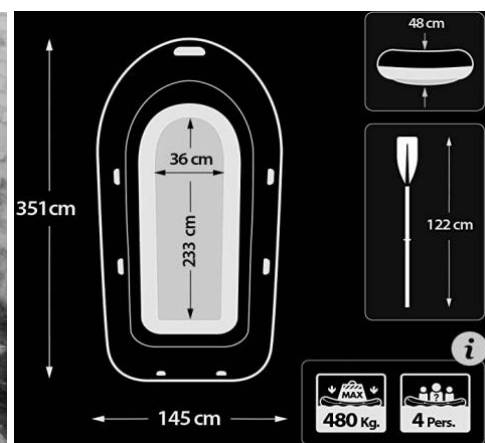
The worry and despair that emerge in this short extract convey the material precarity migrant people at the border are reduced to. It also conveys the extent to which the migration journey is one of constant, near inevitable dispossession, exacerbated by biopolitical strategies for deterrence and containment imposed by nation states. It reveals how people's threshold for safety in travel slips as they become increasingly desperate to reach their end goal, in this case as they are harassed by police and aware that, as time passes, whatever resources they have will only decrease through the dispossessive processes inherent to *being* at the border. In the case of this couple, the passage attempt they cobbled together a few days after our conversation failed. They felt certain they were halfway across the Channel - the blue dot on their GPS showing them well on their way to Dover - when a change in weather drove them back towards the French coast with force, almost tipping them on several occasions. 'If we're alive it's thanks to our [boat] driver,' Irem told me when we next spoke, after several days of silence, 'but we lost the boat, we lost the motor and we lost the life jackets.' The police intercepted them on the beach and confiscated everything, leaving the passengers drenched, dispossessed, disheartened and back at square one, unable to afford a new boat and motor let alone life jackets for their next attempt. A borderland in which materialities for both survival and passage are undercut pushes people in a desperate situation to take increasingly greater risks. A young man I met in Calais made a reckless passage attempt to the UK, despairing at challenges made to his age claim during an asylum application in France. He and two friends bought a second-hand kayak off a young local on Facebook Marketplace, in which they made the incredibly risky 33km Channel crossing. Around the same time however, on the 19th of August

2020, a Sudanese teenager named Abdulfatah Hamdallah washed up drowned on the beach at Sangatte after attempting the crossing in an inflatable dinghy with a friend, propelling themselves with shovels in the place of oars (Mohammed Salih & Grierson 2020). They had not gone far and his friend made it back to shore, but Abdulfatah could not swim.

Those I met in Tangier faced similar problems: saving up to buy the materialities for passage could take months and be confiscated within minutes during a raid, or when seeking to approach the water to attempt a crossing. When a group of the Cameroonian men attempted passage in September 2020, Idriss called me afterwards to tell me it had failed. Forgetting the right terminology, I asked him how many people were on the two boats they had, and he corrected me: ‘These aren’t *boats*, they’re *zodiacs*. People with money are the ones going in boats - it’s people struggling, people like *us*, who have to risk it all on a *zodiac*! There were fourteen of us, seven in each. I know it’s not safe, but it’s all we could afford and we’re in it together you know?’ [30.09.20] The distinction he makes here is an important one: in Morocco, migrant people who can afford it will use a smuggler to attempt passage in a small boat with a motor, similar to the ones used in Calais. The cost of this service ranges from €1,000 to €3,000, a sum not easy to come by or earn, especially as a Black person in Morocco. Those unable to afford it however (the men living at the cemetery were among this group), often gather money among themselves to attempt passage in precarious inflatable boats. Even acquiring and holding onto an inflatable boat as a migrant person in northern Morocco can be a complicated feat, and many of those I met would buy them on the black market. The availability of this service is not to say that the materials provided were quality ones however, as emerges in the images below. The image on the left, of a man selling inflatable boats, was shared with me by a respondent in Tangier. Sales would be made discreetly, and it was not uncommon for people to be ripped off, hastily investing in an object like this one only to find it was defective.



Buying a boat for passage | Photo shared with author by Amadou



Seahawk 4 | Walmart website

On the image on the left, we see a salesman offering his clients the Seahawk 4 boat model. This is a

standard type of boat that people unable to afford a smuggler in Tangier would attempt the crossing in, propelling themselves with paddles. The Walmart website describes the Seahawk 4 (suitable for 4 people) as an ‘inflatable boat set designed for recreational boating or fishing on lakes.’ The accompanying images of two women and two men out for a leisurely paddle on a lake are a far stretch from their intended use - to cross the treacherous 14km Strait to the southern coast of Spain from Tangier. Many of those seeking to make the crossing in this way would store their materialities for passage (boat, air pump, oars) separately, in an attempt to guarantee no person or sub-group would rip the others off by taking off with all of the equipment, for example, as well to try and guarantee that in the event of a police raid at one site, all would not be lost. I also often heard claims that police officers would confiscate the boats for resale, for example in this passage of an interview with Morel:

‘We had really good equipment that time. It was brand new, good quality. It must have been good ‘cause after ten hours of floating around, lost, in the mist it got us back to shore didn’t it? [Chuckles] Because we still had the boat, we started to deflate it so we could bring it back with us for the next time, but then we saw the police running down the sand towards us, and they looked like they had weapons. We ran, and when we looked back, we saw they had gone for the equipment instead of coming after us. They must’ve seen it was a new boat and deflated it themselves to sell it - something extra is in it for them you know? So there we were, with nothing, back in the bushes in the middle of God knows where!’

Morel, Tangier 29.11.19

As well as making frequent claims to confiscations by police (often accompanied by a dig at the Moroccan state for paying the officers so little they resort to such things) the men seemed to consider *each other* a threat. They spoke often of “*l’arnaque*” [the scam] as an omnipresent risk, and something to remain vigilant of at all times (see chapter seven).

Conclusion

There is perhaps no spatial concept more universal than that of shelter. The protracted and *actively inflicted* precarity of shelter infrastructure where there are humans is one of the most striking developments brought forward with the emergence of the contingent camp, as illustrated in this chapter through the cases of Tangier and Calais. The intentionality of the dispossession borne witness to here is jarring; the target not materiality alone, but the body and mind that materiality serve to sustain. Where struggles for infrastructure in informal urban settlements are often the result of a neglectful or under-resourced state; in contingent camps shelter is not only not provided but actively undone by the host state in a punitive bid to deter the undesired. In this case, biopower (Foucault 2003) is omnipresent in makeshift border encampments, iterated and reiterated through routine harassment and removal of the materialities which enable people to survive. The fearsomeness of these regimes is exacerbated by the fact that these practices of dispossession are extra-legal or legally ambiguous at both sites: the migrant person still occupies the Agambenian category of life excluded from legal and human rights

frameworks.

A war has been waged in the borderlands, but the battle is one-sided. No migrant person seeks to run headfirst into the state apparatus at the border, to sacrifice themselves in the confrontation. Why would they, when they have come for the precise opposite: to evade conflict and survive, lying under the radar in pursuit of transit to a “better” place? In confrontation then, they have little choice but to be passive, their resistance emerging rather in constant and repeated acts of rebuilding shelter and persisting in *being* at the border regardless of the conditions (see chapters six and seven). This chapter has demonstrated how although the regulation of these makeshift spaces of life at first appears unpredictable and chaotic, on closer inspection the contingent camp is paradoxically governed through a rather organised temporal logic of repetition: a dispossessive refrain is so entrenched that even when dispossession may not be predicted, it may be sensed by those who are submitted to it. This repetitive rhythm does the territorialising work of the state by making the “exceptional” event of eviction the norm. Chaos is paradoxically orchestrated through rhythmic imposition. Temporal architectures (Sharma 2014) produce and perpetuate temporal logics and social rhythms to political ends: they mobilise time in such a way as to attribute value to certain groups over others, reasserting certain social hierarchies (see also Bourdieu 2000; Hage 2009). Contingent camps are a vivid illustration of how temporality may be mobilised as a biopolitical tool: a particular experience of time is created within the politicised space of the border to control a particular group at a microlevel (Harris & Coleman 2020, 606). Not only are material structures of encampment compromised, but the time of the displaced is wasted as they attempt to build shelter and everyday life between dispossessions. This also increases the emotional pressure she or he feels to pass the border as fast as possible. Chapter seven picks up on this temporal dimension of contingent camps, focusing on the counter-refrains performed by the displaced in these conditions.

Contingent camps are ‘imperial formations of the present’ which register ongoing racialised ‘processes of decimation, displacement, and reclamation’ (Stoler 2013, 8). This chapter has emphasised the importance of seeking evidence of the violence waged against the displaced in ravaged objects, in order to demonstrate how state violence against camp materialities has become a centrepiece of anti-migrant operations in the northern French and northern Moroccan borderlands. Beyond the juridical, forensic value of sifting through the debris of encampment, this chapter has touched upon the affective potential of images and videos that not only convey migrant people’s suffering, but also their desire for accountability and recognition. Though perhaps less intrinsically poignant than images that testify to bodily violence, images of violent objects may too awaken a civil contract (Azoulay 2008) between those whose violent experience is illustrated and the beholder of images, whose state authorities (broadly speaking) coordinate and perform this violence. Instead, then, of targeting the spectator with the image of their own gaze, images of contingent camps co-opt the gaze of the spectator, inviting them to see the violence their political representatives engage in, to imagine attacked scenes of life as their own by placing the viewer in situ. Beholding a scene of contingent camp devastation from the position

of the photographer reduces the sense of distance between the victim and she or he who beholds the image of the violence committed; it may evoke recognition and rejection of the violence at hand. Objects then may speak for themselves; the question is not one of whether these conditions are somehow “deserved” by an “Other”, but of whether they ought to be inflicted upon any human being whatsoever.

CHAPTER 6 | LIVELY DEADLANDS

SPECTRAL FUGITIVES IN HOSTILE SPACES



Environment as shelter | Photo by author, Tangier 04.12.19

‘It’s about time we found a proper place to
live the dead are tugging at our backs.’

Idriss, Tangier cemetery, 29.10.19

The routine dispossession described in chapter five means that displaced people inhabiting contingent camps at the border are constantly exposed to the natural environment and its meteorological whims. An uncivilised way of life is enforced upon them, and they must resort to the constant identification and occupation of *terrains vagues* to assert their presence and ensure their survival. *Terrains vagues* are ‘non-designed elements of urban nature’ (Gandy 2016, 435), ‘unincorporated margins, interior islands void of activity, oversights, these areas are simply un-inhabited, un-safe, un-productive [...] they are foreign to the urban system, mentally exterior in the physical interior of the city, its negative image’ (Solà-Morales Rubió 1993 in Gandy 2016, 436). These are the terrains upon which contingent camp assemblages are made and unmade, upon and through which encampment perpetuates in the manner of the rhizome. They are appropriated, mobilised, manipulated in processes of both de- and reterritorialisation. The flesh of these border environments and the affects they evoke all feed into and constitute these geographies. In this chapter, I describe these terrains as *lively deadlands*: unremarkable, often neglected spaces animated only through their inhabitation by chased, spectral figures who work to enliven and live within them.

This chapter focuses on these lively deadlands. Moving on from chapter five, it shifts focus from the material to the environmental; to the role the very borderlands play (and are *made* to play) in contexts of severe dispossession. It contributes to fleshing out the contingent camp assemblage in two ways. First, it elaborates on the environmental racism that underpins the contingent camp's precarity, the atmospheric and affective dimensions this generates, and how erasure (particularly in the Calais case) is mobilised in an effort to disrupt the rhizomatic perpetuation of encampment. Second, it fleshes out an understanding of the modes of dwelling and movement that animate this rhizomatic perpetuation, reading the displaced person as a determined and fugitive presence. In this sense, this chapter does not tell a simple tale of migrant submission and oppression. Rather, while revealing a biopolitical mode of deterrence honed to the point of actively rendering its targets spectral, it also seeks to convey how it is fallible, full of cracks, room for negotiation and improvisation. This is not a simple celebratory story of agency and resistance either: the focus is on *struggle* and the disruptive tracings, dwellings and presences the displaced operate within the limited parameters available to them.

Drawing on the work of Weheliye (2014), Kinkaid argues that although racializing assemblages 'work to maintain and rearticulate (i.e. territorialize) racialized hierarchies and onto-epistemological formations', they 'can also be leveraged to disrupt, reimagine, and reconfigure (i.e. deterritorialize) forms of categorical subjectification and subjugation' (2020, 465). In this manner, the contingent camp is both a territorialising phenomenon and one which is disrupted by those who suffer it. Bringing modes of dwelling and border navigation by the displaced into focus, the second part of the chapter elaborates on Weheliye's argument that racialized people might be 're-signified and mobilized against this marginalization' (Kinkaid 2019, 465). Linking back to the discussion of desire lines and rhizomatic modes of resistance elaborated in chapter two, this second part of the chapter expands this discussion, making a new conceptual departure grounded in writings on Black fugitivity (Sojoyner 2017; Moten 2018; Campt 2014) and migration as a decolonial act (Achieme 2019). Through this argumentation, I extend the proposed theorisation of contingent camps by arguing that these may be read as geographies of subversion and evasion, revelatory of the displaced person's rejection of systems which seek to capture them and degrade their humanity.

Part I | Environmental racism at the border

'You only really ever glimpse these people on the fringes of Calais, living in a wood under the rain, a humid place with no protective area. We only ever encounter their shadows [...] there's a complete negation of their existence.'

Representative of the Conservatoire du Littoral, phone interview 10.06.20

Camps, and encampments in particular, are impermanent geographies which 'leave a light footprint on the landscape and are easily erased' (Kourelis 2019, 89). Referring to temporary camps in Greece, Kourelis writes that camps perform impermanence by design and to a double audience: the local

population who do not wish to see the displaced permanently settle, and the displaced who hope to move on, to advance to a more stable future and place of life (ibid). In borderlands where contingent camps emerge, people have usually been chased from other, more visible sites with the goal of obliterating their public visibility. Even if the displaced remain present at the border, governance strategies are put into practice to create an illusion of their impermanence. This first part of this chapter focuses on the deadlands migrant people inhabit at my field sites, arguing that in both border cities the displaced are targeted with various forms of environmental racism (Sundberg & Kaserman 2007; Pulido 2016; Wright 2018; Van Isacker 2022): racist violence is enacted through the destruction and instrumentalization of environments, as well as through the degradation of the environments of life that sustain Black bodies (ibid). First, I discuss the case of Tangier, where the displaced suffer environmental racism through their relegation to a literal necrospace, and the affects of hauntedness, resentment and disposability this evokes. I then discuss the Calais case, where environmental racism is performed through the exposure of the displaced to an industrial, potentially toxic place of life, and constant acts of spatial erasure that frame the displaced as unsanitary while erasing traces of their suffering at the border. This contributes to fleshing out the ontology of contingent camps, the racialised imaginaries and oppressive practices that constitute them.

Tangier: 'The dead are tugging at our backs'



Ruins reclaimed | Photo by author, Tangier 04.11.19

Three chickens strut through the grass with a proud air; one foreign to the men who share their space of life. The camp looks deserted except for Koumen, who sits crouched on a headstone with earphones in, examining his hands. It's quiet and the cemetery holds a certain beauty: its trees, harassed by the wind off the Strait, stand together at a weathered slant. Traces of the ornate grave stylings remain: Arabic inscriptions in calligraphy, painted geometrical shapes and colourful tiling still visible on the

ruined stones wildly overgrown with plants and ivy. I hear a rustling behind me and jump - a white cat prowls between the graves in search of food scraps. In places, the grass has worn away and string-like roots form ornate tangles underfoot. Koumen notices me and nods me over. 'The others are still asleep,' he whispers, gesturing towards a bunker deeper into the cemetery. I suggest we move away a little so we don't wake them, then realise someone is sleeping in the grave I had intended to sit on. He's so low in it that I hadn't even noticed him, and the moment is jarring. It's Olivier, lying tangled in a yellow blanket in one of the pair of headstones that form the core of the camp. His face is covered, but I recognise the jacket I've never yet seen him without and his shoulder bag tied tight around his waist. I feel irrational relief when I see his chest gently rise and fall. A pair of flies land and fly, settle and jump on and off the blanket, as though playfully attempting to rouse him from sleep.

Fieldnotes, Tangier November 2019

The Sidi Bouarrakia mausoleum and mosque is a pristine white building and place of prayer which draws its name from the Patron Saint of Tangier. As a non-Muslim, I was never able to enter the mosque and mausoleum, but a YouTube video reveals a large prayer area and tidy cemetery within the walls of the sacred complex. The contrast with the decaying jumble of graves beyond it, just out of sight when looking at its façade, is stark. Rows of graves in disrepair lie on the grassy hill that leads down from the Spanish quarter of Iberia to the Grand Socco square. Proximity to the square emphasises the central location of the cemetery: the Grand Socco 'functions as a key commercial site for the medina and as a node for broader circuits of cultural production and tourism' (Kenai & Kutz 2013, 86). An NGO worker tells me there's rumour the cemetery is being let fall to neglect because it occupies prime land for real estate development. In contrast with the urban space around, it appears to be a wild space that must eventually be tamed in keeping with the developmental aspirations of the growing city.⁴¹

The cemetery is undergoing a slow process of neglect through submission to nature that renders it marginal and redundant. Its ruined structures of remembrance of the dead are encroached upon by plants upon which *they* once encroached. Many of the graves resemble untended, overgrown plant pots more than resting places; as though bursting at their cement-seams from the growth taking place within and around them. It is a space of neglect not only of its residents above ground, but also of the bodies for whom it is a resting place. The dilapidation of Moroccan cemeteries nationwide has risen as a topic of public concern and debate over the past decade, and while the government committed 700 million dirhams (approx. 65 million euros) for the rehabilitation of 1,250 cemeteries across the country by 2018, many were overlooked (CNDH 2010; France 24 2015; L'Observateur 13.09.2013). The founder of civil society organisation *S.O.S. Cimetière Maroc* showed me countless photographs of decaying tombs and waste piled up in cemeteries across the country. He described these places as sites of life for the homeless and socially excluded, emphasising the status of the cemetery as a lively deadland; a paradoxical place of being for the undesired. Ironically, one of the ways in which some migrant people

⁴¹ While Tangier was largely excluded from processes of post-independence developmentalism in Morocco, since the ascension of King Mohammed VI to the throne in the late 1990s the city has experienced a monarch-centric, neoliberal shift towards drastic redevelopment (Kenai & Kutz 2013).

I met in Tangier would seek to earn money, was by offering cleaning or maintenance services to Moroccan families visiting relatives' tombs in other Tangier cemeteries.

The inhabitation of cemeteries is not uncommon in places of contemporary global precarity. Take the numerous Kinshasa cemeteries where 'mortuary houses inside the cemetery are used as shelters by street children' (De Boeck 2015, 750); the cemetery city known as the City of the Dead in Cairo (Watson 1992; Ansah 2010) and the 'cemetery slums' of Manila, a result of accelerated rural-urban migration in the Philippines (Billing 2018). By contrast, the cemetery camp I encountered in Tangier was one of great impermanence, far from a makeshift city layered over the necrospace. Before living at the cemetery, the Cameroonian men were already familiar with it: it was a place they would go to hang out or smoke in relative peace, or where fights would play out away from public view. When the men were cast off Cathedral grounds, it fed an image of them as souls that could not be saved, and their relegation to the cemetery "confirmed" their status as people to be wary of. The imaginary surrounding this cemetery was one of misbehaviour and criminality. Several of the Cameroonians explained to me that some cemeteries in Douala or Yaoundé shared similar connotations:

'Back home we'd hang out in the cemeteries because, well, maybe we wanted to smoke. Back home, you know... this [*waves his joint around*]... You can't just smoke this out in public. You need to find a quiet spot where you can waste time away with your friends in peace. Mum would give me too much trouble otherwise, trying to get me back on the "right path" you know?' [*Laughs fondly*].

Koumen, Tangier 28.10.19

Despite the fond manner in which Koumen remembers time spent in Douala cemeteries, this need to self-conceal from public space and constant concern of shaming their families were precisely the sorts of stigma these men hoped to leave behind by migrating to Europe. Ndjio (2007) and De Boeck (2004; 2015) write of how the categories of youth and death, usually understood to exclude one other, have become intimately connected in certain contemporary postcolonial African metropolises, to the extent that certain scholars have begun to refer to them as *necropolises* (see Ndjio 2007 writing about Douala; see De Boeck 2015 writing about Kinshasa). De Boeck writes that the unnatural connection between youth and death that exists in such cities 'provokes us to think about the seemingly counterintuitive ways in which young people confronted with powerful societal problems articulate their sociality and their "law" out of the very source of their own desperation and death' (743). The youths who set up home in the cemeteries of Kinshasa are referred to by locals as haunting presences, as *société morte* - dead society (De Boeck 2015, 750). Ndjio refers to Douala, the largest agglomeration in Cameroon and place of departure of most of the Cameroonians I met, as a city of crime and death permeated by violence and uncertainty, in which 'routinized violence and terror have come to create an intimacy between life and death' (2007, 104). He describes how, in an urban context of incomplete, ugly infrastructure, young

residents' lives are overshadowed by a constant sense of insecurity (ibid). In such a context, a feeling of intimacy with death is unavoidable: since the mid-1990s in Douala, 'many cemeteries and communal graves [have been transformed] into playgrounds, farms, or living spaces for many destitute urban families' (Ndjio 2007, 110). Bearing these connotations in mind, the cemetery brought the men shame as a place of life. The transition from cemeteries back home as *chosen* places of subversive sociality to this cemetery as a necessary site of anxious dwelling, was unsettling and discouraging. Olivier expressed:

'You can't say you're proud to be living in a cemetery, to be living in a cemetery with your brothers. That *you* come here and know that I live in the cemetery... That's not right.'

Olivier, Tangier 16.10.19

For some of the men, this was not the first cemetery they had lived in in the country: cemeteries featured in many of my respondents' narratives of the spaces they had inhabited or spent time in in Morocco up until this point. When I was invited to Casablanca in December 2019 by some of the Cameroonian men for a football match they had organised, we spent time at another camp they and Casablanca-based peers had set up in a cemetery. Before moving to Tangier, many of them had lived at the camp beside the Ouled Ziane bus station camp, which burned down in summer 2019. Forbidden from rebuilding on the same site, they built a small camp in a nearby cemetery, first near its entrance, then, after the camp was burned to the earth by the police, far deeper into the massive, decaying cemetery. This emphasises the constant and gradual exclusion and pushing out of undesired bodies through environmentally racist practices, to abandoned and fear-evoking sites of life. This is a form of racism through exposure (Mbembe 2019; Wright 2018) caused first by the refusal of letting the displaced access solid shelter (described in chapter three) and second, of refusing them the possibility of building flimsy bunkers within the cemetery, which might protect them somewhat from the emotional and physical pains they experienced from living in such a place.

The psychological, emotional impact is important to consider here. The men would often speak of their life at the border as '*le shock*,' both in terms of the protracted, brutal living conditions and in relation to border crossing attempts. When feeling wronged by the country they were stuck in, the Cameroonians would often in earnest exclaim: 'Moroccans are vampires!' This referred both to their everyday, racialised encounters in Morocco, and to their exhaustion from what they experienced to be a "blood-sucking" state. Analysing the work of Iraqi writer Hassan Blasim, Sakr describes the forest-borders migrant people negotiate their way through as 'real and imagined sites where forest and border, human and non-human meet' (2018, 767). Blasim employs what he describes as a 'nightmare realism' aesthetic in his writing, to mediate 'material and discursive violence in a combined biopolitical-ecological framework' (ibid). This interpretation of the forest-border in terms of nightmare realism as a result of this environmental racism became vivid to me over the course of the months that I spent in Calais and

Tangier; in relation to the meaning-making of the displaced living in these borderlands. In Tangier, the cemetery took on a particularly nightmarish aesthetic in the way it was read by those relegated to inhabiting it. Living in a feared environment and evoking fear as a result, many of the men felt concerned that they too would meet a disregarded, anonymous death. 'Look around this place,' Idriss would often say, 'they can't even take care of their own dead!'

Eyes on Spain but feet in a grave, the landscape of the cemetery proved fertile ground for the men's verbal teasing out of their emotions towards the potentiality of their own death. This emphasises the psychological, affective, and atmospheric implications of a border deterrence strategy waged through environmental racism. Though the outcome of a far broader range of experiences and spaces than just the cemetery, living there fed their sense of standing on the brink between the living and the dead. Lamar would often state: 'Here in Morocco, we're all already dead anyway'. Over the weeks and months of my fieldwork and over the course of my encounters, stories accumulated of friends murdered in confrontations with police, of people disappearing, others going into hospital for routine procedures and never coming out again. While some of these tales initially struck me as surreal or fantastical, over time spent with the men their stories came to appear more and more plausible. The closer I got to the group, the more preoccupied I grew with the possibility of their disappearance. Gazzotti writes that 'the racism instigated by the externalization of European borders does not only express itself in the willingness to exclude but also in the routinized acceptance that Black people may - and indeed do - die in the economy of the border' (2019, 425). This dark observation well-captures how the death of the Black person at the border is routinised and comes to be accepted in places where contingent camps emerge; it also emphasises the necropolitical logic at the core of environmental racism (Mbembe 2019). The men's awareness of their disposability, of the non grieveability of their bodies at the border (Butler 2016), constantly haunted them. Following De Boeck, mortality operates as a prism through which splintering perspectives may be turned into a collective experience: in contexts of imperial ruination and infrastructures in disrepair, 'death is the spectral lens through which the city is imagined as a shared social body' (2015, 751). A prism of mortality has come to govern the migrant experience of border zones in which contingent camps emerge: the space of life is a deadland, and with finding a way out comes the risk of death. One simultaneously grieves for one's irretrievable past, one's life circumstances in the present, and one's potential demise in seeking passage. Before attempting passage by sea, many of those at both my field sites would write essential phone numbers on scraps of paper handed to friends, or in permanent marker on inner labels of their clothes, so they might be identified were they to fall victim to the sea; an unpredictable environment that might reveal itself either friend or foe.

Relegation to the cemetery also brought with it much talk of witchcraft and sorcery. Atekmangoh, who studies Cameroonians in migration, explains that material realities are 'always embedded in magical interpretations in Cameroon' (ibid 320, see also Moore & Sanders 2001), emphasising the symbolic and superstitious ramifications of being relegated to life in a ruined cemetery. Indeed, in contexts of violence

and ruination, inner and outer worlds are particularly embroiled (Navaro-Yashin 2012). The symbolic associations of the ruined cemetery added to the men's experience of the wretchedness of the space: 'in its materialities, obscure signs, and affordances, in its ghosts [...] what emerges is not empiricist, didactic, or intellectual knowledge but an empathetic and sensual apprehension, understood at an intuitive and affective level' (Edensor 2005, 847). In the early days of my spending time at the cemetery, one of the men claimed he had the powers of a seer and the ability to curse or bless people. I found it difficult at first to gauge how genuine this talk was, as the man seemed to mobilize the discourse to tease and test me. It struck me as at odds with the branded tracksuits the men wore, their heavy chain necklaces and their love of French African rap. Over time however, it became clear that many of the men had genuine concerns about sorcery, and many told me of how curses had affected their lives or those of family and friends back home. Lamar for example told me poignantly and at length about having been cursed by an aunt as a child. The hostility of the border environment seemed to exacerbate fears of this nature. Nelson, a Cameroonian man I met in Tetouan, attempted to explain to me how sorcery may come into play at crucial moments of passage:

'Not so long ago a few Guineans made it [into Ceuta]. But *shaitan* [the devil] was in on it. *Shaitan* was working with them, from back home. The Guineans, the Ivorians and the Senegalese too work a lot with witchcraft. One of them calls his sister back home to kill the boys here. She performs a sacrifice there. Just a few made it through the barrier, by blinding and sacrificing the rest... Only we can understand what *really* happens in the forest. 800 people were supposed to hit the barrier, we had a mass group ready, 800 people. But because of him and his sister, we lost the mass [numbers needed for a crossing attempt].'

Nelson, Tetouan 12.12.19

Many carry these beliefs along their migration paths, drawing on them to make sense of their predicament. It soon became clear that 'witches or those possessing occult powers are considered capable of afflicting their victims even across great geographical distances' (Atekhangoh 2017, 321), exacerbating the men's dread at the prospect of failure. Atekhangoh explains: 'if bushfalling [outward migration] is synonymous to a hunter that goes to the bush to hunt and bring home game to feed the family [...] witchcraft is used in the situation where a hunter goes to the bush, hunt, and do[es] not bring home food/game to feed the family but rather choses to make "a home in the bush" (meaning to be selfish and not sharing)' (ibid, 326). The men I met were afraid of being perceived to be 'making themselves a home in the bush', which ironically, they were doing in literal terms at the cemetery despite their best efforts to the contrary. The weight of being considered a failure by loved ones back home, who could then bestow a curse upon them, was a concern I heard several times. The men would often

speak of themselves as *maudits*, meaning “cursed” or “damned.”⁴² This account of the men’s relegation to the cemetery and exposure to its physical, symbolic brutalities emphasises the visceral, emotive effects of environmental racism within a border deterrence strategy already premised on their dispossession. Though the *terrain vagues* inhabited in Calais are somewhat different, they share many similarities elaborated in what follows, and reflect a similar violence through exposure.

Calais deadland: the Zone Industrielle des Dunes



Empty Shell | Photo by author, Calais 25.01.20

We take the Zone Industrielle des Dunes exit off the motorway and drive past the entrance to the former Jungle, where two riot police vans are near-permanently parked. A pair of CCTV cameras swivel as we pass them. The Sudanese camp is sprawling and grey today, and alongside it a smaller tent cluster of Syrians and another of Eritreans seem to be growing in numbers. A hollowed-out Shell sign and EDC petrol pump mark what this site once was, but lorry drivers are now scarce in the area. The tents are neatly and tightly packed together today; there’s little spillover onto the road. ‘We’ll have to go around the sides’, Sam mutters, rapidly taking in the changes in numbers and shifts in camp formation since we were last here just days ago. Constant evictions mean the camp keeps re-emerging in different ways; it always looks the same, but different. We park, I jump into the van and hand three wheelbarrows out. ‘Let’s start with five bags in each ‘barrow?’ Sam says.

⁴² Some of the Eritreans in Calais too considered waiting at the border a form of purgatory, whereby God would determine the duration of one’s wait. Gebre, who had been in Calais since mid-2019, crossing the border only two years later, told me ‘I don’t know what I have done, but God is upset with me’. This was a suspicion that a good friend of his from home, who arrived in Calais almost a year after him but crossed to the UK six months before confirmed, saying: ‘I don’t know what he did, but he must have done something for God to punish him like this.’

I hand out fifteen bags of logs and kindling, chopped and packed into sturdy malt bags sourced from British breweries. When the three wheelbarrows are piled high, we make our way over tarmac then mud to the first camps. People wave and try to draw us over to them first, pointing to their thin jumpers or damp shoes. We track charred evidence of where campfires have burned before, and Sam's memory of the quantities needed for each group is impressive; sharing stock evenly across all sites is a challenge.

A group of men sit around the last embers of a fire. Relieved to see us, they revive the fire with kindling and eager puffs of breath, pulling small pots of honey and cartons of milk from their coat pockets, collected at the morning's state-coordinated food distribution. They place the small golden pots and blue cartons on the embers, pouring the honey into the milk to drink once it's liquid and warm. One of the younger boys stands and nudges me gently. In a low voice, he asks: 'Sister, this milk... it's not for animals, yes?' He taps the image of the dancing cat on the packaging. 'No of course not', I shudder at his suspicion, 'they wouldn't do that'.

Fieldnotes, Calais January 2020

The deadland negotiated by the displaced in Calais in 2020 was the Zone Industrielle des Dunes, an industrial zone spanning 120 hectares beside the A2 motorway that leads to Calais' port. The constant cawing of seagulls overhead is one of few reminders of the proximity of the coast in a place that otherwise feels detached from the seaside city. Hundreds of people lived informally in the zone at the time of my fieldwork, and thousands more have transited through. The area is constantly busy: people linger around their campfires, moving between the roadsides and the wooded areas or industrial waste sites onto which they back off. Along the road, an area is equipped with just thirteen chemical toilets and a single water tap. By night, people head out to "try" (and cross the border), or huddle around campfires to keep warm. The roads that make up the industrial zone are designed for trucks and other vehicles, not for navigation on foot. Although the infrastructures are operational, the social life of the industries is concealed behind gates, walls and fences topped with barbed wire. The employees who flock to and from the buildings daily are barely noticeable, moving in and out of the zone in vehicles and rarely seen lingering. Most petrol pumps in the zone are out of service, scarcely visited by lorries out of concern for a human rush to enter them. Instead, the decaying pumps are used by humanitarian groups and migrant people to map the area, to schedule pick-up places and drop off points in a landscape otherwise devoid of notable features. These pumps give the zone the post-apocalyptic feel of a deadland stripped of its relevance and activity. "Civilization" becomes visible again to the south of the industrial zone, where it backs onto the route des Gravelines: a residential road beyond which a row of houses with front gardens lie, one with improvised loops of barbed wire across its front hedge.

The industrial zone harbours a particular smell. In 2016, I thought it was specific to the Calais Jungle, but with every trip back since its demolition I've been met with that same stench; not the smell of human stagnation but that of industrial activity. The zone is home to several heavy industry factories such as cement manufacturers and chemical plants, some of which are classified as high-risk Seveso sites. The proximity of the former Jungle to two of these chemical plants led it to be classified as at moderate risk of exposure to dangerous substances (DREAL Hauts-de-France 2019; Davies et al. 2017),

and since the demolition of the camp the displaced have lived in even greater proximity to them. Allocating the site of the former Jungle as a “tolerated” place of encampment emerges as an explicit, *active* act of environmental racism: the displaced are exposed to a potentially toxic environment in an act of state-sanctioned violence (Pulido 2016; Wright 2018). Moreover, in these places poor sanitation means displaced people face constant stomach troubles, while the muddy landscape and lack of shelter make opportunities to remove one’s shoes scarce, and early cases of trench foot frequent. A shortage of shelter and firewood means the displaced often resort to burning plastic to keep warm, releasing toxic fumes which compromise their sense of health, respiratory system and skin. Cases of scabies were widespread at both sites. In Tangier, just a few weeks into life at the cemetery, the outbreak began. Idriss scratched his arms as he lamented: ‘this cemetery is getting under our skin!’ Although the men knew the mites travelled skin-to-skin as well as through their blankets and clothes, they could not easily discard them due to a lack of washing facilities or opportunities to acquire new blankets. Reusing the same materials only exacerbated the spread of the infestation, leaving them caught in a vicious cycle. It was also very common at both sites to hear people say they ‘feel pain everywhere’, likely a psychosomatic issue linked to their poor living conditions and strains on their mental health associated with their harassment by the authorities (on Calais, see Lotto 2021, 109).



Scaling the industrial waste heap | Photo by author, Calais 06.02.20

Gutting the landscape: the environment, a compromised witness

‘Before we arrived we heard that people in Calais live in a jungle. We just *heard* about it, but we hadn’t seen it for ourselves yet. We imagined a real jungle, with wild animals in it and no roads. No other humans inside, no associations. When we did arrive, we thought it must just be the beginning of the jungle - where are all the trees and the animals?’

In this interview extract Raziah, stuck seeking passage to the UK from Calais for almost a year when we speak, draws attention to the strangeness of the term “jungle” (understood as “forest”) in relation to the landscape she and her family encountered upon arrival to the industrial zone. Indeed, the term was more fitting in the 2000s and early 2010s, before a series of alterations were made to the natural environment in border spaces where the displaced camp, each in turn reducing the salience of the term “jungle”. Raziah’s comment highlights the environmental manipulation strategy that the state has incorporated into its border deterrence arsenal since the dismantling of the Jungle in 2016 (Hagan 2019; Lizée 2020; Van Isacker 2022). After my first few weeks in the field in 2020, I was struck by the thinning out of forests in which the displaced took shelter: where thick wooded areas initially concealed campfires well, in just a matter of weeks the orange flames and figures huddled around them had become clearly visible silhouettes. Those who seek to take discrete shelter in forested areas are in turn rendered visible and displaced *again* through attacks on the natural environments they inhabit. An Eritrean place of encampment in a densely wooded area of the industrial zone saw *all* of its trees cut down in late December 2019, depriving this group of the relative safety and privacy the trees had offered them. The remaining ground was grey and muddy with turned up earth, jagged with severed roots and tree stumps. It left members of the community sleeping in tents not only more visible, but more exposed to wind and rain during the coldest months of the year. A medical worker who had watched these practices gradually become the norm remarked: ‘It’s a *completely* disfigured city’ [12.01.21].

I sought to take scrupulous notes and images throughout my fieldwork, knowing that a given site might disappear at any moment. Indeed, many of the places where communities had been present during my fieldwork in 2017 have not only been cleared of encampments but disappeared altogether by 2020. A row of houses and several warehouses that were squatted, several clusters of bushes and trees that served as rudimentary shelters, have all been razed to the ground. It is in this sense that contingency is not only imposed through material dispossession, but also through attempts to pull the very earth from underfoot and *erase* all traces of migrant presence. The meticulous erasure of sites of violence through environmental manipulation constitutes a deft act of environmental racism which requires close attention, going beyond attacks on the material in attempts to shatter the rhizomatic perpetuation of encampment. As Wright argues, it is important to draw attention to ‘the use of environmental habitats to commit and *conceal* acts of anti-Black violence’ (emphasis added) within studies of practices of environmental racism (2018, 791).

The local government in Calais often draws upon an ecological rhetoric to justify its adaptations to or restrictions of zones of encampment (Hagan 2019). As Sundberg & Kaserman write: ‘undocumented immigrants are often held responsible for [...] damage; indeed contamination appears to emanate from their bodies’ 2007, (729). The site of the former Jungle for instance has been turned into a nature reserve,

described on its website as a ‘landscape and ecological reconquest’. Renamed as the “site des Deux-Mers”, the site has been restored as a place for flora and fauna to flourish - camping however, is *not* permitted (Hagan 2018). Situated in a prime location for migrating birds, the reclamation of the land represents an age-old strategy of using environmental conservation to displace and exclude the informally settled (Ramutsindela 2014; Doshi 2018). It also serves to erase reminders of their presence from the border (Kourelis 2019). While the ecological value of the site is genuine, it was greatly neglected before the displaced were permitted to settle on it.

Manipulations of border environments to the ends of improved border control is not exclusive to northern France (see Louarn 2020 on the Croatian tree-felling campaign at the Bosnia-Herzegovina/Croatia border). Sundberg & Kaserman also observe how at the Mexico-US border migrant people are strategically funnelled towards protected areas, where their portrayal as a threat to nature may be reinforced. Fears of the displaced person as a social and environmental concern are conflated: ‘protecting nature is equated with protecting the national body from social contamination’ (2007, 471). This resonates with what Baviskar describes as ‘bourgeois environmentalism’, whereby ideals of urban improvement and beautification are mobilised to justify forced evictions (2002). In seeking to give new purpose to these supposedly “empty” forested spaces, the authorities seek to reclaim them permanently. Scott-Smith fittingly captures the intention behind the transformation of the site of the Calais Jungle: ‘from being neglected urban wasteland, it was now designated as *properly* empty of people’ (2020a).



‘Properly empty of people’: from makeshift camp to environmental haven

Photo by author, site of the former Calais Jungle 16.05.20

The extent of cleansing the site underwent in the aftermath of its demolition was radical; not a trace of the former camp remained. A representative of the land conservation organisation that oversaw the restoration of the former site, the Conservatoire du littoral, described:

‘There was *a lot* to remove, and once we started scratching the earth a lot of things started to come out of it, because there were even older things too. It was the outcome of a long period, not just that of the camp, but of different occupations of the land over time. Everyone had added their own layer. [...] Specialised companies did the bulk of the job, and then workers from a social reintegration programme in Calais did a lot of the clear-up manually after the big stuff was removed, because loads of little pieces of rubbish came up out of the ground and needed to be hand-picked.’

Conservatoire du Littoral representative, phone interview 10.06.20

This description of meticulous cleansing down to the hand-picking of ‘little pieces of rubbish’ reveals both the poor state of the site on which people were living, and the extent to which the French authorities were willing to go to erase any evidence of the place’s existence. In this vein, it is important to pay attention to state practices of erasure. Sezneva emphasises the importance of digging in processes of memory-making, writing that ‘a place and its culture can be reconstructed *metonymically* through interpretation of an object and its link to the cultural whole’ (2007, 31). By contrast, what is at work in these borderlands is rather a process of *excavation* of the present by the state in order to actively erase it. This process has undergone refinement since the Jungle was demolished, the borderlands characterised by relentless fencing up and renaturing of parts of the city inhabited by displaced communities as well as the cutting down of trees (Lizée 2020). Although the *terrain vagues* and unoccupied slices of natural space amid urban infrastructures in Calais seem countless, the desire for land reclamation is seemingly insatiable. Just four months after I left the border city in late spring 2020, most of the main sites of encampment had already drastically changed. To the unknowing passer-by, the history of these sites as places of life to hundreds would be near-unidentifiable, reinvested with “purpose”: fenced up and altered or left for nature to gradually reclaim the inaccessible land beyond the fence. These alterations deny the border zone its messy, layered history, adding to its hauntedness for those who have witnessed the transformation. In Tangier, too, this logic of erasure was apparent in the presence of clean up teams who would sometimes emerge in the wake of police raids to get rid of the bulk of damaged shelter materialities left behind: while the bodies of the displaced were chased or physically removed from space, their traces at the cemetery were erased. This is an intriguing example of how environmental racism is activated in the contingent camp specifically, performed through the *cleansing* of border space to racist ends as opposed to (and alongside) more explicit acts of degradation with which the concept is more commonly associated (Wright 2018). In Calais, in the aftermath of the degradation of the hostile and polluted environment to deterrence ends, it is repackaged, rendered pristine for “legitimate” local citizens (see Hagan 2019).

In terms of affect and atmosphere, this process of local authorities reclaiming space was anxiety-inducing for those who experienced it. It was usually carried out performatively and at a slow pace, creating uncertainty among the displaced for weeks before actually happening. As Harms writes, the systematic collection of data in marginal spaces often serves to pre-empt and legitimise their elimination through an insidious process of ‘knowing into oblivion’ (2014 in Gandy 2016, 438). Throughout my fieldwork, the industrial zone underwent the slow process of local authorities preparing for a massive eviction. This was performed by workers in high-vis jackets and hard hats visiting the sites equipped with theodolites, range finders and other measurement instruments before chainsaws and diggers were rolled in. Trees to be cut down were marked with fluorescent crosses in spray paint, sealing their fate weeks before they came down, while shallow trenches were dug where fences would soon run. This amounted to an unsettling experience of slowly witnessing the parameters for one’s expulsion being devised, undermining the basic consistency one might have expected from the bare border landscape. It emphasises the calculated nature of the environmental racism at work here. Alborz from Iran explained:

‘The government wants to put fences in the jungle and starts cutting trees two or three metres from each side of the fence. Near the jungle there is a factory, and that factory started cutting their trees to put a fence around it - to keep it safe from migration. After that, the police just try to keep everyone collected in one place, not everywhere. They told us: “we are going to remove the jungle from this place, remove the refugees from the jungle.” But still refugees are in the jungle, the jungle is surrounded by fences, and after that they are going to plant trees again. I don’t have any idea why they do such a thing.’

Alborz, Calais 22.04.20

At one of the main sites of encampment, several communities lived fenced in for weeks (see image below), all but for a narrow gap left open to be sealed at any moment. The process of measuring, planning and geometrically portioning off the *terrain vague* by fencing it up deprives it of the vagueness that initially allowed for it to be territorialised by the displaced. Knowing a space ‘into oblivion’ (Harms 2014) represents an act of striation in its most literal sense: ‘in striated space, one closes off a surface and “allocates” it according to determinate intervals, assigned breaks’ (Deleuze & Guattari 2013, 559). These are malevolent and unsubtle alterations to public space and spaces of sociality, whereby the human is altered by reworkings of the non-human (Amin 2015). Where public, social space is usually something local authorities seek to create and nurture, where “othered” bodies settle efforts are made to crush it. People are made to witness the detailed unfolding of the erasure of their own places of life.



Living inside the fence, Rute des Huttes | Photo by author, Calais 12.02.20

Calais is a border landscape mapped against those who enliven it. The borderlands still bear traces of its migration present and history, but it is less a history of communal lives lived furtively in forests than one of systematic eviction and erasure. This politics of erasure is visible in elements on the landscape that *conceal* rather than in those traces themselves: in the fences that eat away at public space, the boulders set down to hinder humanitarian access to sites of life, the attention paid to neglected sites whose environmental value is suddenly acknowledged. These alterations to urban space offer a cartographic “negative” of where spaces of life used to be, emphasising the importance of counter-mapping these borderlands (Tazzioli 2020; Van Isacker 2020), of paying forensic attention to these alterations and the traces they leave behind or conceal. Watching the detail of these alterations play out, noticing how quickly a landscape of experience is erased and sanitised, lends the Calais borderland a particularly haunted quality. Obscuring the life spaces of the displaced at the border in this way, erasing their traces, also erases the true history of the borderland and our ability to remember and document life within it. This is yet another devastating characteristic of the contingent camp phenomenon: it marks a transition from neglect to active violence, but also from scarred borderlands from which we might cobble together a remembrance of chaotic temporary spaces of transit,⁴³ to cleansed borderlands which mute the voices of those who suffer within them and compromise the possibility of bearing witness.

⁴³ The former Jungle has been documented widely and through numerous mediums: it inspired exhibitions (Wildschut 2016), several novels (Coulin 2017; Huret, 2017; Puri 2017; Norek 2017), graphic novels (Evans 2017, Mandel & Bouagga 2017) and a play that has travelled from London’s West End to theatres in New York and San Francisco (Good Chance Theatre Company 2017).

Part II | Enlivening dead space: desire lines, rhizomes & fugitivity

This second part of the chapter focuses on how the displaced enliven border space despite the processes of environmental racism with which they are targeted, focusing on modes of dwelling and spatial navigation migrant people devise in adverse environments. Weheliye argues that it is important to think beyond the ‘tradition of the oppressed’ (2014,12) conveyed in Agamben, Foucault and even Mbembe’s biopolitical conceptualisations, because they refute ‘the existence of alternative modes of life alongside the violence, subjection, exploitation, and racialization that define the modern human’ (ibid, 1-2). While the violence at work in the contingent camp indeed brutally targets (usually racialised) flesh, these ‘assemblages of subjection can never annihilate the lines of flight, freedom dreams, practices of liberation, and possibilities of other worlds’ (Weheliye 2014, 2). In this sense, he calls for attention to ‘miniscule movements, glimmers of hope, scraps of food, the interrupted dreams of freedom found in those spaces deemed devoid of full human life’ (ibid, 12).

Chapter two introduced Smith & Walters’ (2018) conceptualisation of *desire lines* for thinking about the ways in which borderlands where contingent camps emerge are lived and their hostility somewhat subverted. Chapter five drew on De Boeck & Balaji’s (2016; 2017) conceptualisation of the postcolonial city as a place of “holes” which inhabitants struggle to patch up and reclaim, “suturing” the city in an effort to redefine the difficult circumstances of inhabiting its ‘impossible circumstances,’ turning them instead into ‘a possibility, a something else, a surplus’ (2017, 152). This resonates with the constant “resuturing” of damaged spaces of life that contingent camp residents engage in in the “holey” topography of the borderscape, constantly working to rebuild shelter or weave places of life into being. If we read practices of navigating the border environment and endlessly seeking shelter within it as processes of “suturing”, desire lines represent the threads and stitches of these efforts. Close attention to these micro-practices may indeed enable us to see ‘alternative critical, political, and poetic assemblages that are often hushed in these debates’ (Weheliye 2014, 12). These are the focus of this second section of this chapter, which returns to the concepts of the desire line and the rhizome described in chapter two, looking first at modes dwelling then at modes of spatial navigation. Departing from these analyses, I then propose a conceptualisation of contingent camps as hopeful spaces of Black fugitivity.

Dwelling, a rhizomatic practice

States mobilise exposure and alterations to space to compromise displaced people’s drive and ability to dwell at the border. However, strategies that ‘seek to inculcate behaviours through adjustments to the topography of public space can never be sure of the outcome’ (Amin 2015, 255). Indeed, dwelling involves spatial negotiation and skill (Noë 2012; Amin 2015), and for the displaced person, such skills have been honed through experience acquired over the course of a furtive migration journey. While

chapter five illustrated certain forms of shelter-building (namely the tent in Calais and the bunker in Tangier), this section focuses on other modes of dwelling these groups engage in. The tent and makeshift shelter are crucial material manifestations of spatial reclamation and persistence, but the focus here is on more insidious forms of spatial affirmation which are less tangible and thus more difficult to undermine or attack. They are forms of territorialisation through furtive modes of dwelling, processes of communal, relentless *reinscription* that the displaced engage in, regenerating encampment in rhizomatic offshoots. It is through these practices that they work to claim space, enlivening border deadlands as ‘unintentional landscapes’: ‘wastelands or *terrain vagues* [...] appropriated as spaces of adventure, creativity or discovery’ (Gandy 2016, 433). In the contingent camp, desire lines first and foremost emerge in “little tactics” for rebuilding shelter in places hard for authorities to access, that subvert the use of infrastructures and the border environment, claiming the natural or urban environment as ally. As described above, these are often mere ‘miniscule movements’ but also significant ‘glimmers of hope’ (Weheliye 2014, 12).



Tents between the trees | Photo by author, Calais 08.02.20

The Calais encampments are crawling with mice and rats, yet they harbour a certain intrigue: clever setups of tarps and tents between the trees. The first time a fellow volunteer ventured into the more hidden sites of the industrial zone on a wood distribution shift, he excitedly described the experience to me as one of ‘stepping into a whole other universe, like finally stepping backstage’. The wood distribution team gave the various sites of encampment names that might appear on a map of a fictive land: the Sudanese Woods, Big Iranian Camp, la Francophonie, the Sudanese Mountains and so on. Taking part in the activities of this organisation, which distributes firewood to displaced people, also allowed me to get to the intimacy of spaces of encampment. As well as this main area, there were several

other sites of life dotted across the city at the time of my fieldwork. Every time it seemed that all thinkable border spaces had been found and fenced up, the displaced would find new sites, always ahead of the urban imagination of the “included”. When I asked Sam about a new area of encampment that had emerged since I left Calais, they described it in a way that well captures the *terrain vague* quality of these spaces:

‘It was quite secretive and a bit elusive and no one really knew if it actually existed or not [Laughs]. [...] It’s behind the clinic, like an island along the railway tracks. You have to go over a little stream to get to it. We took a couple of pallets so people could walk over. It was like building a little bridge, but a lot of people were slipping in - it was quite tricky. You then had to go up the bank on the other side; it was muddy. And it’s this huge, huge area. Most people were all around the outside of it. A big part of it was weirdly concreted over, and then there were loads of trees and shrubs around and it’s quite marshy. None of us knew the place existed before people moved there’.

Sam, phone interview 07.12.20

This interview extract conveys the resourcefulness of displaced people in a context of constant change, their ability to make place out of bare space. It seems ironic that although *terrain vagues* are usually almost by definition deadlands devoid of the infrastructures and tools which make life possible, to the displaced they are vital as the only types of spaces in which the contingent camp may be negotiated, across which they may rhizomatically travel and persist in their survival.

At an encampment on the outskirts of Tangier, I spent a day with a group of other Cameroonian and Senegalese men. We sat by a campfire near a recently quarried piece of land, looking out over a residential area in construction. Behind us stretched a forest, deep within which the men spent their nights. Two of the men brought me to see a cluster of impressive caves in large yellow rocks, explaining that they would often take shelter within them. By night, they would most often retreat into the forests higher up, but these natural rock formations would come in useful for sleeping during the day or in the aftermath of a camp raid. Amadou from Senegal walked ahead eagerly, explaining:

‘Look, this is my room, there are some others down there. Three of us sleep in here some nights *wallah*, when the rain hits hard, though the rain comes in a bit anyway. Look here - I wrote my name on the stone in this one.’

Amadou, Tangier 04.12.19

He climbed in and showed me how they had padded the hollows down with a few blankets.⁴⁴ He demonstrated how he would use a balled-up hoodie or rucksack for a pillow. In a context where materialities are so uncertain, the caves offered the benefit of some consistency in sheltering. Once the men stepped out of the caves, and I asked if I could take a picture, they insisted on jumping back in, eager to be on the photos. They posed triumphantly in the grandiose caves, expressing a certain pride in their claimed ownership of the basic and cold yet *permanent* spaces - an emotion I so rarely witnessed among contingent camp residents in their places of life.



Amadou in his cave | Photo by author, 04.12.19

This strategy of embedding oneself in consistent elements of the available environment is characteristic of life in contingent camps. At the cemetery camp, though in the early days of living there the men slept in the empty spaces between the graves, they soon came to reconcile themselves with the advantages of instead sleeping *within* these structures that offered solid and consistent sources of protection from the elements and stayed fixed even when the rest of the shelter has been attacked. In Calais this was also visible (particularly through 2017-18 when the timing of raids was unpredictable and police patrols through the borderlands were frequent): the displaced would build shelter embedded in bushes and

⁴⁴ These cave shelters are reminiscent of the limestone caves and quarries in proximity to the northern French port city of Dieppe, known as the “*gobes* of Dieppe”, where migrant people are also known to have taken shelter while seeking passage to the United Kingdom in the early 2000s (Thomas 2011) and again (to a more limited extent) in the mid-2010s (Rabelle et al. 2016). Historically, these were places used by fishermen and contraband smugglers, and taken on as places of dwelling by Dieppe’s poorest families in the late 19th century.

wooded areas, going to great lengths to conceal their encampments from all angles. Like in Tangier, they could not always be sure they would have the resources to rebuild shelter at short notice, so also carved out spaces of shelter in the environment at the border where some form of protection remains even when stripped of the materialities of encampment. A coordinator for NGO *Collective Aid* described to me in early spring 2021:

‘There’s a wide scrub area with circular bushes, so people have cut into the bushes and made their camps inside those. That way, different groups can be in different parts of the bush, which offers some kind of privacy and a community space.’

James, phone interview 13.01.21

The urban equivalent of the Tangier caves for Eritreans in Calais was perhaps the *binto* (bridge in Tigrinya) - a massive and ugly, concrete grey area away beneath the motorway, which was later fenced off. Habtom, a young Eritrean man whom I met in Calais in 2017 and has since settled with refugee status in France, told me in 2020:

‘We used to sleep between the trees in *Little Forest*, but when it got too cold or it was raining too much, we would pack up our tents, take our sleeping bags and our blankets, and go to sleep at the *binto*, under the motorway. It protected us a bit. The first time I slept there I couldn’t sleep at all because of the noise of the lorries driving by just over our heads. It was very frightening, but we slept there together, and I got used to it in the end.’

Habtom, Béthune 22.01.20

These examples convey the ways in which the displaced move strategically dwell within and across the borderlands. Carving out shelter in improbable natural and urban spaces amounts to a ‘domestication of the abject’, in the sense that these spaces become ‘intrinsically constitutive’ of life at the border (Navaro-Yashin 2009, 6). Although they remain rudimentary and do not grow in arborescence, these places of life develop rhizomatically, reimagined in offshoots beyond and around the striating practices of the state. It is a reconciliatory and appropriating act of inscribing one’s body and self on the skin of the borderscape. Colebrook describes the practice of inscription as a ‘tool of cutting,’ that ‘inscription (and thus inhabitation) in its most basic manoeuvre remains the marking of something through its corresponding nothingness, of the civilized against the uncivilized, and so forth’ (in Simone 2019, 25). Although the dwelling practices of the displaced are understated in these spaces, they mark their humanity upon border space, laying claim to hospitality in a hostile environment. From Amadou inscribing his name on the wall of the cave in Tangier to groups in Calais carving communal hollows out of bushes, these practices testify to the potential for assembled bodies to make place and claim shelter in adverse conditions. At both sites, the displaced would also draw on the natural border environment to protect their possessions: digging holes in which to conceal documents or valuables, hiding boats in the sand in Calais, or in wooded areas in proximity to the beach in Morocco, ready for the moment of departure.

Desire lines: navigating border space



Pathway to success Calais 28.01.20 | Photo by author

The ontological uncertainty of the contingent camp and the erasure of migrant experience that its emergence represents make attention to practices of self-inscription on border space particularly important. Desire lines bear witness to a manipulation of space in pursuit of opportunity, to a parallel and hopeful mapping of the borderlands. On the photograph above, you can just about make out a foot-trodden path leading up to the motorway, just beneath the U of SUCCES on the lorry that's driving by. The path is an uncanny one because it puts the fugitive figure of the migrant person in transit, visible here only as a spectre, into contrast with the huge infrastructure of the motorway and its traffic. In however small a way, this path through the grass evokes absent border crossers and their rudimentary strategies for passage, bearing witness to their fleeting presence as well as to the dangerous challenge of navigating intimidating urban infrastructures in pursuit of clandestine crossing. Collectively treaded and used by many of those I met during my fieldwork in 2018, this particular path is deep and still visible when I come to take this photograph in 2020. Though fenced off, discreet and no longer accessible, the rudimentary trace humbly testifies to the passing through of those who came before and to the fugitivity of their border experience. In this sense, the desire line represents the “experiential ruin”, allowing for an imaginative exchange between the person who beholds these traces and the history of border space (Garrett, 2011b in DeSilvey & Edensor 2012, 472).

The cunning and persistence of displaced people is visible in the countless traces which rhizomatically pattern strategic borderlands; these are desire lines in a literal sense, unrequited inscriptions and routes treaded by the repeated and collective passing through of footsteps (Smith & Walters 2018). The

displaced devise their own paths across border space in a network of micro-typographies which never cease multiplying. These subversive physical routes help them to avoid pervasive policing and navigate the border city on their own terms. As De Certeau emphasises, ‘the ordinary practitioners of the city live “down below” the threshold at which visibility begins; their bodies follow the thicks and thins of a spatial “text” that they write without being able to read it’ (1984, 93). The person who walks (or in this case furtively navigates) border space develops intimacy with it, tracing desire lines out of necessity. I do not here take desire lines in a romanticised sense but a strategic one; they are not artistic imaginings or testimonies of ‘the never-ending resourcefulness of a subaltern imagination’ (Simone 2019, 19), but rather marks of endurance. These traces are a discreet yet powerful affirmation of a determined migrant presence in the borderlands, prying open space and potential for parallel narratives of migrant experiences of the border, counter to those amplified by the state.

A pared back way of life creates a certain intimacy and familiarity between the displaced person and the territories upon which they dwell, which is a clear asset. While it is enforced by the authorities to the ends of dehumanisation and deterrence, this close manner of living in and with an environment also generates a deep and strategic familiarity between the displaced and the bare territory across which their encampments rhizomatically perpetuate. As Olivier put it in reference to the cemetery camp in Tangier: ‘If they [the police] come for us here at night, they’re shooting themselves in the foot. We live here, we’ve got the advantage, we *master* cemetery territory’. The displaced in Calais had a similarly detailed knowledge of and familiarity with border space. In 2018 for example, I wrote of how, in a moment of emergency, an Eritrean man led me through a hole in a fence before carefully tying it closed again (image below right), revealing routes across the city as of yet unknown to me. I described this moment as one in which ‘a whole other mapping of the city emerge[d]. Green, secret routes away from the asphalt and the city’s threats’ (Hagan 2018, 53). Indeed, in a heavily securitised city predominantly policed by officers travelling in cars or vans, discreet routes through the grass and mud offered the displaced person some peace of mind. An Iraqi man, Ashti, who took some photographs of his daily life for me with a disposal camera, shared the photo below (left), explaining that walking the railway tracks offered him greater peace of mind than walking the streets of the city.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Resorting to a life lived in the shadows of urban space in this manner has however led to casualties. On the 4th of November 2021 a Tigray man was killed and three of his friends hospitalised after being hit by a train on these same tracks (Calais Migrant Solidarity 2021). On the 28th of February 2022, a 26-year-old Sudanese man named Abubaker was also killed by a train on these tracks, right beside his place of life and within view of his peers (Utopia56 2022).



Walking the railway tracks | January 2018

Photo by Ashti (disposable camera)



The hole in the fence | still there on 28.01.21

Photo by author

While to the outsider, the trace bears witness to a certain mode of enforced and rudimentary life, for the displaced person the border landscape marked with traces offers an affective force that counters the haunting that emerges from their relegation to abject spaces and encounters with material remains. Markings on a tree or cave wall, faded beer caps clamped to the earth, a patch of grass yellowed from past campfires: treading in the desire lines of those who came before may evoke a certain promise, stories and evidence of peers who have come and gone before. There is perhaps something comforting about inhabiting the very landscape others in your position have struggled with intimately before you; spectral evidence that testifies to the fact that such an experience is, in fact, possible. Although the presence of individual people at the border is transitory, these groups relay one another in what amounts to a protracted, communal project of claiming border territory. And yet, these lines too are ephemeral in the context of erasure and reclamation enforced by the state. As DeSilvey and Edensor write: the ‘liminal state [of ruination] is actually a fragile and ephemeral achievement [...] ruined structures are apt to be swiftly razed, reclaimed or restored’ (2012, 472). Returning in 2020 to the Bois Chico-Mendès, where the Eritreans lived for some time in 2017 and 2018 before being definitively evicted, was an uncanny experience (Hagan 2019). What had been an important and lively place of life, where a neglected *pétanque* pitch had been imaginatively upgraded to a place of worship through regular prayer (see chapter seven), was now fenced off and video-camera equipped. Few traces of the area’s former inhabitation remain: the *pétanque* pitch has been returned to its neglected state and only a few brave desire lines persist, uncannily leading nowhere but right into the fences that now claim the space. Similar was the experience of arriving at the Tangier cemetery after the event on days when an eviction had taken place. With the site cleared and its inhabitants often absent but for a few tell-tale traces, one would be forgiven for thinking they had dreamed up the people that enlivened the space altogether.

The displaced dwelling in contingent camps are in constant voluntary and involuntary movement; both perpetually unable to arrive and unable to depart. Reduced to a game of shadows and glimpses, traces on the landscape are the only markings that bear witness to their presence. The state desire to erase the

displaced indeed renders the borderland phantomic (Navaro-Yashin 2012) and those who furtively dwell within it spectral. However, this fantasy is undermined by the displaced who refuse to disappear. As Derrida describes, the spectre is a *revenant* ‘because it begins by coming back’ (1994, 11). This description resonates with the repetitive, evanescent ontology of the contingent camp: it is always uncertain and precarious yet predictably re-emergent. I prefer to speak of the spectralisation of the displaced person rather than of their invisibilisation, because it better captures the idea that despite constant struggle their presence is not *erased*. Much like the camp, the migrant person becomes an absent-presence who flits in and out of view. It is important to pay attention to these dual processes of attempted erasure and return, departing from a reading of the displaced person as both spectre and revenant. Drawing on Derrida, Wylie emphasises how ‘the spectral ushers in an endless process of returning without ever arriving. [...] the spectral constitutes an incessance that belies origins or ends: a haunting’ (2007, 171).

Migration as a fugitive, decolonial act



Evading capture | Photo by author, Calais 2018

‘Even if you bring them good proof, they’ll keep you hanging around for a year and a half and then reject you. [...] Whether or not you ask for asylum the outcome is the same. They don’t want us to stay here. Even if they gave us a house now, we wouldn’t want it. After all they’ve done, we are afraid.’

Azzat (Afghan), Calais 23.10.17

Derrida’s reading of hospitality identifies negotiation and struggle as fundamental to the relationship between guest and host (2000). The “master of the house” devises the rules to which the guest must

submit (ibid, 149), the relationship is thus always entangled in power struggles, premised on a certain inequality. Le Blanc & Brugère condemn state attempts to invisibilise and efface migrant people on their territory, observing that by failing to host we create an illusion that we can ignore or erase human lives that come knocking at our door (2017). They describe this as *pure inhospitality* that rapidly grows into hostility or even hatred (ibid). The contingent camp emerges in contexts where this rapport of hostility reigns, and namely in the moment when it intersects with the refusal of the displaced person to play the role of rule-following guest, as expressed in the above extract from an interview with Azzat. Darling qualifies informality as a means of eluding the ‘mechanisms that define hospitality’, as a mode of life predicated on the evasion of classification and legibility that lie at the core of the hospitable relation (2014b, 164). He argues that the outcome of informality means living in ‘the anonymity of presence’ (ibid, 165), a status which in and of itself is often revelatory of injustice. In what follows I extend this argument, proposing a reading of the desire lines that emerge in contexts of camp contingency as deterritorialising marks of Black fugitivity.

Where institutional spaces of migrant life (like the refugee camp or asylum centre) are often stagnant, running bureaucratically and in slow motion, borderlands in which contingent camps emerge are the opposite. As described above, the routes and dwelling spaces that characterise them are rhizomatic, fast-paced and characterised by the activity and resourcefulness of those who inhabit them. Despite the harsh conditions and risks that the journeys of the displaced entail, the desire line is the spatial manifestation of a determination to take control of one’s condition. Following Weheliye (2014), the more we read the borderlands in this way, paying close attention to the details that express the persistence and desire of the migrant person to determine their own futures, the less relevant it seems to conceive of the experience of life in contingency as one of “bare life”. The acts of territorialisation described above may seem banal, not particularly spectacular or noteworthy. However, small acts of everyday practice which appropriate border space tell us a great deal about the sentiment and motivations that give rise to contingent camps. It is valuable here to draw a link between desire lines and the *line of flight*:

‘The line of flight is a deterritorialisation. [...] To flee is not to give up action, nothing is more active than flight. It’s the opposite of the imaginary. It is also to make flee, not necessarily others, but to make something flee, to make a system flee like you might puncture a tube... To take flight is to trace a line, lines, a whole cartography.’

Deleuze & Parnet ([author’s translation] 1977, 47)

The *line of flight* captures the agency inherent to the flight of the displaced person, both within and in seeking to exit the borderland northwards. These lines trace a communal cartography which subverts state control of the landscape. Despite the environmental racism with which they are targeted, the displaced seek a liberated way of life at the border through banal and rhizomatic acts of ‘radical place-making’ (Heynen & Ybarra 2021); they work to liberate their environments through struggle, to invoke

‘freedom as a place’ in defiance of the will of the state (Gilmore 2017, 227). This ties in powerfully with the concept of Black fugitivity. Originally used to refer to the escape of the enslaved from 19th century Southern American plantations, drawing on the work of W.E.B. DuBois (Northover & Crichlow 2009), the concept of Black fugitivity has also been applied to contemporary sites of oppression, namely in the context of contemporary carceral America (Sojoyner 2017; Moten 2018; Omelsky 2020). Fugitivity has also been described as a global phenomenon reacting to various colonial and neo-colonial forms of suppression or degradation of Black life (Moten 2018). It is a movement of body and mind that emerges in a group or person’s refusal to see themselves subjected to a system that refuses to recognise them (Sojoyner 2017); ‘it’s defined not by opposition or necessarily resistance, but instead a refusal of the very premises that have historically negated the lived experience of Blackness as either pathological or exceptional to the logic of white supremacy’ (Campt 2014). Sojoyner poses the fundamental question of how a person can ‘negotiate or enter into any type of fruitful relationship, with an entity that on multiple levels has proven detrimental to your humanity?’ (2017, 533), which resonates with the relationship between state and migrant person portrayed in this thesis thus far. The following extract from an interview with Tesfa, from Eritrea, vividly illustrates disengagement from a treacherous state represented in the geography of the contingent camp:

‘All that the police do is encourage us to fight them. It is a strategy. We understand the logic. Treat us as criminals. Encourage us to fight and if they catch us that’s it, we must go with them to the station. In the area where we live especially, we know this trick. But we prefer not to fight so we just let them go. Sometimes they go by in the car and spray us [with tear gas]. But it is like water to us now. We don’t give them any feedback. [...] They spray us while we sleep and they expect feedback. But we give them nothing. At the parking they come running at us, so we go peacefully. If we run away they can run after us, so instead we stand. Our main problem is not nature here. It’s not living outside. It is police. Since I left my country they do not let me rest.’

Tesfa, Calais 01.02.18 (also cited in Hagan 2018, 57-58)

This disengagement with authority at the level of the border zone is reflective of a broader disengagement of the displaced with notions of hospitality or refuge on the part of the state. This is a valuable observation for thinking through the shifting attitudes of people migrating towards Europe. The contingent camp is a manifestation of these attitudes as well as of those of the state. Indeed, the contingent camp reflects a shift whereby the displaced person recognises the necessity of taking their future and trajectory into their own hands. In this sense, we might begin to read the contingent camp as a spatialization of migration as ‘attempted decolonization at a personal level’ and a ‘means of asserting individual agency over political horizons’ (Achiume 2019, 1522). It is a fugitive geography, seeking escape from the racialised temporal, material and environmental structures that the transit state seeks to impose. This emphasises how and why the contingent camp may be read as a geography of evasion and refusal of institutional capture (Campt 2014 in Sojoyner 2017) by groups who “accept” a shelterless life

in a hostile environment as a free though brutal mode of dwelling, refusing to willingly submit to a system that refuses to recognize their humanity and desire for self-determination (Harney & Moten 2013).

Black fugitivity is at its core ‘an approach by which fugitives disengage from state processes’ (Sojoyner 2017, 527). This notion of disengagement with systems of hospitality is important here and reinforces the liberty-claiming dynamics that may be gleaned within these oppressive spaces. Refusal is not necessarily defined by outspoken opposition or explicit resistance but may be seen in disengagement, in the refusal to see oneself subjected to ‘a law that refuses to recognise you’ (Camp 2014). In contingent camp assemblages, fugitivity and refusal are territorialized in communal movements of the mind as well as physical, bodily movement (Omelsky 2020, 56). The displaced ironically render themselves ungovernable, uncontainable by engaging in the constant non-fixity imposed upon them by the state (Moten 2008). It is the mode through which the displaced consistently remain present and reclaim space, in an unfixed yet clear territorialising process.

Black fugitivity is not, however, a mode that should be overly celebrated or romanticised, in the sense that it does not represent an act of outright resistance or emancipation. As explained above, those who live in contingent camps often pour energy into defiantly maintaining a presence at the border, yet after successfully making the crossing hand themselves into other regimes of containment and legibility where they are again bound to see themselves stripped of their agency. A study carried out in Calais in 2020 reports that among those for whom the UK will be the first country in which they apply for asylum, 56% state they are “doing well”, 10% that they are “well enough” and 34% that they are “doing badly”. By contrast, among those who have already tried to ask for asylum elsewhere and are travelling to the UK by *default*, only 29% state that they are “doing well”, 25% that they are “well enough” and 46% that they are “doing badly” (Lotto 2021, 112). This marked difference in wellbeing conveys the extent to which the fugitivity of the migrant person is limited, how among those who have already experienced institutional capture on EU territory, the dream of genuine evasion of such systems upon arrival to the UK is already greatly tarnished. These structures inevitably also operate along lines of exclusion and national supremacy, dehumanising or disempowering migrant lives in their own way (Darling 2011; Kreichauf 2018). This contradiction however seems inherent to these types of spaces and processes of evasion. Indeed, Black fugitivity tends to be contradictory, ‘often reproducing forms of oppression while simultaneously establishing spaces (sometimes momentarily) of freedom’ (Sojoyner 2017, 526-7).

While there are moments of freedom and evasion however, there is no real option for genuine escape. This is emphasised by the experiences of many with whom I have maintained contact since leaving my field sites. Some have been granted asylum in France or the UK, several are still stuck at these borders, while others wait in various ambiguous humanitarian spaces or trapped in treacherous asylum systems. When Javid’s UK asylum process took a dark turn with the threat of his expulsion to

Belgium, where he was previously held in detention and faced poor treatment, even the promise of the UK began to tarnish and a sense of entrapment overwhelmed him. He told me: ‘you know, if I can find maybe 8,000 pounds, I can try for Canada. It’s possible to go hidden on a big boat, it takes twenty-two days. Do you know if Canada has a system with the UK like the Dublin system, that can see if I have been here before and send me back?’ [phone conversation 08.09.20] Many of those in pursuit of a safe place, where humanity overrides politics, seek a safe haven that seems not, in fact, to exist.

Conclusion: spectral fugitives in the borderlands

‘Specific lives cannot be apprehended as injured or
lost if they are not first apprehended as living.’

Judith Butler (2016, 1)

This chapter has revealed how in border zones where contingent camps emerge, the authorities weaponize the natural environment in several ways, concrete and atmospheric, to strengthen the deterrence project set in motion by routine dispossession. The environmental racism of the state emerges in several ways. The hostilities of the bare *terrain vagues* in which encampments emerge are harnessed to brutal biopolitical ends: as degraded sites of life, they symbolically deny their residents their humanity even as these work to claim their liveliness within them. They are sites of protracted exposure that wear materially dispossessed bodies and minds down, entrenching the displaced person’s awareness of their disposability in the eyes of the states through which they seek to pass, of their mortality and “ghostliness”. This chapter has also shown how environmental racism may be performed through active erasure: the relentless removal, cleansing, concealment, or transformation of sites of migrant life and their traces. This is significant for several reasons: it further exposes the displaced by dispossessing them of the very earth beneath their sites of life, and of the trees that once offered them shelter, it also enables the state to *erase* traces of its own violence, limiting future possibilities for bearing witness to the types of violence this thesis documents. It pre-emptively hinders the possibility that the criminality of the state might be borne witness to in years to come, that these border zones might come to bear traces of ‘a past which can haunt the fixed memories of place proffered by the powerful’ (Edensor 2005, 846-7).

This chapter has sought to show how everyday life persists in these spaces and the conditions in which they do so; the affective modes they give rise to and the subtle modes of resistance revealed in the banal. Both the Tangier and Calais borderlands illustrate the neglected types of space within and between which displaced people strive to carve out places of being for themselves, enlivening dead spaces in order to take refuge within them, navigating the borderlands furtively and leaving traces of their passing and humanity in their wake. McKittrick writes that the ‘alternative geographic formulations that subaltern communities advance [...] can incite new, or different, and perhaps more just, geographic stories’ (2006, xviii-xix). Improvisatory modes of dwelling and border navigation in

hostile contexts may be read as resistive, critical threads. Efforts to sever shoots of encampment at the border fail to acknowledge that as long as the border remains strategic and holds the promise of a better life elsewhere, displaced people will be drawn to the border zone. In other words, while acts of dispossession prove considerable deterrence mechanisms, they do not in and of themselves hinder the *presence* of the displaced and their territorialisation of border space. While the gathering of “undesired” bodies and their collective occupation of space most often occurs in instances of protest, when groups claim social sites of visibility from which to make communal political demands to better their situation (Lancione 2017, Vasudevan 2015, 2017; Sanyal 2014; Bock 2018), the contingent camp gives rise to rather different forms of resistive spatial occupation. Indeed, the demand expressed in the contingent camp geography is not so much for shelter as it is a demand to be left alone. These are not loud sites of explicit protest, but implicit protest geographies that symbolise the demand for self-determination, choice, mobility and the right to be let live, *rejecting* the hand of the state that seeks to force them into systems of containment at the cost of their legibility (Scott-Smith 2020b; Tazzioli 2020; Hagan 2020). Contingent camps are fluid assemblages serving the purposes of transit as opposed to demanding greater anchoring, legitimisation or recognition from the state. In this sense, the person who dwells within them reclaims their reduction to a spectral state, taking on a role that might better be described as that of the *revenant* (Derrida, 1994), constantly returning despite being chased. This revenant constantly flits in and out of view and does not want to arrive *yet*, inhabiting the liminal space and moment in pursuit of another site of arrival.

W.E.B Dubois once wrote that the Black person lives in a world that only lets them see themselves through the eyes of the “Other”: ‘always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others [...] measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity’ (1897). Although this is a historical quotation written in the very different context of post-slavery America, it resonates with the value system ascribed on migrant people’s lives through the pseudo-humanitarian processing systems to which our governments submit them. Read through the lens of the desire line and Black fugitivity, the contingent camp emphasises how in transit sites where all pretence of state hospitality is profoundly absent, the displaced person no longer *needs* the acknowledgment of the state to reaffirm their humanity and the legitimacy of their desires. Subtle traces, modes of dwelling and being testify to a humanity claimed and reaffirmed by those who see *themselves* as deserving and legitimate, regardless of the acknowledgement of the transit state. Chapter seven in part extends this argument, discussing the value of social togetherness and practice in sustaining fugitive modes of life.

CHAPTER 7 | DWELLING TOGETHER

FRAGILE RELATIONSHIPS IN PRECARIOUS PLACES



Place of prayer | Calais, Photo by Alex Holmes

‘When I decided to leave my country, I knew I would have to change. I was a very quiet person before - I had a few close friends but not too many. When I left my country, I knew that I would have to change to survive the journey.’

Hamaki, 26.07.20

In contingent camp contexts, where material structures are perpetually uncertain, social architectures and thresholds play a vital sheltering role. While a rich body of literature (described in chapter two), has shed light on the modes of social life that may emerge in refugee or makeshift camp contexts and the modes of resistance they give rise to (Agier 2002; Mould 2015; Sigona 2015; Katz & Gueguen-Teil 2018), the unfixed materialities and dynamics of contingent camps bring up a related yet new set of questions: how is the social life of migrant groups organised in these places where shelter, materialities, terrain and communal places of being are always uncertain? How does this uncertainty impact modes of social living? Jordan & Moser claim that the informal transit camp ‘functions less like a community and more like a circumstantial conglomerate of disparate individuals and small groups merely sharing the same transit goals’ (2020, 5). While at a first glance this observation seems fitting, this chapter argues that it is vital to look more closely, more deeply at the specific forms of sociality that contingent

camps give rise to: dense, social entanglements rooted around a common goal, but also spreading far deeper and beyond this situational commonality. After focusing on the material and environmental in chapters five and six, it is essential to explicitly tease out the distinct social dimensions of these geographies. While aspects of this have emerged throughout these earlier chapters, which discussed common social practices of rebuilding (in brief) and navigating border space, it is vital to devote attention to the social more specifically, to flesh out a deeper reading of contingent camp assemblages through the embodied practices and processes that constitute them, and atmospheric and affective emanations from their social fabrics. Evictions are moments of rupture which have a profound impact on the social structures of groups of displaced people, affecting their modes of social life and being in their relentless repetition. However, this is a far more complex story than one of simple submission of the displaced to dispossession and microlevel displacements: precarization is a contested field (Lorey 2015) which gives rise to new modes of cohesion, solidarity and communal life in transit, while also putting strain on social fabrics and forcing changes in their organisation. The material and the human are always ‘hyphenated’, and attention must be paid to the affective qualities that emerge from their entanglement, particularly within an assemblage approach (Amin 2014).

On the one hand, this chapter explores the social fabric of contingent camps as a lifeline and survival necessity in hostile circumstances. As Hamaki expresses in the citation above, weaving social connections along his migration journey was crucial: nurturing social bonds offers safety and opportunity along a perilous migration trajectory, as well as companionship and possibilities for communal resistance. On the other hand, this chapter sheds light on the fragility of social fabrics that emerge in nightmarish border conditions, in places where the individual desire to escape is the main goal. These are not straight-forward, homogeneous sites of solidarity or resistance; those gathered within them have come together accidentally, and above all else share the desire to free themselves from their situation. This analysis of the sociality of contingent camps spaces can however be taken much further. This part of the chapter examines the fine social lines being navigated and negotiated by the displaced in these spaces, which are both tight-knit and rife with tension and suspicion, constantly compromised by the challenging contexts in which they arise. Relations waver quickly between friendship and animosity; solidarity and mistrust; cooperation and independence. In hostile conditions, dwelling together so intimately is not always so much a choice as it is an inevitable survival necessity. There is something inherently contradictory about this observation, yet it was apparent at both of my field sites and came to be central in shaping my understanding of the social life of contingent camps. It is a contradiction which well captures and conveys the pressure, tension and states of desperation experienced by those enduring life at the border; together yet profoundly alone in contexts of great social strain.

Returning to the concepts of assembly, the refrain and the rhizome, this chapter works to expand the scope and breadth of how we think about informal modes of border dwelling, to notice how a landscape of transit deprived of material things may serve as a point of emergence for certain modes of

social organisation. Contingent camps are fleeting, yet they remain complex social *places* constituted of far more than just the ruins that first meet the eye. The first part of this chapter considers what it is to live together in these conditions, the social organisation of the groups I encountered at microlevel, considering the affect and types of social bond established among groups who have left similar challenges behind, who face the struggles of life in contingency together and are driven by a common goal of passage. In a second part, I propose that spaces of life, crucially, are not only forged through physical dwelling, but also through repeated routines of everyday social practice, such as communal eating or prayer. I return to the theme of the refrain developed in relation to practices of repeated eviction in chapter five to focus on these everyday practices, conceptualising them as counter-refrains of resistance that drive the rhizomatic persistence of border encampments. Far from wishing to romanticise the terrible living situations displaced people face in contingent camp contexts and their ability to withstand them, the third part of this chapter turns to examine the particular social strains that life in the contingent camp places on groups of displaced people in transit, on the dynamics of suspicion and mistrust that fester within these places in which individual stakes are so high, yet social dependencies are crucial as each person seeks to cross the border.

Part I | Living together in contingency

Those who find themselves together at the border inhabit a peculiar relationality that sits between strangeness and familiarity. This first part of this chapter looks at how place may be made through embodied assembly; at the emotions and types of relationships forged in these contexts, before turning to the concrete question of how groups organise and structure themselves in contingent camps, focusing on the Cameroonians in Tangier and the Eritreans in Calais. Social organisation and cohesion are at the root of impressive modes of dwelling together that render life at the border possible.

Familiar strangers: assembled bodies, shared spaces, solidarity

Chapter two emphasised the relevance of thinking of territory as something portable and mobile, emerging through the everyday practices of assembled bodies in a given space. As Smith, Swanson & Gökarıksel argue, bodies are territorial actors that ‘challenge and subvert state control of territory, become vulnerable to violence due to state bordering practices, and experience and produce smaller scale forms of territory’ (2016, 259). The collective determination to resist in hostile border space with the goal of reaching a certain destination unites these bodies, feeding the development of ‘subterranean’ relations that drive the perpetual reassembling of dwelling places and subversive, fugitive traces. As Butler writes, when several bodies assemble in alliance, a ‘true’ space emerges in their coming together, representing an ‘acting together that opens up time and space outside and against the temporality and established architecture of the regime’ (2011). The social ties and relations that develop in these contexts are crucial for ensuring their perpetuation. As Ahmed writes: ‘emotions are crucial to the way

in which bodies surface in relation to other bodies, a surfacing that produces the very effect of collectives, which we can describe as “felt” as well as imagined and mediated’ (2004, 39). In this case, the assembled bodies of the displaced surface to one another and take on a collective skin, felt and forged in reaction to the intense hostile feelings projected upon them in the border context.

In the context of the contingent camp, the body is a particularly important site of study because it is through physical presence, above all else, that one is immersed in a group of peers; a group with whom one lives in the constant immediacy of social interaction, communal dwelling and exchange. Contingent camps are gathering places for strangers who often find a sense of familiarity in their encounter. Strangers who meet at the border often inhabit similar emotional and psychological landscapes and are driven by a similar hope and determination. As Brankamp describes, refugee camps are places of distilled hardship and trauma, spaces ‘infused with a profusion of feelings that accrue from experiences of conflict, disaster, displacement and continue to impact people’s lives in the present’ (2021, 6). What makes these places bearable is the encounter - physical, atmospheric and affective - *between* people within them, who despite their status as strangers recognise in one another a certain familiarity rooted in shared experience. Indeed, atmosphere refers to collective affect generated unconsciously between people, pre-cognitively (Thrift 2004; Anderson 2009; Amin 2015; Brankamp 2021). Familiarity and shared presence assemble people and hold them together in these contexts, creating a mutual presence that contributes to ensuring the security of others. It is a *true* shared experience of hardship and threshold-building, establishing an (often unspoken) familiarity between “strangers” which in that moment serve as greater anchors and sources of recognition than friends or family located at a distance, and interacted with only virtually. This recognition is of course in part national and linguistic in a foreign context, but more importantly it is experiential, emerging between people who flee similar hardship or trauma, who have undertaken similar migration trajectories. I often encountered instances of this in my interactions with the Eritreans in Calais, many of whom shared stories with one another of time spent in the military, of tight escapes crossing the border into Sudan or Ethiopia, hardships or imprisonment in Libya, the dangerous Mediterranean crossing, racial stigmatisation, failed asylum requests, detention, police violence and so on. Not only concerned with their own fates, they were also preoccupied with news of siblings or friends caught trying to flee their country and jailed indefinitely, of family illnesses or deaths, political developments and so on (Kusmallah 2021). These anxieties were vivid and disturbing, but seemed somewhat tempered by the fact that they were emotions shared by many of those dwelling together and inhabiting a ‘collective unconscious’ (Amin 2015). Moments of solitude were rare, with most people opting for a life of constant companionship at the border.

Shared experiences in the ‘now’ at the border also work as threads that weave the social fabric of contingent camps together. The displaced are united in the pressure they feel to pass the border, and in being perceived and treated as fearsome strangers in the eyes of the states between which they seek to pass (Amin 2012). These shared experiences render them allies bound by common experience and by a

common goal; recognizing a wilful stance in one another works to drive them in their determination to persist in the face of racial violence (Ahmed 2017). Being persistently present in the face of contestation is to reaffirm ‘a right that is no right’: the legitimacy of being, even in the face of authority (Butler 2011). Although this no doubt means that certain traumas are put on hold rather than dealt with in these contexts, it allows for the survival and persistence of the not-yet-arrived border crosser. Paradoxically, after succeeding in crossing the border, many of those I met over the years in Calais have expressed a sense of loneliness or struggled with their mental health, particularly in the first year or two after arriving in the UK. Although asylum-seekers are housed together, nationalities are usually mixed, meaning communication is often difficult, and the sense of recognition that vitally underpins the social fabric of the camps is more difficult to establish or maintain with national peers. Asylum seekers tend to live scattered across the country as a result of the UK’s dispersal strategy, which seeks to regulate and control these individuals by ‘fixing’ them to specific locations and addresses determined by the state (Darling 2011; 2016).

In Tangier, many of the Cameroonian men recognised a similar positionality in one another, in relation to their lives and families back home. Many had decided to leave for similar reasons, namely the difficulty of finding employment and their involvement in petty crime or gangs which had put pressure on their reputations or their lives at risk. As Koumen explained: ‘Back home people used to call us *voyous* [thugs/gangsters] because we disobeyed our parents. It’s by getting out that we became *aventuriers*.’ Departing from this shared positionality, the men identified with each other in what they often described as a journey of redemption, figuring out new identities in the process of being *aventuriers* together. Although Atekhangoh (2017) and Collyer (2007) write that in their research Cameroonian migration primarily emerged as a family decision and endeavour, those I encountered in Morocco tended to have taken individual decisions to leave home. Many of those with whom I spent most of my time had not told their family of their plans to travel until after they had already left. Those I met in both Tangier and Calais would often emphasise that their families and friends at home had no idea of the reality of their experiences and thus could not understand them. Olivier explained:

‘Some people back home think to themselves that I’m in Morocco and not putting any effort in. Because you see, I’ve been in this country almost three years now, and some others who came behind [after] me are already in Europe now [...]. Only the person who has lived here, in this situation, can really understand it. [...] I can’t call someone from home and say “you want to see where I sleep? *Look* where I sleep. *Look* what I have to do to eat.” I prefer to let him think whatever he wants to think. I put myself in this situation, I know what I’m living. I know why I’m here, I have a goal in mind. It’s a *sacrifice*. Each of us knows why we’ve made this sacrifice. Yeah, it’s a sacrifice. We left our families and our homes for this.’

Olivier, Tangier 16.10.19

This feeling of being perceived negatively led many to cut off contact with home altogether, saying they would wait until they made it across and could redeem themselves. This strengthened the need to build ties with peers living the same experience at the border. Olivier noticeably speaks in terms of ‘we’ in the last sentences of the above interview extract, emphasising how the men share a certain positionality and goal. In this context, trust and relationships are ‘based on sharing “the right mentality,” that is demonstrating strength and courage in the face of arduous living conditions and violent border regimes’ (Bachelet 2019, 850-1). This emphasises the importance of ties of solidarity and friendship with peers *en aventure*, which allow the men to reframe themselves not as their families might perceive them (as failing in their attempts at emancipation and redemption), but as adventurers who have made a sacrifice for their families, still engaged in their protracted struggle. ‘We don’t fight so much between groups here like we did back home,’ Lamar explained, ‘when we’re *en aventure*, we know that’s not what we’re here for.’ Where some of the men were involved with competing district gangs in Douala, once out of the country they largely put these differences behind them in pursuit of what they envisioned to be a transformative journey. While occasional fights between groups (even of the same nationality) did break out, these were rare and efforts were made to avoid them, knowing it was in their interest to keep a low profile. The migration journey seemed to prompt the emergence of a new form of brotherhood, based not on common scorn from their peers but on shared experiences, struggles and desires. Rallying together around a common goal, the men create a form of social sheltering among and between one another, allowing for the development of a greater sense of self-worth as well as a sense of safety. The psychological importance of inscribing oneself within a network of friendship or brotherhood operates as a lifeline, despite its imperfections. Olivier further described:

‘We’re in a sort of system, always with our brothers. So when we’re all together it gives us some motivation, you know, it boosts morale. Even if I *could* get a house in this city, I wouldn’t want to live in it alone. Imagine. You’ve got no wife, you live alone, and you’re stuck in Morocco. That’s when you *really* get in a bad headspace, ha! Even if a few of us brothers found a place and lived together, we’d always be at the cemetery to hang out with the rest. That’s the thing, it’s a system. Since I’ve been in Morocco, I’ve always lived like this, always with the brothers.’

Olivier, Tangier 16.10.19

A social sense of sheltering is vivid here; the affective sense of comfort emergent from the men’s assembly is clear. The constant togetherness Olivier describes also emerges from the *necessity* of travelling in groups to stave off everyday violence. Hannoum (2019) explains that Tangier has been a site of explicit protest by Moroccans against West Africans since the 1990s, leading to intense violence and an incremental sense of danger among these groups who, as a survival strategy, began to navigate urban space in groups and fight back when attacked (2019, 154).

At both of my field sites, a need for social sheltering also emerged in social relations woven around the life-threatening experience of attempting clandestine passage. Bakary described how he and fellow Ivorians due to travel with the same smuggler immediately formed a supportive unit:

‘From the day we met our smuggler we became friends, because we knew we were going to travel together. Plus, we’re all from Ivory Coast and speak the same language. We’re all from the north of the country, so it’s like a family. We live together, sleep together and eat together. Our union is our strength.’

Bakary, Tangier 20.11.21

A long-term humanitarian worker in Calais offered a similar perspective of dynamics among groups using a common smuggler. She explained:

‘I think that crossing... the moments of *trying* to cross... are really experientially quite heavy. Families will be attached to one smuggler. So you’ll have five families who are attached to one smuggler, and they’ll always try to cross together. And... I guess for practical reasons, those families become close and supportive. The relations of solidarity and support that seem to come from that are *huge*, in the sense that you’re literally doing life-changing, life *risking* things together. [...] I guess they’re moments in which you need safety - or just a *sense* of safety more than anything else, and people come to represent that for you.’

Hannah, phone interview 02.12.21

Attempts at passage are emotionally loaded events: the anxious process of planning and taking the risk of passage strengthens social ties, as well as traumatic moments of *failed* attempt and rescue, in the aftermath of which bonds grow particularly strong. There is a shared awareness of submitting one’s body to the same dangers, that one’s travel companions may be the last people one sees. In these moments, small acts of care or recognition bind these groups together. The nature of these bonds forged in the context of emotions of desperation, anxiety and trauma, renders moments in which they are betrayed particularly painful, as is explored in the final section of this chapter.

Tangier: Splintered hierarchies

The Cameroonian men I met in Tangier were accustomed to living within a hierarchical social structure long before they left their country. Séraphin describes how ‘in Douala, the classification order that is used in priority, often even exclusively, is that of hierarchisation. Equality does not exist, because when it comes to the nature of social ties, it is not considered’ (2001, 124). Social structures and hierarchies remain important along the migration journey: cooperation and the establishment of social structures are crucial for survival along the migration route. As Bachelet writes: ‘building relations with other migrants undertaking journeys that cross similar spaces is vital to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary for avoiding perilous obstacles and for seizing opportunities’ (2019, 852). Pian (2009) and

Richter (2018) also offer rich accounts of the hierarchical, even institutional organisation of migrant groups in transit through the Maghreb. These structures have persisted in the country over several decades and serve to organise members of a given group, not only to the ends of solidarity, but also for developing passage strategies and maintaining order among group members. The appointment of community leaders is also crucial for communication with *other* groups (usually of other nationalities), with whom conflicts might be resolved or strategies for joint passage devised. Morel, from Cameroon, who had been in the country for close to a decade when we spoke, described the hierarchical structures according to which most Cameroonians in transit through Morocco lived until recently:

‘The *anciens* - the people who have been here for a long time - have a lot of experience. Four or five years ago there used to be a lot of rules, a lot of *strict* rules we had to abide by. There was a hierarchy. A President, a General, even a Prime Minister! The President is the most powerful; the General is usually the strongest - physically I mean. There’s also a government and even a judiciary. You can put in a complaint about someone and solutions to your problems will be found.’

Morel, Tangier 29.11.19

However, the intensive arrest-and-disperse operations migrant people face in the north of the country and their resulting inability to hold down a fixed place of being (let alone a fixed place of shelter), has somewhat splintered these social structures. In contingent camp contexts, migrant people are forced into such hypermobility that institution-like modes of hierarchical operation are weakened. Morel went on:

‘All of this still sort of exists today, but now that everyone lives so scattered, we don’t really know who is where when, see? Because of the raids, people keep a lower profile, live more hidden. Before, everyone - well, almost all Blacks - lived in the same neighbourhoods: Mesnana and Boukhalef. Going there was like going to Abidjan or to Yaoundé. There were Black people everywhere. The Moroccans maybe saw that as a threat, and then the *boumla* [police] started bashing down our doors.’

Morel’s words convey how, in an urban landscape in which shelter is always uncertain and in which life at the border is evermore furtive, social life is splintered and strict hierarchies somewhat fall away, gatherings become more difficult to organise. While some social roles persist, they lose clout in this changed context. Further splintering seems to result from a shift in strategies for passage. Where passage into Spain used to predominantly be attempted by “jumping” the border fence into Ceuta or Melilla *en masse*, for which inter-dependence within and between groups is absolutely crucial, the increasing difficulty of passing the fence has led to a rise in passage attempts by boat. In this sense, there appeared to be a generational divide between those who had been in Morocco for eight to ten years and those who had been around for less than four years. Where passage via the land border requires social collaboration (the gathering of hundreds of people to hit the fence together), boat passage requires either having money to pay a smuggler, or just a few people working together on a passage attempt. This lessens an individual’s sense of dependency on peers for crossing. Nonetheless, hierarchical structures

persist in the context of isolated forest encampments at the border, where specific roles are delegated to individuals and specific rules are in place. In urban space however, these have become less prominent and hold less clout. Although the Cameroonians retained a President, some of the more recently-arrived expressed a lack of faith in him and other *anciens*, claiming they are “all talk” and do little to support them in practice.

Despite the reduced significance of these institution-like social roles, a sense of hierarchy remained omnipresent among the group with whom I spent my time. The men would situate themselves in *relation* to one another, in a manner common in Douala (where many of the men were from), as being someone else’s *Grand* or their *petit*. Séraphin writes that these roles are commonly used in Doula, that ‘a being is social because he is “status-ed”’. No one tries to break the hierarchy, everyone tries to place themselves within it’ (2001, 124; see also Feussi 2011). The community organisation I encountered was one in which people worked to gain authority over and respect from others, allowing them to position themselves as a *Grand*, meaning ‘big’ or ‘elder.’ The *Grand* would offer protection and support to the *petits*, meaning ‘small’ or ‘young’. This created strong bonds of brotherhood in which the men took pride. In order to maintain his respected status, a *Grand* would always look out for his *petits*, in exchange for which he earned their respect and loyalty. The *petits* would enjoy this role while also, in time, looking to become the *Grand* of others. One’s social positioning in Tangier often also referred to social status back home. Lamar explained:

‘If you had status in Douala, if people respected you in your neighbourhood there, you’ll have a certain status here too. Omar for example is respected in his whole *cité*. I knew him back home but not personally - only to see. I was even in a fight against Omar once, he was one of the big guys! [Laughs]’

Lamar, Tangier 06.12.19

This reworking of social relations from the home context underpinned a strong sense of social structure, protection and responsibility among the men. When a *petit* came under attack from another person or group, their *Grand* would be obliged to defend them. Rivals might also go through the *petits* to get to the *Grand*. Omar and Lamar held the status of *Grands* while Koumen and Idriss were Omar’s *petits*, and increasingly acquiring *petits* of their own. Nora described: ‘Omar is smart, very smart. When he’s with the brothers, he plays the role of big brother. He coordinates things and tells the others, “You, no. Don’t do that. Do this, don’t do that” He is for *sure* the big brother.’ Indeed, the *Grands* would often take on disciplinary roles, giving heated lectures when someone had misspoken or acted out of line. Being able to define oneself as the *petit* of a *Grand* also helps reinforce one’s legitimacy and trustworthiness in the eyes of others. I myself experienced this, to some extent, when after several weeks of what he later described to me as ‘observing your behaviour with the guys,’ Omar decided to confide in me and guide me in my research, in a sense offering me his help and protection as a *Grand*. I would tell him about academic articles I had been reading about Douala’s social structures, occasionally

sending him screenshots of short snippets or summaries to get his perspective on them. This made him laugh, unaware that these home neighbourhoods and dynamics he knew so intimately had been written about in this way. He would send me back his thoughts, growingly intrigued by the work I was doing. We kept in touch after I left, and he was eager to show me more about their lives in Morocco on my return. Unfortunately, this was never to be. The same week the Covid-19 pandemic led me to cancel plans to travel back to Tangier, Omar tragically passed away. I received a stream of distressed phone calls from his friends and *petits*, expressing guilt that they could not save him when he began to convulse at the cemetery. The months that followed left them unanchored, adrift and uncertain of what to do. Along with Omar, their forthcoming plans for passage had also vanished, as he had been the one coordinating their strategy. According to tradition, the men shaved their heads in mourning, and this period seemed to reinforce ties between the men. As Ndjio writes: ‘death may also reinforce communal spirit and solidarity among family members, or dramatise a sense of belonging among members of a clan or an ethnic group’ (2020, 854). Despite having few resources himself, Idriss, a *petit* to whom Omar was particularly close, took on the responsibility of occasionally sending money back to support his wife and young daughter.

The Cameroonians would often speak proudly of their community as *la chenille*, literally meaning “the caterpillar” but taken figuratively here to mean “the chain”. They used the term to refer to the broader network of solidarity within which they lived, extending across the country and beyond. ‘The chain stretches far you know’, Lamar explained, ‘all the way across Morocco, down to the very south’. This conceptualisation of their social network is very different from the hierarchical structure described above, referring to a more organic social fabric. The social network envisioned in *la chenille* - mobile, flexible, connected and everywhere - is the perfect counter-response to the dispersal strategy enforced by the Moroccan state. Forced into a hypermobile state, its “members” constantly re-encounter one another, and when bussed south by the police, rely on acquaintances or friends based across the country for support. A particular form of social connection is forged along the migration journey: people encounter and reencounter one another, spreading their ‘circulatory territories’ (Tarrius 2000). While some people would return north immediately after being dispersed, others would inhabit this network, visiting people before making their way back, somewhat softening the frustration of the arrest-and-disperse process. Indeed, dispersal is often aimed at disrupting migrant “multiplicities” and the resistance that is wont to emerge from them (Tazzioli 2020), seeking to prevent ‘that collective migrant formations [...] consolidate and last in time’ (ibid, 2). It attenuates the sense of frustration, isolation and desperation that dispersal seeks to inflict on the displaced by constantly unrooting them from their desired place of being. Migrant people in Morocco are modern nomads ‘circulating collectively’ (Alioua 2007, 39) in the sense that they inhabit the same forms of imposed temporalities and mobility. Alioua describes social ties in migration as ‘deterritorialised social relations’ elaborated in the process of migrating and vital to its pursuit: deterritorialised social relations allow for collective reorganisation,

orienting migration journeys and trajectories (ibid). Olivier for example explained to me that he had spent two months living in Tiznit (875km south of Tangier) the previous year, after being “chucked down there” by the police. He stayed in part because the town was more hospitable and less policed: ‘I could liberate my head, sleep easy, avoid thinking too much and always checking in front and behind me.’ But above all, he lingered in the southern city because of the social connections he found there:

‘When I turned up there, some brothers of mine from my neighbourhood back home were there too. When I saw them... *pure joy!* A *hundred times* I must’ve told them “I’m leaving tomorrow, heading back to Tangier” - but when tomorrow came around, I always changed my mind.’

Olivier, Tangier 16.10.19

The *chenille* is an expansive conceptualisation of deterritorialised social relations which resonates with Simone’s questioning (in the context of Douala) of the assumption that survival strategies in precarious urban conditions usually amount to ‘narrowing one’s universe to a manageable domain of safety or efficacy’ to which one must hold on with tenacity (Simone 2005, 517). On the contrary, he proposes that contemporary precaritised youth often choose to let go of these pure efforts at territorialisation in favour of dispersing themselves across urban space, seeking means of survival *laterally* rather than in fixity (ibid). This resonates with this thesis’s argument that life in contingency operates rhizomatically, in fugitive territorialisations that unpredictably sprawl outwards, as opposed to in arborescence. The above account of the Cameroonians’ social organisation emphasises how social structures are splintered and reactively rewoven in their encounter with the hostile context and dynamics of camp contingency and routine arrest-and-disperse operations in Morocco. Social fabric is woven and transformed along the journey, and constantly reterritorialized in reaction to the ground reality encountered.

Calais: the List

Turning to social life in Calais, every (generally national or language-based) group of displaced people in the border city had their own specific organisation. Among the Eritreans, with whom I was in closest contact, a particularly interesting mode of communal life was followed. At the time of my fieldwork, they were more dependent on mutual cooperation for passage than on smugglers (with whom arranging passage comes down to individual deal-making). When smugglers are involved in the border-crossing process, relations of trust among groups are more often corrupted, as explored later on in this chapter. However, the Eritreans operated with a Council - a group of leaders appointed according to various criteria such as experience, age, level of education, former professional status and so on. This council was in charge of a list of the names of all Eritreans at the border who had presented themselves to the group, ordered according to their date of arrival in Calais. At the time of my fieldwork, the community lived divided across three different sites of encampment, each nearby to a different strategic car park for attempting passage by stowing away on a UK-bound lorry. At the first site, where recent newcomers

live, the likelihood of succeeding at passage is low, while at the second and particularly the third site, rates of passage are far greater. As people succeed at making the crossing, others gradually move up the list, and from one living site to the next. This ensures there is never too large a gathering of people at the site from which the chance of passage is the highest. During my fieldwork, it would take around a year for most to work their way up the list and cross the border. The less fortunate were there for two years or more. This organisation, whereby each person must wait their turn for passage, operates a crucial role: it creates a sense of order, hope and progression in a context where the state tries rather to create chaos and a sense of living an absurd and untenable situation. The hope the list provides bolsters the incentive to persist at the border: once halfway up the list, one is less likely to quit and give up one's place. Furthermore, the list operates as a tool for incentivising good behaviour and cohesion among the community: the council could knock people *down* the list as a punishment for fighting, drunkenness and so on. This, along with a general sense of cooperation and solidarity, means that a productive trust exists between members of this group.

Similarly to the Cameroonians in Morocco, the Eritreans would draw on social networks built up over the course of their convoluted migration trajectories (Tazzioli 2018) to occasionally “retreat” from the hardships of the border, travelling to Paris, Belgium or the Netherlands, or when they found themselves in one of these places after stowing away on a lorry that turned out not be UK-bound after all. They tended to have a network of family, friends or friends of friends settled or going through the asylum process to draw upon in these places, from whom they would receive support and accommodation. Some would even travel from Calais to Brussels for the day to play football matches with peers there, demonstrating the importance of maintaining social connections and networks that stretch beyond the border itself. A broader affective network beyond the border and rooted in greater material stability thus also contributes in ways to sustaining the social morale and constant (re)assembling of the contingent camp.

Part II | Malleable atmospheres: nurturing critical distance through rhythm

‘The nomad knows how to wait, he has infinite patience’

Deleuze & Guattari 2013, 444

Previous chapters emphasised that the biopolitical strategy of which contingent camps are a product marks a shift towards a mode of everyday security which is both temporal and increasingly atmospheric (Adey 2014). Immersive, hostile atmospheres are primarily activated through the repeated degradation of displaced people's material living conditions and their ability to live a predictable, everyday life. Chapter five emphasised how this unsettling deterrence strategy emerges in the relentless rhythm of the dispossessive practices it deploys. However, noticing this oppressive rhythm on the part of state actors also invites us to tune into the *counter-rhythms* and *counter-atmospheres* reactively nurtured by

displaced people, who structure their everyday lives around communal practices and routines. As Deleuze & Guattari propose, ‘critical distance is not a metre, it is a rhythm’ (2013, 372), a notion I elaborate upon here to express that a resistive affective barrier to sovereign hostility is coaxed to life by targeted groups through rhythm and routine.

In *Rhythmanalysis* (2004 [1992]), Henri Lefebvre proposes that insights may be drawn from isolating and scrutinising rhythms of social life, proposing that ‘once one discerns relations of force in social relations and relations of alliance, one perceives their link with rhythm’ (ibid, 69). Such an endeavour is reflected in this thesis, which disentangles refrains of dispossession from refrains of resistance and rebuilding, to scrutinise how they operate in contingent camps. As discussed in chapter two, the contingent camp is a geography of *arrythmia*, characterised by conflicting rhythms which generate ‘a disassembly of times and spaces’ (ibid). Where the rhythm of evictions imposed on contingent camps by the state works to ‘efface dialogue’ and make the subject ‘completely passive’ (ibid, 48), the paragraphs that follow illustrate how the rhythms of social life instigated by groups of displaced people in these conditions work as microlevel counter-refrains. Displaced people unite in social practices that imprint a rhythm on border space in a way that challenges the oppression of the state, giving sense and meaning to an absurd context while cultivating a sense of social sheltering.

Thinking back to chapter six, the modes of social living described in what follows emphasise the value and relevance of reading the contingent camp as a fugitive geography; bearing in mind the aforementioned understanding that: ‘the fugitive is the simultaneous embodiment of life, culture, and pathways to freedom, on the one hand, and the singular exposure of the state as a tenuous system of unstable structures constantly teetering on the brink of illegitimacy, on the other’ (Sojoyner 2017, 526). The social life of contingent camps expresses alternative modes of living and being together in a self-determined way, emphasising their *raison d’être* as places of evasion and exposure of the failings of state hospitality, that emerge on a freedom-seeking journey. Considering social practices in the contingent camp brings home the dignity and humanity of the displaced, and in doing so further exposes the illegitimacy of repeated acts of state violence which intimately target them. First, this section elaborates on the role of religious practice focusing on Calais, before moving on to explore the everyday routines and communal social practice that rhythm contingent camp life in Tangier.

Finding hope and solace: refrains of religious practice



Assembled in prayer | Photo by Denis Emelin, Calais February 2020

Though the sky threatens rain, a campfire is going strong when I reach the Eritrean camp. A wall built between the slice of land on which the men live and the motorway stands as a shield against the wind. Several people stand around the campfire, rubbing the cold from their hands. Though it's Sunday, it's an eviction day and the camp is empty - there's not a single tent in sight. The men were up early to pack up their belongings and store them with an organisation for a few hours while the eviction team come and go. An old, blackened teapot sat on the flames starts to splutter. Coffee is poured and we chat until a young man, trained as an Orthodox deacon in Eritrea, rises: 'Time for prayer?' Twenty or so of us follow him the short distance to an empty parking lot. Two planks of wood have been nailed together to form a cross, itself attached to the metal post of a no-entry sign. I would not otherwise have noticed the symbolic object in this unremarkable spot, camouflage against the shrubbery around it. The deacon bends to hang a white rosary over the cross and attaches a small painted image of Mary to it with a piece of wire. We lay a tarpaulin down on the tarmac and remove our shoes and hats despite the inhospitable cold of the ground. The motorway runs barely 100 metres up ahead of us, and I wonder if any of the passing drivers notice us down below: women and men, huddled together and engaged in the familiar ritual of prayer. An hour or so later, we walk back to the campfire and the men's possessions are being offloaded. As one group prepares lunch, the others set to work: the slice of land quickly grows busy with colourful rows of tents.⁴⁶

Fieldnotes, Calais January 2020

⁴⁶ On a visit back to this site of encampment in January 2022, the Eritreans had labelled each of their tents with numbers in thick coloured tape, enabling them to quickly and efficiently reorganise their encampment with the tents in the same order as they were before they packed them all up and removed them in anticipation of an eviction.

The contingent camp is a fluid and fleeting territory that may be ‘fixed’ not only through materiality but also through pace, practice and repetition. As Deleuze & Guattari write: ‘sometimes chaos is an immense black hole in which one endeavours to fix a fragile point as a centre. Sometimes one organises around that point a calm and stable “pace” (rather than a form): the black hole has become a home’ (2013, 363). This idea that pace or rhythm may play a role in the territorialising process gains particular salience when considered in relation to the contingent camp, where routine practices may establish critical distance from a hostile state by feeding atmospheres of resistance and solidarity: these refrains of practice mark out pace and consistency in an otherwise chaotic context. The resilience of those I encountered tended to emerge in these subtle, social ways of being and living together.

In both Morocco and Calais, many of the groups of displaced people I met had spaces of common social practice within or near their area of life which were not immediately obvious to me; unremarkable spaces which, like the space of prayer described above, emerged only in moments when their function was performed. By gradually participating in such moments of camp life, I began to identify the rhythms that constitute social lives at these sites. These rhythms reshape the affective atmospheres that constitute them, operating as a common, sense-making thread off which rationales for their situations form. The most vivid example of the mobilisation of refrain as a force of resistance was that of religious practice. The common and routine practice of prayer operates as a powerful and immaterial *counter-refrain* to the dehumanising refrain of the state, and is one which cannot easily be compromised or attacked. This became clearest to me while participating in these moments with my respondents (when appropriate and invited to do so), getting a sense of the atmospheres of solidarity and safety generated through routine social practice (described in chapter four).



Makeshift mosque, Tangier | Photo by author 2019 **Pétanque pitch church**, Calais | Photo by author 2018

As evidenced in the near-emptiness of the images above, religious practice demands very little materiality. Makeshift places of prayer are powerful examples of how a ‘rich diversity of cultural practices [are] reproduced, borrowed, transformed, and even created or improvised by journeying migrants’ (JM Hagan 2008, 116). The makeshift mosque in the image above (left) belonged to the aforementioned group of Senegalese and Cameroonian men living in the forests on the outskirts of

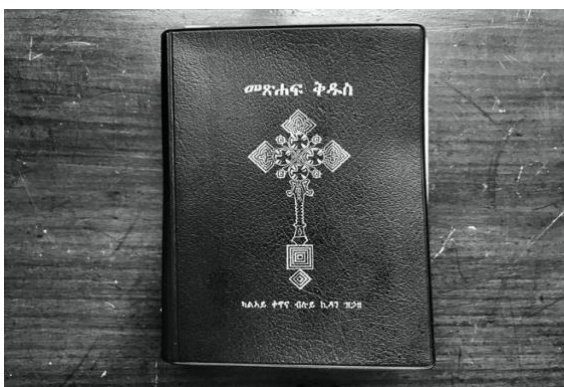
Tangier.⁴⁷ The image above (right) shows the place of prayer that the Eritreans used in 2017-18, a neglected *pétanque* pitch in a park by the motorway (Hagan 2018). When the site was fenced up in the spring of 2019, the group were quick to find a new place of prayer, described in the opening vignette. The photo below (and the opening photograph in this chapter) show a simple wooden cross tied to a no entry sign on a car park just off that same motorway in Calais. Barely perceptible, the power of communal religious practice emerges in these places when it is performed every Friday or Sunday, enlivening unremarkable places and giving routine and rhythm to their lives that runs *counter* to the destructive rhythm imposed by the authorities. The basic materiality of these spaces means they may be infinitely reconstructed or conjured up. It is a mode of improvisation and adaptation rooted in the spiritual rather than in physical or material space; a survival strategy rooted in communal placemaking through imaginative practice (Navaro-Yashin 2012). As Amin describes, public space may be shaped by ‘affective percolations’ generated by certain forms of bodily awareness, or through rhythms and ‘repetitions settling around a particular spectrum of social affects’ (2015, 248). These affective percolations appear to resonate beyond those who take part in prayer. As I observed during earlier fieldwork: ‘although the CRS [French riot police] might sit and watch the mass from a distance for a while, they would not get out of the van or intervene during prayer. The church may be invisible, yet the space is seemingly sacred [...]. Prayer becomes a fleeting moment during which shared humanity is recognized through dedication to a culturally familiar ritual’ (Hagan 2020, 119).



Makeshift church | Photos by Alex Holmes

⁴⁷ Aru described a similar practice among migrant people living in the Roja camp in Ventimiglia: ‘Muslim worshippers have carved out space under the bridge for an open-air mosque, with beautiful carpets spread on the ground’ (2021, 1630).

In her ethnography documenting the lives of Latin American migrants seeking clandestine passage to the United States, JM Hagan writes of religious and spiritual practice as a way to ‘make sense of and make bearable the traumas and hardships they encounter’ (2008, 115). She identifies these groups’ turn to culturally familiar religious practices as emergent from the dangerous context of the migration journey intensified by border policies and the powerful social context they create. Religious practice is performed both collectively and individually, in the wearing or carrying of ‘symbols of divine companionship’ (ibid, 127): wooden crosses, rosaries, bracelets, icons of saints and so on. In Calais, many of the Orthodox Catholic Eritreans I met displayed an image of their companion saint on their mobile phone as a screensaver (see image bottom right), or in the place of a profile picture on a social media or messaging account. Faven, an Eritrean woman, explained to me that she and many of her peers had a favourite saint (associated with their hometown or simply personal choice) who accompanied, guided and protected them along their journey. She would often kiss her mobile phone in an act of hope for good news, or news of an opportunity for passage. In these moments, the vital importance of religious faith and technology for some border crossers is vividly evoked; both emerge as vital for mental endurance, survival and passage. This is even more pertinent when you consider that in the dispossessed space of the contingent camp the mobile phone is also a means of pursuing religious practice: it was often through mobile phones that Eritreans accessed the Bible in Tigrinya, listened to mezmurs (spiritual songs) and church services. While some managed to acquire Bibles along their migration journey, these were so valuable they would rarely take the risk of holding onto them in the border encampments, preferring to entrust them to volunteers or locals they had come to know well, who could return them after their passage to the United Kingdom. Below (left) is the image of a Bible confided to me by one of the deacons, to whom I sent it once he crossed the border and received housing from the British Home Office.



The deacon's Bible | Author's image



Companion saint | Author's image

The travel prayer mat and compass indicating the *qibla* (direction of prayer towards Mecca) photographed below were a donation to Calais during Ramadan 2020, during the early months of the Covid-19 pandemic. Some Muslims owned more substantial prayer mats, but holding onto them during

evictions was never a guarantee. These pocket-sized travel mats enabled people to carry them easily, tucked into a pocket close to their bodies. Every evening during Ramadan, the Muslims among the Eritreans in Calais gathered at a fixed spot in an empty field near their encampment to pray as the sun was setting, before breaking their fast.



Prayer mat & compass | Photo by author

Debele writes insightfully of how Oromo asylum seekers navigating the uncertainties of the asylum process in Germany mobilise collective prayer as a means of withstanding the temporal angst of waiting for an asylum outcome. She interprets the significance of prayer among this community in a way that resonates powerfully with what I encountered at my field sites:

‘In their invocation of God, the congregants deconstruct the state the moment they delegate time to the divine [...] this empowers those in wait and from the perspective of those who pray, snatches the state of the control it has on their time. [...] Apart from being sites of consolation and solace, prayers are mediums through which various structures of power are trivialized.’ (2020, 62-3)

This reading of collective prayer as a fugitive practice in itself, which may trivialise oppressive or disempowering structures of power, bolsters the reading of the contingent camp as a fugitive geography proposed in chapter six. Indeed, prayer enables the displaced to envision and interpret the narratives of their own lives, journeys and absurd living conditions as part of a broader narrative than that which border authorities seek to enforce upon them through their criminalization. Many among the Eritrean Orthodox community expressed their suffering to me in this way, as God’s will, and that enduring suffering was a way of proving or strengthening their faith (see also Debele 2020). One of the deacons

present at the time of my 2020 fieldwork explained to me that his Sunday sermons were designed to give his peers guidance and hope, fuelling the fugitive drive that leads contingent camps to constantly regenerate. Following Debele:

‘The leaders of the prayer lift the hope of the congregation up, not necessarily counting on the rather unsupportive system in place but on the power they believe is beyond all such systems, structures and individuals who are obstructing the process of “getting there”’ (ibid, 52).

Collective identity-building & refrains of social practice

Walking up through the cemetery towards the camp I notice Nora ahead, taking strong but slow steps up the hill. She holds a bucket full of breads wrapped in brown paper in one hand, and with the other steadies a plastic basin holding two small pots and a saucepan balanced on her head. I rush up behind her, bracing myself for it to come crashing to the ground: ‘Can I help?’ ‘No, I’ve got it!’ she says, ‘We’re almost there!’ We set up her pots at the foot of two graves, where we sit side by side and she gets ready to serve. I offer her my help, but she turns to me and winks: ‘Pour your coffee for them first, yeah?’ she whispers, ‘it gets their stomachs going, they’re always hungry after drinking it, and that makes it hard to resist buying from me.’ Nora is business-minded yet caring and fair. The men slowly begin to emerge, lured out by the sounds of our voices and the clattering of pots and pans. Nora peels the boiled eggs at speed, dropping the broken shells into a plastic bucket and placing the shiny white ovals into a metal pot with a spiced meat and caramelised onion sauce. ‘Great, here comes Idriss,’ she says, slicing a bread open and spreading her chili sauce over the soft white dough. She smiles and waves him over, then turns to me: ‘I know he likes it when I throw in a few sliced potatoes’ He greets us, sleep in his eyes and I hand him a coffee. ‘I’ve prepared yours just how you like it,’ Nora says, ‘but you know it’s a few dirhams more if you want a piece of meat!’ He hands over a few coins, ‘Ah give me a break Nora, I don’t have anything more for you today - maybe tomorrow okay?’ As more of the men emerge from between the graves, the morning routine picks up. Omar starts playing upbeat music from his phone, and everyone sits around, talking and planning the day ahead.

Fieldnotes Tangier, November 2019

‘You know, there’s really nothing predictable about my life in Morocco,’ Lamar explained to me one afternoon when I asked him about his plans for the following days, ‘tomorrow I might find myself in Marrakesh. Or who knows, maybe later tonight they’ll chuck me down to Safi or Tiznit!’ [27.11.19] This sense of constant uncertainty and inability to plan ahead are inherent to life in contingent camps, yet it tends to lead groups to try and nurture certain routines that lend pace to their daily lives in transit. The scene described above captures the routine way life in the cemetery camp came to be organised. Almost every morning, the men would go to the Cathedral or pay entry to a hammam for a shower, priding themselves on keeping up appearances despite their place of life. They were keen to do this despite the extra effort and costs of good hygiene, in part out of a desire to distinguish themselves from the Moroccan groups who inhabited the cemeteries alongside them, to demonstrate ‘discipline and self-

respect', and that theirs was a homelessness of a different sort. Either before or on their return from the showers, Nora would have arrived to sell her sandwiches. Every mid-late afternoon she would return with a substantial, rice-based meal. Her comings and goings were invaluable in creating everyday reference points and a sense of anchoring for the men, sustaining their daily rhythm (in Calais, as well as individual groups' own habits, this routine was forged in part by humanitarian organisations' provision of food, shower, hospital runs and so at fixed times throughout the day). Although the Cameroonians would often suffer uncomfortable and anxious, sleepless nights, most would get up once Nora appeared. These relatively fixed times also facilitated the nurturing of an organic social life, whereby friends living elsewhere would know what times to drop by and have a chance of finding the others. The rare days Nora didn't show up (she had found a few days of better paid work elsewhere) the men's rhythm was noticeably disrupted. They tended to be more scattered on those days and frustrated by her absence, especially when she had not been able to warn them she would not be coming. As for the evenings, the men imposed a rhythm on their lives by going "to work", begging at traffic lights for a few hours. Blaise explained: 'I hate asking for charity, but I try to make at least 50 dirhams before I call it a night'. Some in Calais spoke of attempting to stow away on lorries every night as "work" as well, to which time and energy must on a regular basis be devoted. This emphasises how the routines of people assembled in contingent camps are significant in making border life and persistence possible in a period of indefinite waiting. Beyond the interpersonal, these daily rhythms and the affect they evoke work to 'configure distinctive atmospheres of place' (Amin 2015). Indeed, the ability to make place beyond the material emerges in practices performed relationally and dynamically between the assembled bodies of contingent camp residents (Butler 2011; Massey 1994), in routines known by all who belong to a given group. This evokes the possibility of shelter being something portable and mutable, of one being able to territorialise one's own body - or in this case of a group territorialising their assembled bodies - in a context of constant chaos (Deleuze & Guattari 2013, 372). These rhythms are not of the realm of the exceptional, they are vital rhythms of survival and endurance (Simone 2019).

Among the Cameroonians living at the cemetery, sound also played an important sheltering role. It was rare for there not to be music playing from a mobile phone. After I introduced the men to the music-identification application Shazam on my phone, they encouraged me to use it to collect the sounds of their experiences. They would share favourite tracks with me, often using music as a vector to describe their experiences, origins and aspirations.⁴⁸ Emmerson (2017) writes evocatively of laughter as refrain, showing how an immaterial social refrain may perform an atmospherically territorialising role in the contingent camp. He writes that 'laughter can disrupt the feel of spaces, deterritorialising and reterritorialising them towards different modes of relation between bodies, thus generating space times that have a different atmospheric feel' (ibid, 2087). Similarly, the repeated practice of listening to music

⁴⁸ Palmas writes of the importance of smartphones in Calais, 'used as flashlights, to stay in touch with people, listen to music, use the GPS to find parking lots or monitor the direction of the trucks on which they are traveling' (2021, 501).

as a group unconsciously draws out an atmospheric territory that may be felt rather than seen, influencing that group's corporeal experience of space (Western 2018). As Amin observes, 'sociality arises in the embodied experience of an environment in which thinking and feeling are shaped by the interaction between sentient bodies, technologies, and environments' (2015, 244).

The Cameroonian men would most often listen to French artists of African descent: Niska, Ninho, Booba among others, whose music has a lot to do with, on the one hand, criticising the racialised social system and hardships of life as an immigrant in France, and on the other of their achieving success nonetheless. Recognising their own situation and aspirations in these lyrics, the men cultivated an identity rooted in resisting racial discrimination in Morocco, around a profound sense of injustice, which they felt forced them to resort to delinquency. Bound up in this identity was also a sense of deservingness towards Europe and especially France. References to specific lyrics would regularly be dropped into conversation or interviews by the men when conveying an aspect of their identity. Idriss for example told me:

'It makes me think of this Niska song, I can't remember which one, but it says that *insha'Allah* isn't worth anything if you don't move your ass to go out and get what you want. Moroccans rely too much on *insha'Allah*, the ones you see in the street or sitting on their asses in here [the graveyard] all day, just waiting for God to help them out. It's such a bad mentality to have. For us, it's all about being determined.'

Idriss, Tangier 12.11.19

This common interest in music contributed to forging a collective sense of identity, thus establishing and writing a common narrative among the men. This nurtures a comfortable atmosphere that arises from mutual recognition, enveloping contingent camp inhabitants and their places of life in an atmosphere of companionship in hardship (Anderson 2014; Lancione 2017). These binding atmospheres work to subvert the overarching sombre and dehumanising atmosphere inherent to life at the cemetery, while giving it a sense of purpose. The routine practice of listening to certain songs over and over served as a bonding mechanism, with group members developing a common set of perspectives and cues, 'reference points around which [their] bodies, experiences and space times can acquire resonance' (Emmerson 2017, 2087). Boochani (2020) writes of the importance of music in helping asylum seekers in indefinite detention to retain a sense of self and of identity. He writes that to play or listen to music is a radical act against the violence of oppressive and dehumanising systems (ibid). While this is less explicit in the context of the contingent camp, where people are not physically imprisoned or denied the ability to enjoy music, it resonates with the important role sound may play: a sense of safety, group motivation and identity-building came from sharing music and lyrics.

The necessity of having had to conceal themselves in cemeteries back in their home cities, to socialise away from the eyes of prying family and neighbours, was the sort of thing the men spoke to me as having wanted to escape by emigrating. Over time however, some started to express that the cemetery is part of their pre-existing identity, one they can navigate and relate to, cushioning the blow

of being relegated to a life within one. Far from the shame of their first days in the space, they collectively began to take it on as part of their identity, sharing creative photographs of themselves in their WhatsApp statuses or Instagram profiles, standing in strong poses on the eerily photogenic headstones overflowing with greenery, or in group shots that did little to hide the conditions they live in. When we celebrated Idriss's 21st birthday, the party took place in the cemetery on a grey November afternoon. Headstones held up a *JBL* speaker, blasting out the music they took on as a soundtrack to their *aventure*. A grave served as a table for the elaborate cake Idriss had made me promise to arrange for him two months earlier, eager to make the most of the occasion. The graves also served as a discreet place to hide a few bottles of whisky from the rare passers-by using the cemetery as a throughway. There was a certain resentful and provocative enjoyment in the air, of drinking and dancing in a Muslim cemetery. At least one of the men was constantly filming the event on their phone: the visual effect of the group dancing, drinking and smoking on the headstones was staged and relished, a symbolic refusal to give in to the deathliness of the space they inhabit. The men appeared to be defiantly affirming their right to exist and *live* beyond bare survival, by celebrating life in a place of death. This seemed to be part of the men's work of resistance: unable to do much to change their situation, they sought to embrace it. Doing so appeared to enable them to *reclaim* the identity of delinquents imposed upon these men at the border by the hostile state, countering a racialised and hierarchical mode of governance that seeks to inflict upon them what Ramsay describes as the dehumanising 'core experience of a dispossessed future' (2020, 396). The group later savoured the videos and images from the party, re-watching and sharing them among friends for weeks. The cemetery had taken on a certain social significance, no longer so much a place of exclusion and shame as a place of enjoyment and community. One morning not long after the party, one of the younger men named Harold had, to my surprise, slept over there, despite being one of few with a place to stay at that point. He explained:

'It doesn't frighten me. You know to be honest, I often prefer to be here with them than at home just waiting for the police to come and chase us away. There are some nights when I prefer to sleep here with the brothers.'

Harold, Tangier 30.11.19

This emphasises how the men, to an extent, succeeded in reappropriating the cemetery socially if not materially, into a space in which they felt relatively at ease. By engaging with the atmospheric and symbolic dimensions of the space as well as with its physicality, the atmosphere of the place is reworked, taking on 'its own convening powers as a place of gathering' that 'links civic orientation, the affects and dispositions of people [...] the bodily experience of a multiple sensory field stretching and exceeding individual skills and capabilities' (Amin 2015). This was something the Cameroonians *worked* into the atmosphere through the consistency of their bodies assembling in this space, within which they had managed to forge fixed intervals of daily routine with significant affective implications. When Covid-19 hit, most of those I had met when they were living at the cemetery managed to find

rooms again and benefited from some respite from police in the early months of this period. And yet, the cemetery remained the core site of social life for the group. Several months after I left, Idriss sent me a music video the men had made at the cemetery, for a song written by members of the broader community about life stuck in transit in Morocco.

Those who dwell in contingent camps carve out protective practices or cultivate common rationales for their situations through prayer or identity-building through common cultural references and other forms of everyday practice. This enables them to subvert their encounter with an omnipresent oppressive security atmosphere, as well as to weave a sense of logic, hope and purpose into an absurdly precarious way of life. This ability to subvert oppressive forces imaginatively and atmospherically, to summon the drive that facilitates the perpetuation of a fugitive mode of encampment, is fundamentally dependent on social cohesion and cooperation. What follows however offers insight into the feelings of mistrust that linger in these profoundly social spaces, into how genuine trust is constantly undermined as each individual seeks to extract themselves from the brutal border conditions suffered by all.

Part III | Cracks in community

‘When the dream is too long, waking up from it is brutal.’

Ninho (2019) *La vie qu’on mène*

While it is clear from the above account that the social life of contingent camps is a crucial resistive resource for displaced people in transit, it is also important to note the tension and fragility of these relations in such challenging contexts. At both of my field sites, I quickly became aware of the paradox that although the social fabric of contingent camps is crucial for coaxing places of being to life and sustaining their re-emergence, these were so often undermined by the profound mistrust that often festers between people experiencing challenging migration trajectories (see also Collyer 2007; Bachelet 2019). As Brankamp observes, refugee camps are places that ‘[incubate] hope, solidarity, and belonging’ among their residents, but also emotions of suspicion (2021, 1; see also Feldman 2018). Members of the same community who *need* one another to sustain contingent camp assemblages and to make passage attempts are, in a sense, caught in the trap of cooperation being crucial to their wellbeing and passage. Yet they often face betrayal or the disappointment of being left behind. Brankamp describes how in camp spaces, ‘suspicion covers various cognitive and pre-cognitive conditions and ‘gut feelings’ that emerge not only from imaginings of danger or fear, but from lingering disquiet about the indeterminacy of events, objects, spaces, and people’ (2021, 4). Mutual dependency renders displaced people living together particularly vulnerable to one another. At both of my sites, I was often told that to grace another person with one’s trust along the migration route was to be terribly naïve.

Cooperation as imperative: the dilemma of trust

‘People abuse each other, Iranians abuse each other. You shouldn’t trust anyone for the Game because each person might put a knife in your back. We had friends - another couple, with a child - and as five people together we had the same smuggler. But after we tried one time and failed, the other family secretly changed their smuggler without telling us. We helped them a lot, we thought we were friends, but they didn’t even say goodbye to us when they left. We trusted them and they are in the UK now, but they left us behind. You know in this place - in this situation - people start to become wild. They just want to *survive*. It’s a hard situation and every person wants to get free from it - first *I* must get free, then another person. This road is so difficult that people want to arrive at any cost. Some people will kill another person and walk over their body to their destination’.

Alborz, Calais 22.04.20

This confronting passage from an interview with Alborz was far from the only heartfelt account of betrayal I heard or witnessed during my field research. Many people told me of how they had fallen into the “trap” of trusting others and been betrayed as a result. This presents a radically different image to that of cohesion and communal space-claiming described in the earlier sections of this chapter. It reveals the paradox of suspicion and mistrust percolating beneath the surface of the social fabric of contingent camps, the existence of which depends on the binding of ties of solidarity and support between their inhabitants. I witnessed several breakdowns in relations like those Alborz describes: people who had considered each other the closest thing they had to family in transit went from all to nothing in moments of betrayal. I also came to realise that people would often force themselves to continue engaging in certain relationships despite having lost confidence in them; that other person already so bound up in one’s daily survival or plans for passage. After crossing the border, these soured relationships were often abandoned beyond repair. This underlying tension is a crucial aspect of life in contingent camps, where social architectures lie at the foundation of one’s survival and the perpetuation of assemblages of encampment: one *has to* render oneself vulnerable to others, and yet social life is a double-edged sword one has to navigate carefully, juggling interdependence and individual determinations to get away. While trust is a locus of reassurance and safety that holds these social architectures together, they are constantly undermined by the threat of betrayal.

I also experienced this consistently as a researcher at my field sites. Contingent camps are places of suspicion, so doing research within them often amounts to piecing scraps of information together: half-spoken truths and observations. I was struck how many respondents I grew close to spontaneously “confessed” fuller stories or insights to me amid apologies when we spoke again after their passage, once safety had been reached. In Tangier too, it was through keeping in touch with several of the Cameroonians by phone *after* leaving that I gained more profound insight into their true feelings about their peers. Having developed a close relationship with them in person, then speaking to them from a geographically and socially separate context seemed to facilitate greater trust.

By contrast, betrayal was an aspect of border life that was quietly *expected* in Tangier, rather than one that gave rise to outrage and regret. ‘My success depends only on myself; my survival depends only on me,’ Koumen told me one afternoon as we sat together along the city’s shiny new seafront promenade, looking out across the Strait. He was mulling over a possible passage attempt involving a few - but not all - of his closest friends. ‘Yeah, we try to stick together,’ he went on, ‘but above all, each of us knows this is a solo journey’ [06.12.19]. It struck me how intimately discourses, practices and the performativity of brotherhood coexisted with a profound sense of mutual mistrust and determination for individual gain. The ties between the men were not necessarily false, but all were hyperaware of the vulnerability of the social ties between them. As we spoke, a deep wound on Koumen’s cheekbone was still jammy, healing from the bitemark of a member of a (now rival) Cameroonian group who had attacked him one night at the cemetery. Acts of betrayal through violence or dispossession were not uncommon even between members of a same group or nationality, contributing to their state of constant suspicion. Considerable energy went into self-preservation and keeping out of the “trap” of genuinely trusting one’s “brothers”, entrenching the profound sense of loneliness many of the men felt. Olivier described: ‘The atmosphere... it’s good but it’s not really joyful. It’s an atmosphere we create because we *have* to, for our morale, see? On the inside though, each of us feels... [clicks] ill at ease with some of the others’ [16.10.19]. Life in these conditions entailed a complex balancing act of rendering oneself likeable without giving too much about oneself away. Bachelet writes insightfully of dynamics of (mis)trust between Central and West-African migrants in Morocco, observing that ‘migrants forge tenuous but essential relationships in the face of hostile and violent border politics’ (2019, 850). Inevitably, ‘moral conundrums’ often emerge between ‘people travelling together and alongside one another to achieve what they called “the objective” (usually articulated as to *mbeng*, to get into Europe)’ (ibid, 851). I often heard striking comments like, ‘all we Black brothers try to do is to stop each other from getting ahead,’ or ‘when I get to Europe, I’ll avoid the Black man at all costs’ (see also Atekmangoh 2017). Such comments were surprising to me considering the front of unity the men otherwise created narratives around and performed.

Individually, the men spoke to me openly about the challenges of friendship in migration. Blaise described just how rare it is to find genuine friendship along the migration route, what he called a *one spirit*. He explained that you might only ever find them once - if you’re lucky enough to find them at all. Many spoke of *one spirits* from whom they had been separated - who had either returned home, were elsewhere in Morocco or had made it to Europe ahead of them. Bakary from Ivory Coast, who lived alongside the Cameroonian men for a while at the Cathedral, picked up on the dynamics of their group, whom he described as disunited, reading the unity they put forward as a mere performance. He said:

‘The Cameroonian brothers don’t eat together. *Never*. Have you ever seen them eating together? Each of them eats as and when he wants, they don’t want to eat together. Us, when we were sleeping at the Cathedral, we would pool our money, call an Ivorian sister and give

her the money. We would say, “take this money and cook something for us?” She would cook and bring us a meal and we would eat it together. The others envied us! If I put in 10 dirhams and you put in 10 and so on, with 6 of us that’s 60 dirhams. She’ll make a beautiful dish for that money! We’ll all be able to eat and there’ll be enough for everyone. If you eat alone for 10 dirhams all you can really afford is some bread. People think we’re stupid, but unity is power. The Cameroonians though, they *never* eat together like that. They’re only united when it comes to making problems.’

Bakary, Tangier 20.11.21

Bakary made a valid point here in the sense that the Cameroonians purchased their meals individually from Nora or local shops and ate individually, a practice which in some respects did seem to reflect the mistrust lingering beneath the united front they put forward. Often some of the men would simply not eat, unable to pay Nora for a meal. Nonetheless, spending considerable time with this group, the relationships between the men did not strike me as false or purely strategic. It rather seemed that they preferred to commit to one another loosely rather than in a “family” dynamic. This reflects Simone’s observation that the “burden of survival” tends to be placed with individuals and households before society at large in Douala, meaning ‘there is a greater valuation on the autonomy of operations rather than on fostering social interdependency’ (Warnier 1993 in Simone 2005, 522). The drive to succeed was ultimately driven by the desire to make something of themselves and redeem themselves in the eyes of family, and the unbearable living conditions faced in contingent camps at the border only made this determination stronger. As Collyer fittingly observes: ‘if the weak ties of fellow migrants frequently provided the means for continued migration, the strong ties of absent family members provided the motivation’ (2007, 682). This is not to say that these men were devoid of all sense of solidarity, but rather that the strength of these ties was towards home connections above those made along the migration journey: to absent-present family and friends left behind, whose expectations are strongly felt. Ultimately, like in Calais, the drive to free oneself from these transit circumstances is stronger than any sense of responsibility towards a fellow border crosser met along the way.

Sixteen-year-old Issa was the only one among the group of Cameroonians who found himself a full-time job. He worked six or seven days a week at a *hanut* (corner shop) in the city centre. Despite his young age, he had secured this job due to his good character, trustworthiness, and the Muslim faith he shared with the shop owners. This job however meant that his peers knew he had a regular income and was spared the humiliation of begging for money at the traffic lights every night. He spoke to me often of wanting to find ways to better hide the money he was seeking to save up. He was frustrated that he was neither old enough nor had the right documents to open a bank account, making it difficult for him to keep his money safe. His long-term plan was to save 1,500 euros to pay a smuggler for a more secure passage attempt by motorboat than the non-motorised dingy boat attempts his friends were planning. However, he was often pressured if not forced into “loaning” money to his older peers, which he would rarely get back. He once had his phone stolen by these peers, emphasising how people in migration are

often both dependent on and bound to their broader (national) communities, facing both obligations of solidarity towards and fear of theft by their peers (Collyer 2007, 683). This resonates with a dynamic Simone describes, that ‘Douala is replete with complex codes of conduct applied to situations that youth often describe as “chasing those who owe them money, running from those whose money they have stolen”’ (2005, 521).

This dynamic, which travelled with the men, meant many of them would try to conceal any extra income they had, for example if they were receiving money transfers from family or friends. In Issa’s case, I was struck by how quick he was to transition from anger at his peers to brushing off what they had done to him; for example, replacing his stolen phone with an even better one. In this way, the younger man gradually earned status and respect from his peers: having money or being able to access it in other ways than begging gave him status. Without bank accounts and under constant threat of being dispossessed, the Cameroonians would “convert” their money into silver chains at jewellery shops in the Tangier *medina*, which they could convert back into cash at any moment. Not only did they consider this a way of protecting their money and stopping themselves from spending it or loaning it to friends with little hope of getting it back, it also served as a display of power and wealth - though this itself could be considered more performative than representative. Lamar told me: ‘It’s important to wear the chains to show you’ve got status, that you have money even if you don’t really. It helps you earn the trust of the other person.’ By the end of my fieldwork, young Issa wore several chains proudly around his neck and had “toughened up”: he had learned to build better boundaries with his peers while maintaining their friendship, even acquiring *petits* of his own.

Conclusion

Though they emerge in incredibly hostile contexts, contingent camps are not purely symbolic of “bare life”, nor of interminable, dispossessed waiting. On the contrary they represent collective agency and a demand for self-determination, fuelling the constant re-emergence of encampment. The contingent camp is a fugitive geography that symbolises a refusal of submission, a refusal to wait passively. This seems to characterise contemporary informal migration, as border control strategies become increasingly ruthless and faith in institutionalised processing systems is constantly undermined. Indeed, these spaces emphasise how ‘neither waiting nor crisis is an inherently passive experience. Even in contexts of uncertainty, refugees and other irregular migrants imagine, and actively work toward, new futures’ (Ramsay 2017). In this sense, contingent camps are a spatialisation of new, fugitive modes of collective refusal of submission to dehumanising systems.

This chapter has emphasised some of the ways in which displaced people seek to reclaim protective spaces at the border, how they draw on rhythms of practice, on refrain, to establish critical distance (Deleuze & Guattari 2013, 372) from the dispossessive and dehumanising practices of the state. The sociality of contingent camps is patterned with intensities of emotion and experience; it gives rise to a

particular mode of living collectively. This sociality allows for recognition and identity formation, for one's humanity to be seen and acknowledged by peers at micro-level. This is crucial in places where historical optics, state discourses and performativities throw displaced people into the dehumanising categories of undesirable, clandestine, migrant. Assembly opens up a sense of belonging and possibility in border space, challenging policing strategies designed to destroy just that. Through collective counter-refrains, powerful common atmospheres are established, coaxing the camp into being as an affective yet nonetheless vivid sheltering assemblage. It is interesting to note how despite considerable differences between border crossing groups in northern Morocco and northern France, similar social modes emerge, allowing for the presence of the displaced across time, as different groups relay one another in border space.

Just like the materialities that seek to assemble encampment, this chapter has also emphasised how the social ties that constitute contingent camps are characterised by uncertainty; binding together with vital strength before loosening or being pulled apart and rewoven in new ways. The ethnographic insights presented in this chapter offer a glimpse into not only the resourcefulness, but also the tricky complexities of communal life at the border. Where cooperation between groups is not only a valuable but an absolutely *vital* resource, the same social fabrics that sustain a person also render them constantly vulnerable to betrayal; an undercurrent of weariness and mistrust inevitably permeates contingent camps. The nightmarish living conditions mean the individual goal of crossing the border is everyone's priority. Each person uses the social fabric she or he is a part of as a functional resource and to their own advantage, be it mental, physical or in pursuit of opportunities for passage. This creates complex, sometimes contradictory atmospheres and affects in these spaces, which at times only serve to exacerbate the sense of uncertainty inflicted by the state. As border securitisation relentlessly tightens, access to opportunities grows increasingly competitive, and the cooperation of some often comes at the expense of others.

CHAPTER 8 | CONCLUSION



Eviction morning in Calais | Photo by author, January 2020

The frost on the ground still sticks as the convoy of gendarmerie and clean up vehicles drives off. A group of men who refer to themselves as “la Francophonie” in reference to their shared language are crouched, huddled around a fire. They see us shivering and call us over to share the heat off the fast-combusting pile of wood. We exchange the usual handshakes and headshakes at the police intervention. One of the men crouched by the fire and energetically warming his hands begins to speak and I recognise his Douala slang. We chat about Tangier, the Spanish church, the border fences, the day of his “Boza” [crossing] in 2013 and the years he spent in Spain afterwards. He’s upbeat yet unable to rationalise quite how or why he’s ended up in Calais. The following afternoon, I walk out of Carrefour to find him sitting at the bus stop outside the McDonald’s drive-in, a can of beer in hand. He staggers over to me with a huge grin on his face. ‘It’s good to see you,’ he says, ‘I had some problems with the other guys back at the camp... You know, if England doesn’t work out, I’ll just go back to Spain, life wasn’t so bad there...’ He seems clueless and unrooted. He takes a swig of beer, laughs and twirls back over to his seat at the bus stop, shaking off the cold. I dread the thought of meeting the Tangier Cameroonians here, living the same violence on this longed-for side of the border a few years on. I imagine this man’s journey beyond the immediacy of his Calais experience, what he has lived in Spain and Morocco before. The stamina required to face border after border, year after year in pursuit of something better is brought home to me in a new way. Though I expect to see him around after that encounter, we never cross paths again.

Fieldnotes, Calais January 2020

Since I gathered the empirical material upon which this thesis is based, a global pandemic has played out and considerable parameters have changed in the northern French and northern Moroccan borderlands. Nonetheless, contingent camps persist in both places, and policy developments strongly

suggest that the routine harassment of displaced people in anticipation of their intention to cross certain borders is only set to intensify. In 2018, the European Commission pledged funds to ‘strengthen border management’ totalling €90,5 million to the Maghreb region (European Commission 2018). Securitisation has also been massively reinforced in northern France, as small boat crossings more than tripled in 2021 compared with 2020 (Sturge 2022, 33). In July 2021, the British government pledged an additional £51,4 million for police reinforcement at the French border (GOV.UK 2021), just a year after a £28 million deal was made between the two countries to double police patrols on northern French beaches (GOV.UK 2020). Since December 2021, a sensor and radar-equipped Frontex plane has also been deployed to the Channel and North sea coastal region, to ‘support border control’ (Frontex 2021). Yet on the ground, it becomes apparent that the displaced are not so much deterred from the border as bolstered in their desire to pass *out of* hostile space and take increasing risks to do so. In 2021, at least 44 people died or went missing attempting to cross the Channel, up from 14 in 2020 (Calais Migrant Solidarity 2022). The death toll among those making the crossing from north and west African shores to Spain in 2021 more than doubled compared with 2020, to an estimated 4,404 people, mostly on the highly perilous Canary Island route, where a third of attempts ended in tragedy (Caminando Fronteras 2022, 4, 6-10). Idriss made the 203km crossing from Laayoune (Western Sahara) to Lanzarote (Spain) after what he described as three terrifying days at sea.

While this thesis has focused on the particularities of contingent encampment and displaced people at just two sites, this phenomenon is far more widespread and applicable to other sites and population groups. First and foremost, the regulation of the undesired presence of border crossers through their dispossession and harassment remains apparent in many border zones, such as between Mexico and the United States (Human Rights Watch 2021a); Greece and Turkey (Forensic Architecture 2022); Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia (Council of Europe 2021); and more recently, Belarus and Poland (Human Rights Watch 2021b). Clear parallels may also be drawn with the violent eviction operations that have targeted the homeless in the United States (Herring 2019; Herring et al. 2020) and the United Kingdom (Jackson 2012; McClenaghan 2020); the hyper-precarity inflicted on Palestinians by Israeli settlers in the West Bank (Hammami 2016), and on Roma people in Bucharest (Lancione 2019) and across France (D. Fassin 2021; Vrabiescu 2021; E. Fassin et al. 2014; Cousin & Legros 2014; Gould 2015). In this sense, this in-depth account of life in contingency contributes not only to migration studies but also to studies of homelessness and processes of social precarisation and domination more broadly, at a time when precarity is increasingly inflicted upon those considered “inconvenient” presences (Lorey 2015; Jackson 2012; Harris & Nowicki 2018; McClenaghan 2020). As Ramsay argues, it is important to re-centre the experience of being stripped of temporal certainty and facing a ‘dispossessed future’, away from just the figure of the refugee or migrant person, in order to ‘open up a new way to think about time: not only as temporalities in tension, but as temporal trajectories and anticipated futures that have been forcibly dispossessed’ (2020, 396).

Towards an ontology of the contingent camp

While there has been no shortage of discussion on migration control and borders in recent years, the specific phenomenon of contingent encampment has remained under-explored. I have emphasised the importance of going beyond reading precarious encampments as temporary phenomena at sites where they have become semi-permanent for migrant people in transit, while trying to understand how this form of dwelling is understood by those who live them. The core contribution of this thesis is a theorisation through close empirical reading of the contingent camp, offering (both methodological and theoretical) tools with which we might better see and address these spaces and understand the dynamics of oppression and resistance that govern and sustain them. Through grounded theory and a deep ethnographic approach, I have drawn on assemblage-thinking to study fluid assemblages of people, materialities, atmospheres and social practices as they are negotiated in processes of informal encampment. After laying the groundwork for this approach in chapter two, chapters five, six and seven developed this framework further, taking it in various directions that refine and elaborate on the initial conceptualisation.

Using assemblage as a loose framework has proven valuable for unpacking the various entities that constitute contingent camps and how they operate, taking the temporal, performative, affective, material and atmospheric in their dynamic interaction. Flattening these various elements (to some extent), in line with an assemblage approach, has facilitated a reading of these elements individually, in their intertwinement and manipulation by various actors. It has enabled me to go beyond mainstream thinking on makeshift spaces and modes of life, to convey how contingent camps are ontologically characterised by perpetual struggle. Indeed assemblage-thinking emphasises readings of power as ‘multiple co-existences’, it ‘connotes not a central governing power, nor a power distributed equally, but power as plurality in transformation’ (Anderson & McFarlane 2011, 15). This allows for the observation of rhizomatic processes over (or alongside) the arborescent or vertical, which often tend to eclipse the horizontal. On the one hand, I scrutinised the dispossessive act by sifting through the debris of encampment, observing the unmaking and remaking of places of life, feeling how practices of environmental racism through exposure and erasure sour the atmospheres of these spaces, creating unsettling temporalities and hostile affect. On the other hand, I observed and sensed the spatial practices and immaterial social rhythms devised by the displaced, from the tracing of literal desire lines to the social refrains of practice performed by these groups, coaxing powerful counter-atmospheres into being in a bid for survival. Emphasising the coexistence of different forms of power, assemblage thinking ‘questions the naturalisation of hegemonic assemblages and renders them open to political challenge by exposing their contingency’ (Müller 2015, 31). Indeed, one of the main characteristics of assemblages is that they are dynamic phenomena driven by process, that they are *open to transformation* (Deleuze & Guattari 2013; Anderson & McFarlane 2011). How then can we shift, rethink, alter the contingent camp assemblage in such a way as to expose and bring home the inhumanity of state-exacerbated

suffering in the border zone, or at least rethink our humanitarian structures in such a way that they need not shy away from such sites?

Racialised geographies

In the introduction to this thesis, the reader was asked to suspend assumptions about the figure of the migrant person and their categorisation as “deserving” or “undeserving”. As Darling argues, ‘whether “we” like these people or not should not be a concern for a politics of refuge - social and spatial justice should not be a politics of preference’ (2021, 59). The people introduced throughout this thesis, from the self-proclaimed Douala “*bandits*” to the devout Eritreans in Calais, might be perceived to sit rather differently on this continuum. Yet a core question this thesis hopes to evoke is whether *any* person should suffer violence and dehumanisation at the hands of the states through which they seek transit in pursuit of a better life. The violence inflicted at the border is not easily forgotten. Rather, it is singed in the memories of the displaced and perpetuated, perhaps in more insidious ways, by state institutions further along the migration route (Darling 2009, 2014 [UK]; Gabrielli et al. 2021 [Spain]). Following Appadurai, ‘displacement in the present is a way to stratify lives in the future. It limits access to resources that are crucial for stability and socioeconomic mobility across numerous contemporary global contexts, stymying the possibility of social navigation for many’ (2013 in Ramsay 2020, 406).

The dynamics at play in the northern French and northern Moroccan borderlands clearly demonstrate that those seeking to evade systems of migration control *de facto* renounce their claims to humanity, dignity and respect. Contingent camps are punitive geographies that mark the deterioration of principles of hospitality and humanity. They are profoundly discriminatory spaces underpinned by racist logics and practices. Fassin qualifies punishment as a ‘contemporary passion’ (2016), and the contingent camp vividly demonstrates how punishment may seep well beyond the boundaries of spaces of confinement or detention. It permeates border control politics and practices by targeting displaced people at the border in the intimacies of their makeshift dwellings, bodies and everyday lives. Repeated acts of violence in *anticipation* of the act of attempted border crossing work to normalise punitive practices as a mode of migration governance. The contingent camp geography emphasises the extent to which states work to render displaced people on their territory ‘Other’ through their dispossession and exposure to a rudimentary mode of life. As Butler observes, in order for violent state practices to appear legitimate, to be defensible: ‘the target has to be figured as a threat, a vessel of real or actual violence, in order for lethal police action to appear as self-defence’ (2020, 4). In the contingent camp, “self-defence” is the mode of the nation state: defending the national “body” legitimises injuring the body of the “Other”, presented as an undeserving, ungrateful threat.

This was emphasised in chapter five, where routine practices of dispossession to the ends of dehumanisation laid bare the *intentionality* of deprivation in the contingent camp, amounting to a gratuitous logic of imperial ruination (Stoler 2013); necropolitical intent rooted in racialised violence.

Chapter six emphasised the environmental racism that goes hand in hand with this dispossession, working to *other* the displaced person and reduce them to a life of exposure and erasure that renders their presence spectral. In these spaces, the border-crossing person is degraded to a “savage” life (Mbembe 2003), exposed to living constantly out of doors, to the erasure of their presence, feeding into the sense that they are threatening and haunt border space. The governance of illicit migration has become a game of honing modes of active violence and ways to either legitimise or conceal that violence: ‘the more this system turns asylum seekers, who are after all among the most vulnerable people in the world, into criminals, the more the law flounders, as it runs the risk of exposing the criminality of the state’ (Rose 2021, 337).

A racialised approach to border control is clear here, particularly as the migrant person reveals themselves as unsubmissive, increasingly suspicious and refusing their blind submission to the pseudo-hospitality of transit states. The racism underlying these geographies (while also working to legitimise their existence) has been made even more apparent as I write these lines, with the establishment of emergency shelter in youth hostels for Ukrainian refugees seeking passage to the UK from Calais, in the early aftermath of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in March 2022 (Carretero 2022). While this response in and of itself is fitting, Black migrant people in the border city remain excluded from such shelter, and face continued violence on the part of the authorities (Pascual 2022). The contrast in treatment is particularly stark considering that (according to the Home Office itself) an estimated 98% of people who arrive in the UK via small boat apply for asylum on arrival (Sturge 2022, 33).⁴⁹ This racialised approach to asylum seekers evokes the British government’s historical resistance to the inclusion of non-European refugees (particularly those from the colonies) under the 1951 Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees (Mayblin 2014).

Rethinking the figure of the migrant person and the act of migration

In bringing the reader to the intimacy of the undignified living conditions imposed upon displaced people in these spaces, offering glimpses into their personalities, modes of survival and motives, this thesis calls for a revaluation of the legitimacy of the human beyond administrative status. Rendering the geography of the contingent camp knowable creates room for identifying the racist prejudices integral to contemporary politics and redressing what is rapidly becoming a banal and racially violent geography (Dei 2005, 4). As statues topple and heated discussion intensifies on the topic of post-colonial responsibility, the way is increasingly being paved for a widespread reading of migration as a decolonial act (Achieme 2019). To these ends, this thesis has sought not only to pay attention to governance strategies, but also to how people (in this case literally and figuratively) inhabit these

⁴⁹ In 2020, 85% of Syrians, 81% of Eritreans and 58% of Afghans (a number likely to rise following the Taliban takeover in August 2021), 43% of Sudanese and 31% of Iranians (the main nationalities present in Calais) were granted asylum by the UK Home Office (Sturge 2022, 31).

strategies (Anjaria 2011 in Darling 2014a). This brings to light new ways of conceptualising the act of migration and the figure of the migrant person beyond the institutional parameters to which we have chosen to reduce this relationship; prying it from the grip of an encounter premised on racial difference and fear. In this respect, observation of the furtive, fugitive modes of life that emerge in contingent camps is particularly valuable. Chapters six and seven proposed a reconceptualisation of precarious border encampments as rhizomatic, fugitive geographies: spaces of subversion and desire in pursuit of escape from the racialised physical and temporal hostilities imposed by the transit state.

Engaging with work that draws on assemblage to unpack unequal power dynamics (Weheliye 2014, Kinkaïd 2020) has offered insightful ties between the notion of the desire line and that of Black fugitivity, allowing for a conceptualisation of the contingent camp as driven by emancipatory subjectivities. Indeed, these remain somewhat free and malleable spaces over which the displaced retain some control through constant rebuilding, spatial reclamation and the establishment of social routines. Contingent camps then may be read as fugitive spaces illustrative of migrant *refusal* to submit to the authority of untrustworthy states. They are fluid assemblages serving the purposes of transit as opposed to demanding greater anchoring, legitimisation or recognition. While those in Calais were, for the most part, living in the hope of being considered “deserving” of refuge by France or the United Kingdom, many expressed scepticism and disillusion at the purported benevolence of these destination states; living in fear of the possibility of the Dublin III Regulation rerouting them from their desired path. The Cameroonians, for whom the possibility of receiving asylum was slim, harboured a more combative attitude towards the European Union, a strong sense of their own deservingness in the light of past and present violence and exploitation inflicted on their home state by colonial powers. This ‘personal pursuit of enhanced self-determination (which asserts political equality with First World citizens) is [...] decolonial; it is migration as decolonization’ (Achieme 2019, 1522). In this sense, it is essential to centre ‘acts of resistance or opposition by those who occupy subordinate positions [...] to reframe migration - even unauthorized Third World migration - as one compelling means of asserting individual agency over political horizons, and to argue for the formal recognition in the law of this expression of agency’ (ibid).

The scope demanded here requires a profound reimagining of migration policy based on a politics of anti-suffering, and a reconsideration of the factors that have led to such explicit, racially-motivated violence in response to movement. The act of movement in a bid for a better life must be reconsidered, not as disobedient but as political, hopeful, and often essential, motivated by a need for emancipation or survival. Achieving this also demands a decentring of Western epistemologies (within and beyond the academy) dominated by fear, suspicion, hate or simple difference, in favour of the multiple and diverse epistemologies of those who migrate but are so rarely heard or considered. Writing from the position of ally, this thesis strives to pry open room for these perspectives, drawing on the work of those who have argued ardently in favour of a reconsideration of Black perspectives and experiences as the

departure point for a new recognition of humanity (Du Bois 1987; Dei 2005; Moten 2018; Wright 2018). While this thesis remains tentative, inevitably rooted in the “outsider” positionality of the author, it seeks to emphasise the need for this rethinking.

Shedding light on a humanitarian dilemma

Amid calls for camp abolition (Brankamp 2021), the *absence* of a camp that the contingent camp evokes raises the question of unintended alternatives that might emerge in a post-camp reality. Indeed, a tangential yet important contribution of this thesis has been to observe that in borderlands where contingent camps emerge (thus where the camp has been banned), the scope of humanitarian action is drastically compromised. The emergence of contingent camps is revelatory of the deterioration of humanitarian standards in favour of securitisation and deterrence. It is an absurd geography, yet the presence of undesired and criminalised clandestine border crossers persists. This thesis has revealed the serious biopolitical implications this has, reaffirming sovereign power over the lives of those who migrate. Contingent camps are illustrative of the paradox that the lives the state claims to try and protect are the same lives it works relentlessly to degrade. The lack of a fixed camp space jars with traditional modes of humanitarian intervention, while the mobility of the target population undercuts the implementation of fixed humanitarian infrastructures. Humanitarian organisations and aid agencies tend to consider working in places where camp contingency has become the norm “too political” or nearing complicity with the border regime, as exemplified in MSF’s withdrawal from the Moroccan border in 2013 and the UNHCR’s withdrawal from any physical presence in Calais in 2018. This had led to more mobile forms of service delivery, which I conceptualise elsewhere as a “performance” of the humanitarian camp by organisations seeking to adapt to these new conditions and keep migrant people’s mode of life in Calais *visible* as a humanitarian crisis (Hagan 2018). But such endeavours, which require constant adaptation to the ground reality at hand, are usually unattractive or unfeasible for established organisations, and fall to grassroots groups who are often criminalised by the authorities. Reaching a better, broader understanding of camp contingency as a rising mode of contemporary precarity may also prove significant for these autonomous humanitarian practitioners on the ground, who might advocate for greater recognition of their role and legitimacy.

Identifying two case studies that mirror each other in certain ways but are very different in others has been valuable for revealing the different outcomes that such a governance strategy gives rise to in different contexts, and for bolstering the claim that this is not a purely site-specific set of practices. Conceptualising and acknowledging the contingent camp as a problematic and recurring migration geography should press for a humanitarian rethinking of how to deliver services in such contexts, and advocate effectively for dignified humanitarian solutions premised on anti-suffering. I argue in favour of a new politics of recognition of the displaced person, a politics of migration governance rooted in human dignity. While there are no simple solutions to this issue, we might imagine a border politics

informed by human rights and the provision of shelter instead of deterrence through brutal dispossession, which pushes displaced people to take great risks to escape the border zone and obliterates their confidence in the institutions within which they seek refuge.

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