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The invisibilization of displaced communities in border zones: The case of Calais: A field study on the Treatment of refugees in Northern France

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**Universiteit
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The Netherlands

MA International Relations
Global Conflict in the Modern Era
Master Thesis

**The invisibilization of displaced communities in border zones:
The case of Calais**

A field study on the Treatment of refugees in Northern France

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Table of Content

Abbreviations 3

Chapter 1: Introduction 4

Chapter 2: Borders and Invisibilization: Literature and Concepts 8

 I. History of the Border..... 8

 II. Instrumentalization: portraying displaced persons as threats 9

 III. The Securitization of Immigration 10

 IV. The invisibilization of marginal communities..... 11

Chapter 3: Methodology 15

Chapter 4: Findings and Analysis 19

 Section 1: Institutionalising a Manhunt: The Eviction of living sites 19

 Section 2: Reshaping the public space: Creating an uninhabitable environment..... 26

 Section 3: Criminalizing Solidarity: Targeting those who support displaced communities 36

Chapter 5: Conclusion 43

Acknowledgements 45

Bibliography 46

Abbreviations

CAO	Centre d'Accueil et d'Orientation (Reception and Orientation Center).
CRA	Centre de Rétention Administrative (Administrative Detention Center).
CRS	Compagnie Républicaine de Sécurité (French Riot Police).
HRO	Human Rights Observers.
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization.
PAF	Police aux Frontières (Border Police).
UK	United Kingdom.
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Situated on the northern coast of France, Calais may appear to be like any other coastal city. Except that it is not. Its four-metres-high fences, the police stationed on every street corner and its multiple slums made up of dozens of tents visibly give it away. Its location on the coastline, only 32km from Dover, places Calais as the closest French city to the UK. Thus, the town has become a transit point for anyone seeking to enter England, especially for those who are not able to use regular legal routes (Agier & al., 2019).

In the late 1990s, Calais saw the arrival of its first refugees fleeing conflict in former Yugoslavia (Agier & al., 2019). Ever since, the city has seen the settling and dismantling of multiple informal living sites, commonly called “camps” (Ibrahim and Howarth 2017). To this date, the most well-known of those settlements remains the “Jungle” of Calais, a slum created in 2015 which spread over several hectares (Buchanam, 2016). At the time of its dismantlement in late 2016, nearly 10 000 persons hoping to reach the UK lived in the Jungle. Following its destruction, various smaller settlements have been dispersed around the coast, mostly regrouping people from Sudan, Eritrea, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Syria, and India including numerous families and unaccompanied minors.

When the camps were first settled in Calais, people on the move would attempt to reach the UK using trucks or trains. However, to prevent refugees from crossing, the French and British governments massively invested in the securitization of the border. Thus, the coastline saw its roads and beaches being transformed through the militarization of its cities. Fences topped with barbed wire were built around lorry parks, along the port and highways, scanners were installed to detect refugees in trucks, while drones were deployed on beaches (Mould, 2017). Similarly, police forces were positioned all around the northern coast as Calais became the French city with the highest concentration of police officers per inhabitant.

This securitization has made it nearly impossible for displaced communities to reach the UK by truck or train. Thus, since 2019, small boats have become the principal means used to reach England. This dynamic has only been getting stronger as demonstrated by the yearly number of crossings. Indeed, while 1,843 people crossed in 2019, nearly 8,500 reached the UK in 2020. Those numbers more than tripled in 2021 with more than 28,500 crossings, while 2022 saw a

record with 45,756 crossings (Witter, 2023). Yet, the distance, weather conditions and precariousness of the crafts make the crossing particularly dangerous.

Since the establishment of the first living sites, at least 350, men, women and children have lost their lives on the border between France and the UK (Witter, 2023). In the year 2021 alone, 44 persons, drowned or went missing when crossing (MacGregor, 2022).

Thus, each year, the death toll increases as more and more people lose their lives due to the UK and France's border regime and inhospitality. Yet neither of their governments seems to be concerned about the situation. Instead, on both sides of the Channel, refugees' arrival has been framed as a threat. Indeed, in the media and in governmental discourses, displaced communities have been criminalised and dehumanised. In turn, the narrative has changed and those in need of help are now being portrayed as the ones Europeans need protection from.

Thus, the Northern French coast has become a direct representation of European countries' indifference towards displaced communities and their unwillingness to welcome people on the move in dignified conditions. With little to no help from the state, refugees rely mostly on the support of NGOs for access to food, clothing, tents, phone charges, medical aid, juridic help and so forth.

While the French State refuses to provide shelter and support for displaced people, it also actively participates in worsening their living conditions. Indeed, both the city council and the law enforcement units have increasingly marginalised and targeted refugees settled along the coastline. Human rights violations and police brutality have grown normalised. These policies follow one clear strategy: to deliberately render the life of refugees unbearable to push them to leave Calais.

Since the dismantling of the Jungle, however, the situation in Calais has gone rather unnoticed. In the media and in State officials' and political actors' discourses, displaced communities' living conditions remain invisible. Indeed, even though between 1000 to 2000 refugees are currently living in make-shift camps in the city, displaced communities have become hardly noticeable. I was told on multiple occasions by local residents that it is possible to "live in Calais and never see refugees". Over the years, the State has developed tools and strategies aimed at restraining people on the move to hidden areas. This form of control has progressively established racial segregation, with displaced communities being excluded from the city centre while being dispersed and confined into secluded areas such as industrial zone, along railways or behind dunes and forests.

Thus, this situation generates many interrogations regarding the evolution of the policies towards displaced people. For instance, what motivates the conduction of systematic eviction of all settlements? This approach additionally brings forward questions regarding the tools used by the State to ensure that communities do not settle back on the locations they were chased away from. To this end, this thesis will assess the following research question: How are displaced communities invisibilized in Calais?

Refugee, Asylum Seeker, Migrant: Finding the right terminology

The words “refugees”, “asylum seekers” and “migrants” are all widely used to refer to populations experiencing migration, thus, highlighting the distinctions between the different terms is crucial to analyse the perception associated with them.

- Refugee: According to the 1951 Convention, a refugee is a person who “owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted [...] is outside the country of [their] nationality and is unable or [...] unwilling to return to it” (UNHCR, 1951).
- Asylum Seeker: A person who “is seeking international protection from persecution and serious human rights violations in another country, but who hasn’t yet been legally recognized as a refugee” (Amnesty International, n. d.).
- Migrant: According to its broad definition, “migrant” refers to any person leaving their place of residence to settle either temporarily or permanently in another country (OIM, n. d.). This would include persons such as international students, seasonal workers or even refugees. Yet according to scholars, many of the people presented as “migrants” in public discourses and the media are in fact refugees or asylum seekers fleeing persecution and war (Goodman & al., 2017).

While the word “migrant” is generally used in mainstream discourse to refer to any person falling into the three categories mentioned above, it has progressively been given a negative meaning (Veniard, 2013). Indeed, it now carries a pejorative connotation as “migrants” have increasingly been dehumanised and portrayed as threats.

Scholars have discussed how the distinction between “refugees” and “migrants” has resulted in a separation of people into deserving and undeserving individuals (Crawley & al., 2016). While “refugees” need to be supported, “migrants” are not entitled to international protection and their asylum claims are thus deemed illegitimate.

Thus, in Calais, activists, volunteers, and NGO workers have abandoned the term because of its negative connotation. Therefore, throughout this thesis, I will not be referring to the people I have met in Calais as “migrants”. Instead, I will deliberately use terminologies such as “displaced persons”, “people on the move”, or “refugees” to describe the communities stuck in Northern France.

This thesis aims to work towards making visible invisibility. It will address the strategies mobilised by the State to marginalise refugees and to control communities and their movements. It will also discuss the implication of these policies and how they tend to target not only displaced people but also the NGOs and activist supporting their struggles.

In order to address the research question, this thesis will draw on data collected in Calais between April 2021 and February 2023 through interviews as well as observations.

With this thesis, I wish to shed light on the human rights abuses perpetrated by the French State along its borders. Thus, I envision this thesis as a means to counter the forced invisibilization of refugees by exposing the concealed and voicing the suffering inflicted along the border.

This thesis will be decomposed into multiple sections. The next chapter will present the literature and concepts that can be applied to the notions of borders and invisibilization. Then, I will introduce the methods used throughout my research process, reflecting on their implications and limitations. Following this, I will divide my analysis and findings into three distinct sections, the first one on systemic evictions, the second one on the creation of an inhospitable environment and finally, the last one on the criminalization of solidarity. Lastly, in the final chapter, I will present a conclusion of the research.

Chapter 2: Borders and Invisibilization: Literature and Concepts

This chapter will present various conceptual understandings of the displaced communities' invisibilization. First, it will reflect on the history of the border in Northern France. Secondly, it will discuss the instrumentalized portrayal of refugees as threats to the public. Thirdly, it will examine how this framing has progressively led to the securitization of migrations. Finally, this literature review will reflect on the invisibilization of displaced communities, explaining how previous conceptions of invisibilization can be applied to the case of Calais. In doing so, this chapter will demonstrate why the current literature has yet to address the situation in Northern France and how this thesis will participate in filling this gap.

I. History of the Border¹

In 1994, the inauguration of the Channel Tunnel establishing a new underground border between the UK and France led both States to sign the Sangatte Protocol (1991) which enshrined the externalisation of British border control on French territory.

By the end of the 1990s, the war in Kosovo brought a significant rise in the number of refugee arrivals in Calais. Following intense mobilisation from NGOs, the Prefecture opened the Sangatte centre, providing night shelter to refugees in which 70 000 people transited in three years. However, in 2002, Nicolas Sarkozy, Minister of Interior, ordered the closing of the centre, arguing that it constituted a pull factor acting as a magnet for refugees. Following this, in 2003, the British and French governments endorsed the Le Touquet agreement, which opened the way for bilateral border controls in all ports across the Channel.

Between 2002 and 2015 successive squats and encampments were built around Calais town and in other cities within the region only to be systematically demolished by authorities. Thus, in its desire to remove displaced communities from the town to concentrate them in one area in order to better control them, the State created the *La Lande* Camp in the spring of 2015, informally called the Jungle. In exchange, authorities promised to stop systematic evictions. The Jungle quickly spread as empty spaces were transformed by inhabitants into a shantytown.

¹ All historical facts presented here were discussed in the book *The Jungle, Calais's camps and migrants* (Agier & al., 2019)

In the meantime, urban life came to be progressively organised as places of worship, schools, and restaurants were rapidly constructed in the Jungle.

As the camp grew in population following the so-called 2015 “migration crisis”, living conditions further deteriorated, and authorities began emptying the “biggest shantytown in Europe” in late 2015, carrying out periodic destructions of parts of the shantytown. Influenced by upcoming elections the French President François Hollande announced in September 2016 that the camp which gathered more than 10,000 people at that time, would be demolished by the end of the year. The operation was presented to the French public as one of “humanitarian sheltering”. By early November, the Jungle had entirely been destroyed while its inhabitants had been dispersed across France.

Since the dismantlement of the Jungle, Calais has all but disappeared from mainstream media and academic literature. The situation, however, has rather remained unchanged. As people returned to Calais, the new government made it a priority to prevent refugees from gathering permanently along the coast, as we will discuss in a later chapter.

The tragedy that killed 27 people in their attempt to cross the Channel in November 2021 brought back Calais to the headlines, shedding a temporary light on the dangers faced by refugees (Walawalkar & al., 2023). However, these events did not result in demonstrations of support from the French and British governments but rather were used to justify the increased securitization along the coast.

II. Instrumentalization: portraying displaced persons as threats

In the past decades, scholars have shown that immigration progressively came to be assimilated with insecurity and terrorism. Indeed, Faist demonstrated how human mobility was redefined as a threat after the 9/11 terrorist attacks (Faist, 2002). The events were blamed on a failure of immigration control and intelligence. Immediately, voices among Western countries started establishing a relationship between migration and insecurity, as we can observe both in the discourses of politicians and the media (Lazaridis, 2016). Yet, several studies have found no direct link between immigration and terrorism. Bove and Böhmelt on the contrary, found that more migration is generally associated with a lower level of terrorist attacks (Bove and Böhmelt, 2016).

Huysmans claims that making a connection between terrorism and displacement has been serving the agenda of nationalist groups, creating a ‘self-fulfilling’ prophecy, which will build support for far-right parties (Huysmans, 1995). This phenomenon is particularly vivid in France which has been heavily affected by terrorist attacks over the past decade. Geisser explains that right-wing politicians attempt to mobilise a frightened part of the electorate by presenting them with a common enemy and a commitment to get the situation back in order (Geisser, 2020) This strategy has been especially efficient if we look at the case of France, as in the 2022 election more than 32% of the votes cast were in favour of far-right candidates openly opposed to immigration.

Nail also showed how the media participate in spreading images of a potential terrorist hiding amongst a crowd, which in turn, frames an entire group of people as a threat (Nail, 2016). The use of analogies induces a dehumanisation of populations, presenting displaced communities as threatening masses, instead of as refugees in need of protection (Bigo, 1998). This correlation between people on the move and danger will then be used to justify the securitization of immigration.

III. The Securitization of Immigration

The Copenhagen School of Securitization theory famously argues “something is a security problem when elites declare it to be so” (Wæver, 1995: 55). They discuss how, through speech acts, some non-security issues are securitized, i.e. turned into issues of security (Buzan, 1993; Wæver, 1995). The process of securitization involves portraying an object as an existential threat to the survival of a group, acknowledgement of the risks posed by the threat by an audience, and legitimization of the breaching of rules and the use of extraordinary measures to handle the threat by the securitizing actor, usually the State (Wæver, 1995: 55). As mentioned previously, immigration has been associated with both insecurity and terrorism since the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Several actors, such as politicians or the media have used security language and have socially constructed mobility as a major threat (Williams, 2003). Concomitantly, we have witnessed the deployment of exceptional measures to tackle immigration in Western countries.

As a response to this approach to securitization, scholars associated with the Paris school have argued that securitization is not a product of extraordinary speech acts but rather involves non-discursive routinized processes. Indeed, in the context of displaced communities, Didier Bigo

(1998) talks about a generalised “governmentality of unease” in a risk society, i.e. a mode of governing through institutional and everyday apparatus of security that targets those who are deemed as ‘risk’. Every sector from borders to banking and social security to public access to resources is securitized. Institutions and bureaucrats mobilise fears which allows them to assert their own legitimacy as guardians of security and ensure confidence in the governing apparatus. Security professionals and State officials have an interest in exploiting this unease and defining (in)security to reinforce their own positions.

Securitization as a theory has been applied to various issues ranging from the environment (Floyd, 2010; Ostrauskaite, 2001), transnational crime (Emmers, 2003), poverty (Lorenzo-Dus & Marsh, 2012), development and foreign aid (Gebresenbet, 2014; Brown & Grävingsholt, 2016), public health (Smernoff, 2013; Elbe, 2006) and even energy (Bocse, 2020; Ganz, 2021). While approaches to securitization emphasise the blurred lines between security and non-security, borders still remain the primary subject of securitization; a space of heavier militarization, punitive surveillance and barbed wires (Enault, 2015). The current literature, however, does not include how this strategy recently came to be implemented in Calais. Indeed, Calais has become the city with the highest ratio of police officers per inhabitant in the country and nearly 70km of fences installed in 2021 (Défenseur des Droits, 2015, Mould, 2017, Pecqueux, 2021). In January 2018, 1,130 officers were stationed around the city, almost double the estimation regarding displaced persons (600) present in Calais (Hagan, 2019). In addition to discussing the implications and consequences of this incredibly heavy show of force, researching the methods used by the police in Calais will help us understand the materialisation of securitization in everyday interactions between representatives of the State and displaced communities.

Thus, this thesis will expose and challenge how the increased militarization in Calais has progressively dehumanised people on the move while further jeopardising their living conditions through the prism of invisibilization.

IV. The invisibilization of marginal communities

Invisibilization refers to how vulnerable groups as well as their experiences are rendered invisible in the public sphere (Borderon & al., 2021). This, in turn, produces a cycle that eventually leads to the underrepresentation of these groups and of the narrative and problems

they face. This phenomenon is even more unfair as groups deemed “invisible” generally include disadvantaged, disenfranchised or marginalised groups such as homeless or displaced communities that already have limited if not non-existent participation in public discourses (Lambert, 1998). Thus, the marginalisation and exclusion of social communities can be approached as mechanisms of silencing or invisibilizing these specific groups. In *Wretched of the Earth* and *A Dying Colonialism*, Frantz Fanon discusses the relationship between visibility/invisibility and power/powerlessness (1963; 1965). He argued that colonisation reproduced a structure in which the coloniser was made visible and possessed all the power. In contrast, the colonised were deemed inhuman and powerless. For Fanon, this absence of power effectively invisibilized colonised individuals, as it kept their oppression hidden. Therefore, fighting this exclusion becomes a matter of fundamental justice – and according to Herzog, a democratic duty (Herzog, 2018).

Drawing on Foucault’s work (1991) on biopolitics and governmentality, Biel discusses “technologies of invisibility”. He looks at how invisibility is a specific mode by which states enable their neglect of marginalised communities. Thus, invisibility involves denying any resources of visibilisation, such as education, political representation, land allotment, and others, to the marginalised. Such denial of resources also makes it easier for the State to manipulate the marginalized as well as exercise its oppression and violence upon them.

Invisibilization is a specific brand of marginalisation that “effectively removes people from the gaze of the public” (Hammond, 2008: 518). But it is also important here to consider the role of language in invisibilization. For Foucault (1981), the public realm needs to be understood as a sphere filled with rules of participation and mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. Power is unequally distributed as some groups concentrate all the participation in public debates while others have no access to it. In *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, Spivak (1988) explains that subaltern voices are not being heard because dominant groups hold the hegemony. What makes subalternity is the fact that the words and actions of subalterns are ignored or that their meanings are diverted. Hence, the invisibilization process is carried out through both the physical (imprisonment/detention, segregation, boundary-marking etc.) as well as epistemological (terms of debate, knowledge structures, representation) prevention of some groups from entering public spaces.

Thus, through physical, social and epistemic invisibilization, people remain hidden from public discourses and geographical territory (Mountz, 2015). This deeply affects the public's perception of excluded groups as they are marginalised from the social sphere and their lives are thus labelled as invaluable. This echoes Butler's approach to political violence in which she explains that while some lives are considered valuable and grievable, others are devalued, dehumanised, and ignored (2004; 2009). In a similar vein, Mountz argues that the deliberate action of hiding people erases the "lives lived, and deaths died" (2015: 189) on islands through dehumanisation and lack of recognition. People lost at sea or in detention never become losses that can be grieved by the public.

At least 350 people have been killed on the border between France and the UK since the establishment of the first official camp in 1999 (Witter, 2023). Many more went missing, while thousands have been maimed and injured. Yet these tragedies rarely make it to the headlines of French media, as Calais is only ever presented from the prism of securitization. The exclusion and invisibilization of people are such that it becomes impossible for the public to perceive them in an emphatic way (Scotland-Stewart, 2007). Every loss is carried out in silence and with complete indifference while the State's responsibility regarding these tragedies is never questioned nor challenged.

In elucidating his concept of necropolitics, Achille Mbembe (2006) argues that being sovereign means being able to assert control over not just life and death but over mortality. He uses the example of slavery to illustrate that the condition of the slave results from a triple loss: the loss of a "home", the loss of rights over one's body, and the loss of one's political status. This leads to complete domination and constitutes what Mbembe calls, drawing on Orlando Patterson, a "social death" (2006: 36). Thus, for him, the State has the power to reduce people to being "living dead", populating "death worlds" where they can barely survive. Likewise, displaced populations have also experienced a form of triple loss; having fled their countries, endured violence, and lost their political status. Refugees could thus be seen as bearing a form of "social death" since they are entirely under domination from the State and only receive enough to survive. I would argue that displaced people's life in Calais is in many ways similar to these systems. Indeed, humiliations, interrogations, beatings, soldier patrols around camps, confiscation of documents, and fatal accidents, which all constitute a form of "madness" according to Mbembe, are an integral part of refugees' daily life in Calais.

Moreover, through necropolitics, the State establishes territorial fragmentation, denying access to certain areas, and limiting movement while also implementing a separation along the line of the apartheid model. This form of segregation is particularly observable in Calais where displaced people are chased from the city centre and forbidden from accessing specific public spaces while being forced to settle outside of the cities, away from the public's gaze.

Therefore, the situation in Calais is particularly relevant to the idea of invisibility. The treatment of displaced people in Northern France has remained marginalised in academic research. Thus, it appears essential to study the mechanism and the strategies used to physically remove displaced people from the public sphere. Indeed, unable to externalise its borders or to detain in other countries the refugees trying to leave its territory, the French State has progressively developed mechanisms to remove people from the public gaze without extraditing them from French soil. This thesis will thus aim to present and problematize the different strategies and mechanisms used by the State to physically invisibilize displaced communities in Calais, thus, keeping their struggles and suffering hidden from the public.

Chapter 3: Methodology

As addressed in the previous chapter, the concept of invisibilization has not yet been applied to the context of Calais in academic research. Furthermore, displaced communities' experiences of the border have largely been overlooked in the media and the public sphere since the dismantling of the Jungle. Challenging the invisibilization of refugees in Northern France is therefore particularly difficult due to the lack of information available on the subject. I thus, deemed it crucial for this thesis to collect data directly on the ground.

Having worked in Calais for 5 months in 2021 as a volunteer, I decided to go back to Northern France in order to conduct ethnographic research. Through my own experience, I knew that it is particularly challenging to integrate Calais' environment. Indeed, for safety reasons, information regarding living sites and their inhabitants is not accessible to the public and constitutes a body of knowledge that is only available to communities and organisations. Additionally, due to widespread hostility from local groups and the police towards refugees, one would find it difficult to get information by walking into a camp and asking questions to its population. For their security, displaced communities have to be cautious when interacting with strangers, especially if those strangers are questioning them. In addition to this, as their work has often been targeted by the State and due to defiance towards the media within NGOs, volunteers receive instructions requiring them not to talk with people asking sensitive questions. Hence, information is filtered and inaccessible to anyone seen as an outsider.

However, due to the State's inaction and hostility, communities depend heavily on the support provided by the local NGO network. Both NGOs and refugees have thus developed positive relations of trust, creating a microcosm within which solidarity and confidence are displayed. Building on my previous volunteer experience, I joined Collective Aid in January 2023, an NGO distributing non-food items with which I had already volunteered. During this period, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork for 6 weeks using qualitative methods of enquiry such as observations and interviews.

Participant observation

In order to understand the context and the situation, I became a participant observer in Calais (Musante & Dewalt, 2010). My position as a volunteer allowed me to participate in the city's solidarity scene, granting me access to multiple settings. I was thus able to direct observations in the warehouse where volunteers work, in the Secours Catholique day centre for refugees, in living sites, in NGO distributions as well as in the city of Calais. This allowed me to look into patterns of interactions, observe the social environment, as well as to address the visual and geographic control of displaced communities by the French State.

Interviews

While collecting data regarding the invisibilization of displaced communities in Calais, I conducted interviews with NGO workers, legal practitioners, and refugees. At first, I led semi-structured interviews, preparing questions in advance in order to guide discussions towards my research topic (Leech, 2002). Thus, I would tell people about my research, ask them if they would consent to answer my questions, record exchanges if they had agreed to it, and then transcribe the recordings. However, I quickly felt that the notebook and recording were intimidating for most of the refugees. Therefore, a few days into my research I decided to switch to unstructured interviews which made my interlocutors more comfortable. As displaced persons are particularly vulnerable and have experienced traumatic events in their respective countries or on their journey to reach Calais, the topics discussed throughout our exchanges can be specifically sensitive or triggering.

Thus, this conversational style gave them extensive freedom in the discussion, allowing them to only share what they felt comfortable sharing. Following our conversations, I would describe, either on my phone or in my notebook, the content of the interactions.

While the anonymity of my interviews might appear as a mechanism of invisibilization of refugees' voices, results have been anonymized as requested by my interviewees. This intends to protect their safety and prevent this thesis from negatively affecting the people who agreed to answer my questions (Nordstrom, 2004).

Being a volunteer also gave me access to specific training and bodies of knowledge. Thus, some data and evidence presented in this thesis were not accessed through interviews or observations but rather through the distilled experience of an NGO worker evolving in a specific environment. Additionally, while collecting information for this thesis, I relied heavily on data produced by NGOs, activists, and news items along the border.

Based on the data collected through my research, I applied inductive reasoning and found that invisibilization is enforced through three different mechanisms that will be analysed in the following chapter:

- The conduction of evictions which physically removes people and their belongings from a specific area, forcing them to move somewhere else.
- The modification of the landscape and the establishment of hostile installations, which prevent people from settling and making areas inaccessible.
- The criminalization and control of NGOs to hinder all forms of solidarity.

Reflection and limitations

While the position of volunteer for an NGO offered me access to my researched environment, it also came with significant constraints. Being a volunteer first, and a researcher second, I had a particularly heavy schedule, as I had to conduct my research and process the data collected while working a full-time job and sharing a house with up to 9 people, which left me very little alone time. Furthermore, the NGOs safeguarding rules forbid volunteers from entering living sites and require them to avoid asking personal questions to communities as they could be triggering or appear as favouritism towards some individuals. Finally, as most NGOs present a hierarchical structure, I always had to ask managers for permission when conducting research on my working hours or when demanding a modification in my schedule to attend information sessions and training.

I managed to overcome most of these difficulties by negotiating an agreement with the coordinators before my arrival. According to this arrangement, I would be able to go to the Secours Catholique day centre a few afternoons during the week instead of completing warehouse work. There I would help the volunteers at the information desk while refugees would come to charge their phones, play games, get information, or enjoy a coffee. Most of my interviews were conducted there as it provided a safe environment for people on the move and allowed for calm and long conversations.

Additionally, while my volunteering position gave me access to various environments as an insider, it also had a considerable impact on my findings. Thus, I do not pretend to be a neutral observer but recognize my role in shaping the framework of interviews (Nordstrom, 2004). Indeed, all my interactions with people were considered through the prism of solidarity and

trust. If people had not identified me as a volunteer or had not recognized me as a familiar face, they would probably not have been so eager to answer my questions.

Volunteers occupy a position of privilege and power when working with vulnerable communities, especially in Calais with refugees whose daily life depends on supply provided by NGOs. Thus, it is important to highlight that some of the people I interviewed might have agreed to answer my question because of the provider and privileged status that I represent as an NGO worker and a French white woman. While the notion of consent is essential in leading any ethical ethnographic research (Mead, 1928; Geertz, 1973), it becomes even more crucial to follow the “Do No Harm” principle when one interviews populations as vulnerable as displaced communities (Scheper-Hughes, 2001; Nordstrom, 2004). Thus, one should always make sure that the people being interviewed are aware of the situation and have consented to have their conversation used for research purposes.

My position as a volunteer also placed me as an actor in the situation I was studying. Indeed, as a volunteer, I perceived every situation through the eyes of an aid worker supporting displaced communities’ struggles. This demonstrates what De Sardan called the unavoidable bias of *enclichage* (Olivier De Sardan & Mouchenik, 2018), which prevented me from perceiving situations from an outsider’s point of view. Additionally, as this research was motivated by my own previous activism and volunteering experience, I deemed it crucial to address my personal subjectivity (Beaud, 1999; Papinot, 2014; Nordstrom, 2004). Therefore, throughout my collection of data, I had to pay particular attention to identifying my own biases both in my interactions and in my notes. Thus, I often found it particularly challenging to interview people I grew close to as they trusted me enough to share sensitive and personal experiences which created a dilemma over whether or not to share some information.

Moreover, my collection of data was further limited by other factors. For instance, I could only have conversations with people who spoke either French or English, which represents a fraction of all the refugees present in Calais. Lastly, the individuals I met were all members of communities who attended distributions or went to the day centre which excludes people who might live on their own, outside of established camps.

Chapter 4: Findings and Analysis

Section 1: Institutionalising a Manhunt: The Eviction of living sites

This section will focus on the eviction operations conducted in Calais. It will explain the proceedings of evictions, their legal basis as well as the consequences these processes have on already extremely vulnerable populations. In doing so, I will draw on the extensive data collected by HRO, a project documenting and denouncing the “State violence perpetrated against displaced people at the French-UK border” (HRO, 2021: 7).

Since the dismantling of the Jungle, authorities have made it a priority to prevent displaced people from permanently settling in Calais. In the eyes of the police, the town hall and the State, any enduring encampment is seen as a potential threat as it could expand to form a new Jungle. Thus, to prevent the formation of anything resembling durable living sites, authorities have been applying a strict policy of “zero fixation point”. This has resulted in the routinization of the expulsion of settlements.

I. How are evictions conducted?

During evictions, a large convoy of police and administrative authorities goes to each targeted living site. When evictions are conducted in the morning, communities are woken up by the police, shaking tents or shouting at them to leave.² Inhabitants of the site are then escorted outside of the arbitrarily defined security perimeter, sometimes being chased, or arrested by the police. Once refugees have been excluded from the encampment, employees of APC, a private cleaning company mandated by the French State, remove all the belongings that have been left inside the perimeter. While shelters, tents and blankets are seized or destroyed during these operations, no alternative housing option is offered to refugees. The perimeter is lifted once all belongings have been removed. This pattern is then repeated in other locations as up to 10 sites can be evicted in the same operation³.

² Interview with Anonymous informant 12, Displaced Person and Volunteer, Feb. 8th 2023.

³ Through observations and with the use of HRO’s report I could notice that evictions always follow the same pattern.

Since August 2018, the rhythm of evictions has considerably intensified. Indeed, living sites are targeted by evictions every 48h. The following table shows that the numbers of evictions have more than tripled between 2018 and 2022.

Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Minimum estimated number of evictions in Calais	452	961	967	1226	1669

Minimum estimated number of evictions in Calais since 2018 (HRO, 2019; HRO, 2020; HRO 2021; HRO 2022)|

This relentless pace of evictions denies refugees access to moments of respite and relief. Throughout my fieldwork, a word came up frequently in the mouths of my interviewees: “harassment”⁴. In its broad definition, this word refers to any behaviour that is “intended to trouble or annoy someone, for instance, repeated attacks or attempts to cause them problem” (Collins Dictionary, n. d.). Here one could thus consider that walking into a community’s living site every 48h and escorting people outside, often through the use of violence or abusive language, would in all likelihood fall within the scope of “harassment”.

Despite the intense effort mobilised, these operations remain completely inefficient. Refugees who have been in Calais for a while usually remove their belongings from the site before the arrival of the police and then put their items back where they were.⁵ Authorities themselves recognize the absurdity of these practices. One of my interviewees was told by the police to move outside the perimeter and wait for 5 min after the departure of the police to then settled back inside the site.⁶ Thus, people watch the police destroy their living area before moving back inside as soon as the convoy is gone, which demonstrates that these operations serve no other purpose than to harass communities.⁷

These incessant expulsions have also proven to be extremely costly. Indeed, while 100 million euros were spent in 2020 to ensure the daily mobilisation of the police in Calais, only 27 million

⁴ Interview with Anonymous informant 1, Volunteer and Activist, Jan. 10th 2023.

Interview with Anonymous informant 8, Jurist, Jan. 18th 2023.

⁵ Interview with Anonymous informant 12, Displaced Person and Volunteer, Feb. 8th 2023.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Interview with Anonymous informant 3, Displaced Person, Jan. 11th 2023.

were allocated to reception measures such as access to water, sanitary facilities, or food (Witter, 2023).

II. Removing people from the border: “Sheltering” operations

In addition to the evictions conducted every 48h, the State also organises large-scale evacuations called “sheltering” operations. In the early morning, the convoy arrives at a living site accompanied by at least three buses. The police presence is significantly heavier than during regular evictions. Inhabitants are woken up by the authorities who proceed to escort them outside of the site without giving them time to collect their belongings. People are then forced to board buses going to CAOs across the country. In the majority of the cases, people who refuse to enter the buses are arrested by the PAF. The destination is only communicated to the people once their vehicle has departed. The site is then completely destroyed by the cleaning company and usually made inaccessible to prevent people from settling back as we will discuss in the following section.

While less common than smaller-scale evictions, “sheltering” operations constitute one of the main strategies used by the authorities to remove displaced communities. In 2021, 15 “sheltering” operations were conducted (HRO, 2021). In 2022, there were 13 (HRO, 2022). Through these expulsions, the presence of refugees in Calais is invisibilized as people are physically removed from the area. For instance, in November 2021, groups were sent to CAOs in Lyon (760km away from Calais) or along the French-Spanish border (Witter, 2023). Furthermore, refugees sent to CAOs face the risk of being placed in the Dublin procedure according to which they could be sent without their consent to their first entry country into Europe. Thus, through the destruction of living spaces and the deportation of its inhabitants, evictions and sheltering operations serve as tools to remove displaced people from the public gaze and the geographical landscape.

III. Instrumentalizing the law

According to French law, a site can only be expelled following a court ruling as decisions to evict informal settlements should always be disputable and contestable before a judicial

authority.⁸ This principle guarantees the adversarial principle which ensures that both parties have the right to be heard⁹.

However, since 2018, authorities have found a way to ignore this principle and justify their harassment strategy by instrumentalizing criminal law. According to them, the evictions perpetrated every 48h constitute criminal investigation operations intended to put an end to illegal occupation of land.¹⁰ Thus, the State has been using the *flagrante delicto* investigation procedure¹¹, according to which the police can start an investigation without the authorization of a judge in order to collect and preserve the proof necessary to recognize the offence. However, evictions do not constitute an act of investigation and thus, should not be carried through the *flagrante delicto* procedure as regularly pointed out by the Human Right Defender.¹² Furthermore, the mobilisation of translators, border police or even of buses, suggests that evictions are more likely to be the result of operations planned in advance rather than a fortuitous discovery of the occupation. On the 6th of January 2021, the Prefecture of Pas-de-Calais was thus convicted of assault for the dismantling of the Virval camp. The court challenged the State's allegation of *flagrante delicto*, pointing out that the authorities had been aware of the camp for several weeks and questioning their ability to mobilise buses and prepare accommodation for 600 people in supposedly less than 24h (Witter, 2023).

This instrumentalization of the law has been explicitly acknowledged by representatives of the State on multiple occasions. In November 2021, Didier Leschi, the director of the French Office of Immigration and Integration (OFII) stated that the use of the *flagrante delicto* is “essential to preventing the reconstitution of the lande (Jungle)” (Panara, 2021). Thus, while the *flagrante delicto* investigation is supposed to repress an infraction (here the illegal occupation of land), in the context of Calais, it is not mobilised to stop the occupation, but rather to prevent the creation of a durable “fixation point”. The State's objective is therefore clear, to establish a permanent manhunt, tracking displaced communities every 48h through evictions, in order to prevent them from creating a hypothetical “Jungle”.

Additionally, per law, the placing of individuals in shelters can only be undertaken without coercion¹³. Yet, most of the time when evictions are coupled with “sheltering “operations,

⁸ Code of Civil Enforcement Procedure, Art. R 432-1 et seq.

⁹ European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights, Art. 6: right to a fair trial.

¹⁰ Penal Code, Article 322-4-1, sur le Délit d'installation illicite.

¹¹ Code of criminal procedure, Art. 53.

¹² Defender of Rights, n°2018-286 of 7 Dec. 2018.

¹³ Administrative Court of Lille, 7th march 2019, n°1709774 and 1802830.

people are either forced to get inside the buses or face the risk of being arrested by PAF officers. In this situation, one could wonder whether threatening people with arrests and deportations if they do not comply could ever be regarded as non-coercive.

IV. A system fragilizing vulnerable populations

While ensuring that refugees do not create “any fixation point”, this dispositive also greatly reinforces displaced communities’ precarity.

First, the regularity of evictions has a considerable impact on targeted people’s mental and physical health. People who suffer the trauma of having experienced and escaped war, repression or torture are denied the right to create safe spaces. Furthermore, the heavy police presence in Calais has made the city a permanent theatre of police violence against displaced populations.¹⁴ For instance, officers have shaken and slashed tents while people were still inside of them, and tear-gassed refugees that had asked where their belongings had been taken.¹⁵

This institutionalised violence is not limited to evictions. In 2021, I was told on multiple occasions by displaced persons that they had been assaulted by the police. One group reported being tear-gassed by a company of CRS driving next to them as they were walking. Another man had to wear a splint around his ankle after having been beaten by officers. Similarly, in April 2020, the Eritrean community wrote an open letter denouncing the multiple assaults perpetrated by a CRS company. At least 15 refugees were attacked by the police over the course of one week, some ended up with broken arms or were left unconscious and transported to the hospital (The Eritrean Refugee Community of Calais, 2020). Sadly, these only constitute examples of a permanent climate of State violence.

This harassment can sometimes have dramatic consequences. In May 2022, Hassan, a young Sudanese man was found hanged in a trailer. According to his friends, he was “exhausted” after having spent two months in Calais (Boitiaux & Alboz, 2022). Throughout my interviews, the question of refugees’ mental and physical exhaustion kept coming up.¹⁶ One of my interviewees insisted that many of his friends had considered taking their own life because they were tired of their living conditions and had lost all hope of a better life.¹⁷

¹⁴ Interview with Anonymous informant 2, Homeless person, witness to police violence, Jan. 11th 2023.

¹⁵ Interview with Anonymous informant 12, Displaced Person and Volunteer, Feb. 8th 2023.

¹⁶ Interview with Anonymous informant 1, Volunteer and Activist, Jan. 10th, 2023.

¹⁷ Interview with Anonymous informant 4, Displaced Person and Volunteer, Jan. 11th, 2023.

Secondly, the seizing and destruction of belongings further jeopardise refugees' already vulnerable position. During evictions, displaced people's properties are thrown into vans going directly to a waste disposal centre or to a storage place¹⁸. People are rarely given the time to collect their properties when escorted outside of the area. Thus, tents, blankets as well as backpacks that can contain identity papers, diplomas or money are forcefully removed from the site.¹⁹ In the context of crowded encampments, tents constitute refugees' only shelter and offer them limited but fundamental privacy. Evictions thus directly deny people protection from wind, rain, or sub-zero temperature. Moreover, the seizing and stealing of properties further increase the pressure on NGOs who already struggle to face the high demand for necessary items. In this context, there is no guarantee that items seized will be replaced, thus the destruction of belongings during evictions further pushes displaced communities into a state of permanent survival.²⁰

V. Invisibilization of evictions

The establishment by the police of a security perimeter around the living site reinforces the invisibilization of State violence as it excludes any unauthorised person from the area. In Calais, this practice is mostly used to prevent journalists and observers from documenting the operations (Witter, 2023). The size of the perimeter is randomly decided by officers on the spot and ensures that curious observers are kept at a distance.²¹ This makes it particularly difficult to document violence and violations of rights perpetrated during evictions. Yet, the National Consultative Commission on Human Rights recommended that “no external observation whether from a citizen or from a journalist be obstructed during operations”.²²

Moreover, HRO teams have on numerous occasions been the target of intimidation tactics from the police when attempting to film their operations (362 intimidation attempts in 2021; HRO, 2021). Intimidation strategies sometimes go even further with volunteers being harassed, insulted, or even arrested²³. Abuses are particularly difficult to report as during operations in

¹⁸ Interview with Anonymous informant 3, Displaced Person, Jan. 11th, 2023.

¹⁹ Interview with Anonymous informant 9, Displaced Person, Jan. 25th, 2023.

Interview with Anonymous informant 10, Displaced Person, Jan. 25th, 2023.

²⁰ To justify the theft of people's belongings, the prefecture created a system through which refugees can “claim back” stolen belongings. However, this system is deeply flawed and limited (see HRO, 2021; Witter, 2023).

²¹ Interview with Anonymous informant 8, Jurist, Jan. 18th 2023.

²² CNCDH. “Avis sur la situation des personnes exilées à Calais et à Grande-Synthe”, n° A-2021, 3 Feb. 2021, p.9.

²³ In 2021, one HRO member was arrested and taken into custody for “insulting behaviour towards the police” after having denounced the state racism and violence during an eviction.

Calais, police officers tend to not wear their identification number RIO²⁴ or refuse to communicate it to observers, despite their obligation to have it visible.²⁵ These practices dissuade observers from documenting violence and human rights violations while ensuring that no images are collected during operations. This in turn guarantees that whatever happens in the course of evictions remains invisible to the public sphere.

²⁴ Interview with Anonymous informant 2, Homeless person, witness to police violence, Jan. 11th 2023.

Interview with Anonymous informant 8, Jurist, Jan. 18th 2023.

²⁵ IGP, IGA et IGGN, “Évaluation de l’action des forces de l’ordre à Calais et dans le Dunkerquois”, Report, p.37.

Section 2: Reshaping the public space: Creating an uninhabitable environment

While the State regularly carries evictions to forcibly remove displaced people from Calais, it has also implemented strategies that while appearing less violent serve the same objective: to render refugees invisible and push them to leave. Authorities thus seek to invisibilize refugees by preventing them from accessing specific areas while intentionally making living conditions increasingly difficult to drive them away from Calais.

I. Preventing people from settling: Making Spaces inaccessible

a. Building fences and putting up walls

Anyone visiting Calais for the first time would surely be struck by the city's fortress-like appearance. With several metres high fences and walls topped with barbed wires, Calais could easily be described as resembling a penitentiary. As part of the securitization of Calais, these installations have sprung up everywhere across the coastline. Since 2015, 65km of fences have been built along the A16 highway, around lorry rest areas, and even in the city centre of Calais (Witter, 2023). Funded mostly by British authorities, this equipment is designed to fortify specific areas, making them inaccessible to refugees trying to reach the UK.



Figure 1: Donnaint, F. (2023). Fences installed along the highway near the port.



Figure 2: Donnaint, F. (2023). Fences installed along the highway near the port.

On top of the walls and fences, the French State reinforced the militarization of the region by installing a specific type of barbed wire: the concertina (Witter, 2023). The concertina “model 22” is composed of a metallic wire made up of hundreds of 22mm razor blades, spaced 34mm apart. Visible around the port, the Eurotunnel and many gas stations in Calais, the concertina was also implemented along other European borders as in Ceuta where a person bled to death trapped in the wire in 2009 (franceinfo, 2022). The installation of this device is therefore not intended to prevent people from crossing, but rather to slow them down and wound them if they do try to cross. In this way, the concertina acts as an instrument of terror, instilling fear in displaced communities, and ensuring that what lies on the other side remains inaccessible to them.

Fences have also been used to close access to living sites. For instance, in January 2023, following an eviction at a living site Rue des Huttes, authorities installed fences on the side of the road around the area that had just been evicted, while the water access point and sanitary facilities were moved outside to prevent people from settling back in.

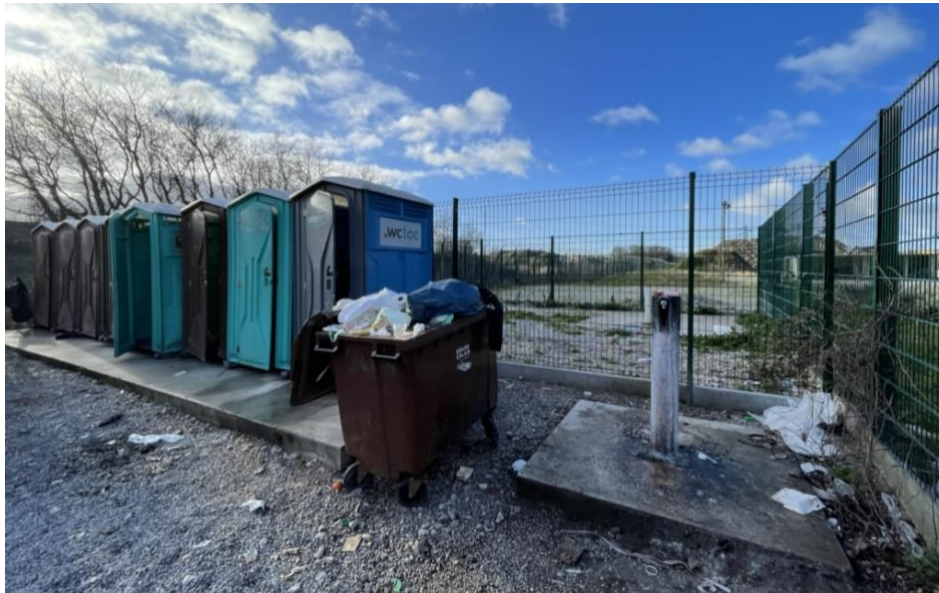


Figure 3: Donnaint, F. (2023). Fences installed in Rue des Huttes to prevent displaced people from settling back.

b. Installing rocks to prevent access

Over the past year, the municipality of Calais generalized the installation of massive and heavy rocks to prevent people from using certain spaces in the city. These boulders are similar to “anti-homeless” hostile architecture used by municipalities to exclude people from public spaces.

In Calais, this strategy is mostly used to prevent the formation of living sites in particularly visible areas. For instance, in September 2022, hundreds of rocks were set up by the town hall on the Quai de la Meuse and Quai du Danube both situated near the train station, in the centre of Calais (Courtois, 2023). Natacha Bouchart, mayor of Calais, justified these decisions, arguing that “if we [the town hall] do not want disruptive encampments in the city centre, I have to take action” (Delattre, 2022). The cost of these operations amounted to 45,000 €.

More recently, on the 1st of March 2023, hundreds of rocks were dropped by Calais’ town hall in the Quai Andrieux, a place where displaced people could go during the day to access water and food distributed by NGOs (Courtois, 2023). Boulders were also placed under the bridge Mollien where refugees would sleep to stay protected from the rain and wind. While it had been snowing in the previous days, this operation prevented people from accessing their shelter.



Figure 4: Calais Food Collective (2023). Rocks installed in Quai Andrieux.



Figure 5: Calais Food Collective (2023). Rocks placed under the Mollien bridge.

As these hostile installations of boulders are mostly used in the city centre, they contribute to excluding displaced people from central and visible areas in the city. Any place where people might gather in plain view is considered as a threat and immediately made inaccessible by the town hall. Thus, this intentionally invisibilizes the presence of displaced people in Calais by removing them from the centre and pushing them to more secluded and isolated areas outside of the urban area.

II. Ensuring that people cannot come back: Destroying and altering the landscape

One of the most radical techniques used by the State and the town halls to remove displaced people from the cities has been the destruction of the landscape in places where people had established shelters.

a. Deforesting the woods

As woods and forests offer natural protection from both the wind and the rain, they have often been chosen by refugees to establish a living site. Woods also confer essential privacy to communities allowing them to gather away from the prying eyes of authorities who actively work towards dispersing them. This additionally provides protection from police violence which usually affects isolated groups (Oberti, 2020). Thus, to prevent refugees from settling in the forests, authorities have opted for an extreme solution: to get rid of the woods.²⁶

For instance, in late April 2021, a few hours after the eviction of multiple sites in Coquelles and Sangatte, several hundreds of square metres were completely razed. Following a request from the Prefecture, the town hall of Coquelles decided to “remove the trees and smooth the ground in order to make it unsuitable for illegal occupation by migrants” (Brousseart, 2021). The strategy is especially clear as the municipality declared not to have future plans for the area yet. Thus, the objective of the operation was to remove the refugees who inhabited the woods and to ensure that they would not be able to settle back in the same place.



Figure 6: Google Street View (2020). Rue de Bergnieulles, Coquelles.

²⁶ Interview with Anonymous informant 8, Jurist, Jan. 18th 2023.



Figure 7: Google Street View (2021). Rue de Bergnieulles, Coquelles.

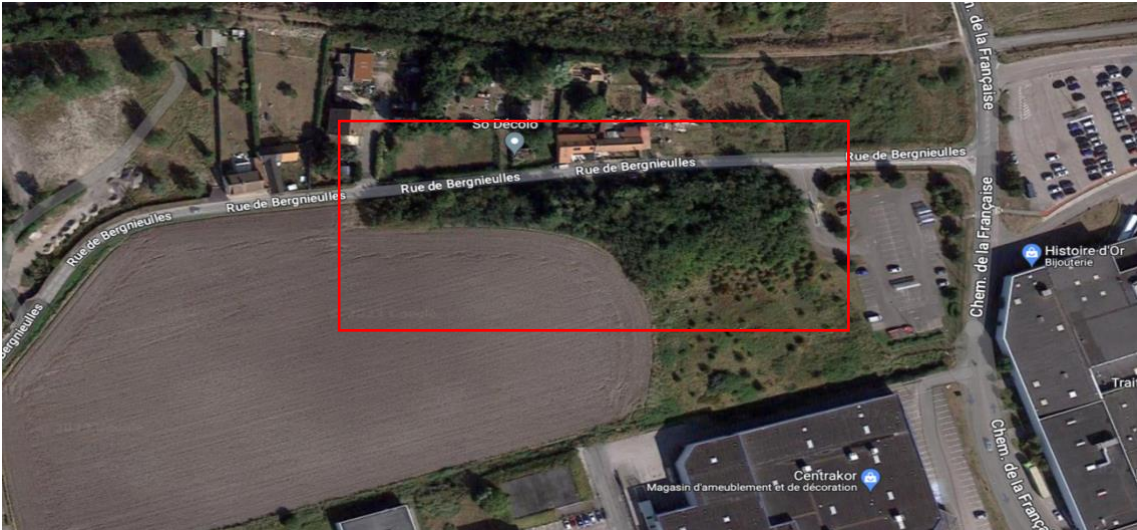


Figure 8: Google Maps (2020). The area that was deforested is indicated by the rectangle. Coquelles.

Similarly, in late September 2021, the Prefecture organised an eviction with a “sheltering” operation in Hospital Jungle, which at the time was the most populated site in Calais. After the departure of refugees, the municipality got rid of 44 hectares of woods in which 800 people had found shelter (HRO, 2021). The people who remained in Calais and those who came back abandoned Hospital Jungle to move to Old Lidl, a site situated next to a small wood, 2.5km away.



Figure 9: Google Street View (2020). Hospital Jungle, Calais.



Figure 10: Google Street View (2023). Hospital Jungle, Calais.



Figure 11: Google Maps (2022). The areas that were deforested are indicated by the rectangles. Calais.

These operations are merely examples of the strategy adopted by the town hall to invisibilize the presence of displaced populations. Between October and December 2020, dozens of hectares were cleared in Calais and in neighbouring towns (Oberti, 2020). While deforestation does not technically remove refugees from Calais, it deprives them of any privacy making them vulnerable not only to bad weather but also to possible violence. This strategy, therefore, pushes communities away, forcing them to move to another area. Thus, the destruction of trees not only wipes out the vegetation in northern France but also actively invisibilizes people on the move, restraining them to secluded and isolated areas.

b. Destroying the ground

In addition to the destruction of woods, institutions have also been altering the ground and the landscape to render lands uninhabitable and prevent displaced people from settling there. Around the Eurotunnel, moats were dug and then flooded to make sure refugees could not approach the tunnel and try to cross to the UK (Turpin, 2016).

The city of Calais also developed a strategy consisting of ploughing the soil in some places following evictions. This turns the land into mud and makes it extremely difficult for people to resettle in the same area and plant their tents. This method was for instance used in Old Lidl in early 2022 (Druelle, 2022).

Finally, the town hall has also dug ditches in front of living sites in order to make it more difficult for refugees to access the camp and to prevent NGO vans from distributing food and water to communities (Druelle, 2022).²⁷

III. Driving people away: Making living sites unsanitary

In addition to the methods used to prevent displaced communities from settling in some areas, the State has also adopted strategies designed to push them to leave the place where they are already settled. This approach is reflected in the town hall and the State's commitment to rendering the living sites as unwelcoming as possible. In order to do so, the authorities have willingly undermined refugees' living conditions in the camps.

²⁷ Interview with Anonymous informant 1, Volunteer and Activist, Jan. 10th 2023.

Indeed, the town hall's refusal to include refugees' living sites in the public trash collection system has made camps extremely unsanitary. Having no access to bins or waste disposal sites, refugees have been forced to dispose of their rubbish in their living areas. Thus, displaced people often live on piles of waste, accumulated for months, or even years.

To put an end to this situation, NGOs have on multiple occasions tried to contact the city hall demanding that the city's rubbish collection include refugees' living areas. As their request remain ignored by the administration, volunteers, activists, and local residents regularly organise "litter picking" in living sites. Throughout my fieldwork, I could observe one of these operations. In two hours, three teams of around 20 people each split into three sites to collect as much trash as possible.

In all living sites, displaced people had tried to get rid of the waste by burying it or burning it. The collective at the origin of the action specified that one kilogram of trash burned on a living site pollutes as much as a ton of rubbish processed in an incinerator. Furthermore, open burnings release toxic chemicals that present considerable risks to those who inhale them. Thus, due to the absence of proper trash collection, refugees have no other option than to burn the waste accumulated, which puts their health in significant danger.

By the end of the two-hour operation, 7 tons of garbage had been collected. The bags were purposely left in plain sight on the side of the road to push the town hall to collect them. While some trash bags collected during a previous litter-picking operation were still untouched at the entrance of the sites after two months, it took two days for the city to remove the ones that had been left near the road.

Still, when the team left the sites after three hours of filling trash bags, the area did not look any different than it did before the action, demonstrating the massive amount of rubbish refugees are forced to live amongst. Similarly, after the deforestation of an area where displaced communities had established a camp in Coquelles, 11 tons of garbage crawling with rats were evacuated by a cleaning society (Brousseart, 2021).

Furthermore, this contributes to creating or reinforcing an anti-immigration sentiment among Calais residents. Complaints received by the town hall from local inhabitants regarding displaced communities generally relate to insalubrity and the presence of rubbish near living areas.²⁸ This impression was further reinforced throughout my research as hostile neighbours would often justify their aggressivity towards refugees as a form of concern about the unsanitary

²⁸ Interview with Anonymous informant 8, Jurist, Jan. 18th 2023.

state of their surroundings. Some declared that they felt as though they were living next to a “garbage dump”, describing displaced communities as “dirty people”.

The State’s neglect when it comes to refugees’ living conditions is further observable when it comes to sanitary installations. In January 2023, while Old Lidl was the most populated living site in Calais, it had no access to sanitary equipment. The State's nearest public toilets were 2.5km away from the camp, a 30-min walk. This often forces displaced people to relieve themselves near their living areas, in the woods or on the ground, which not only compromises their comfort making leaving conditions even more unsanitary but also completely dehumanises them.

Thus, while the numerous strategies mentioned above do not directly remove refugees from Calais the way evictions do, they serve the same goal: to prevent communities from permanently settling. Hostile installations, alterations of the landscape and deliberate unsanitary are all part of an effort aimed at making public spaces uninhabitable for displaced communities. They contribute to the permanent hunt led by the State and the city to drive people away without having to physically remove them. These relentless strategies actively invisibilize people by pushing them out of sight and away from public spaces. Often these policies lead refugees to a form of self-invisibilization where they feel obligated to settle in isolated places, far from the city, hoping to escape the incessant attacks from institutions.

Section 3: Criminalizing Solidarity: Targeting those who support displaced communities

In their desire to marginalise and invisibilize displaced populations in Northern France, both the French State and the town hall of Calais have targeted all signs of solidarity expressed towards refugees. Considering that any form of support addressed to people on the move constitutes a “pull effect”²⁹ likely to attract more people to Calais, the authorities have progressively criminalised all forms of solidarity. By interfering with the work of NGOs and discouraging anyone from helping, this strategy is designed to invisibilize the presence of refugees by isolating them.

I. Obstructing the delivery of aid

a. Banning distributions

In March 2017, a municipal decree made it illegal for NGOs that were not mandated by the State to distribute food and water to displaced communities³⁰. The town hall justified this decision by arguing that people on the move presented a risk to the safety, security and hygiene of both the city of Calais and its residents³¹. Calais’ mayor explained that distribution sites were now considered as fixation points, which could not be tolerated due to the “non-fixation” policy. However, a few days later, this decree was overturned by the Lille administrative court that declared “unnecessary and disproportionate” the measures taken to “deprive an extremely vulnerable population of food support”³². The court went even further denouncing “a serious and manifestly unlawful infringement of the freedom to come and go [...] and the right not to be subjected to inhuman or degrading treatment”³³.

In September 2020, however, the government did not hesitate to abuse the pandemic situation to target solidarity in Calais. Following orders from the Minister of Interior, the prefecture once again banned free food distributions³⁴ (but not those subject to payment) on dozens of streets

²⁹ Expression used by Nicolas Sarkozy during the dismantling of the Sangatte Camp in 2002.

³⁰ Calais Municipal decree, Decision of the 2nd of March 2017.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Lille Administrative Court, Decision of the 22nd of March 2017.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Prefecture of Pas-de-Calais, Prefectural decree of the 10th of September 2020.

and squares in Calais, demonstrating that the objective was indeed to undermine solidarity. Thus, until May 2022, NGOs were systematically fined for providing meals to people in need.

People, therefore, had to walk sometimes for hours to attend the distribution of La Vie Active, the organisation mandated by the State. However, I have also observed that La Vie Active's distributions sometimes tend to take place at the same time as evictions, forcing people to choose between eating and protecting their belongings.

b. Blocking access to distributions

In order to prevent NGOs from providing support to refugees whether it be food, clothing, tents, or phone charging sessions, the town hall of Calais extended the installation of hostile architecture, using it to block distributions.

On multiple occasions, rocks were set up to prevent NGO vans from entering some spaces such as parking lots, squares, or streets. In August 2021, in Coquelles, four boulders were installed to prevent NGOs from accessing the water tank they had placed in front of a living site. This made it impossible for volunteers to fill the tank used by communities to drink, cook and shower. The same scenario was also applied to Unicorn. Even more recently in January 2023, large boulders were placed at the entrance of an abandoned square in RDJ where NGOs would organise their distributions and charging sessions.



Figure 12: Donnaint, F. (2023) Rocks installed to prevent access to Unicorn.



Figure 13: Unknown (2023). Rocks installed to prevent access to RDJ.

c. Destruction and seizing of material

In order to obstruct the distribution of aid, authorities have participated in the destruction, or the seizing of material used by NGOs to support displaced communities. For instance, the water tanks placed by NGOs on living sites have often been targeted by the police or by the town hall. In August and September 2021, multiple tanks were slashed and pierced by CRS, making them unsuitable for the delivery of water (Calais Food Collective, 2021).

When tanks are not destroyed, they are often removed by authorities who declare them as a deposit of equipment on public roads. In September 2022, the town hall had the municipal police remove one of the tanks (Calais Food Collective, 2022). When contacted by the NGOs, the municipality denied its responsibility for the removal of the tank³⁵. However, it was not until the journalists got involved that the town hall admitted that it had seized the equipment (NordLittoral, 2022). Similarly, in January, another reservoir disappeared overnight in RDJ just as rocks were being installed to block access to the square (Calais Food Collective, 2023). Yet the authorities continue to deny any responsibility.

d. Preventing access to premises

Throughout interviews, respondents insisted that the NGOs' work was also deeply obstructed by the town hall's effort to prevent organisations from accessing premises. Although stories

³⁵ Interview with Anonymous informant 1, Volunteer and Activist, Jan. 10th 2023.

about Calais tend to overlook this phenomenon, it seems to be well-established judging by interviewees.

On the one hand, the town hall refuses to issue installation permits to organisations. For instance, for months now, the notorious NGO Médecins Sans Frontières has tried to permanently settle in Calais by opening a day centre to provide care and health services to refugees. However, the organisation is experiencing serious difficulties in finding premises due to a blockage from the town council³⁶.

On the other hand, the city hall has developed a wide-ranging policy aimed at acquiring available land in Calais³⁷. Indeed, when a property is vacant in the absence of an heir, the town council has a right of pre-emption³⁸, meaning it enjoys a priority over private buyers to purchase an estate. This allows the town to decide who can buy which land and to control what it can be used for. Through this procedure, the city council can ensure that landlords will not allow NGOs and displaced people to rent or occupy properties.

Finally, an insidious aspect of the council's strategy to invisibilize displaced people's presence is based on preventing the creation of social connections between local residents and refugees. While municipal halls are supposedly available for all residents of Calais to organise gatherings, those premises have been made inaccessible to NGOs and residents supporting displaced communities. Indeed, every request to host an event designed to bring together refugees, NGOs and residents has been met with the refusal of the town hall³⁹.

In this context, La MER, the Maison d'Entraide et de Ressource, became an essential place where refugees wishing to remain in France can find support and where NGOs can gather around meetings and training. Opened in 2022 by the Secours Catholique, La MER is accessible to all residents of Calais and has become a symbol of resilience despite the authorities' efforts to get rid of solidarity (Charlotte Boitiaux, 2022).

II. The Crime of Solidarity: treating NGOs and Activists as Threats

a. The systematic imposition of fines

³⁶ Interview with Anonymous informant 11, MSF staff member, Feb. 4th 2023.

³⁷ Interview with Anonymous informant 8, Jurist, Jan. 18th 2023.

³⁸ Code de l'Urbanisme, art. L211-1.

³⁹ Training « History of the border » at La MER, February 2023.

In order to prevent the establishment of solidarity networks in Calais, authorities have been punishing those who dare to provide support to displaced communities with the imposition of fines. During the distribution ban, volunteers who distributed food supplies would systematically be given penalties (Witter, 2023).

This strategy was further reinforced with the pandemic as NGOs would be fined for failure to respect lockdowns and curfews. Indeed, while volunteers carried with them certificates from their organisation allowing them to continue their activities during the health crisis, police officers denied the value of the documents and punished the workers. The association Utopia 56 and HRO alone saw their volunteers being controlled around 130 times over 4 months, for a total of 20 000 euros in fines (Witter, 2023). As one interviewee described, authorities “know that either we will have to pay which means less money for our activities, or we will have to contest which will waste a lot of time that we could use to do something else”⁴⁰. HRO contested all the fines received for violation of the lockdown. In June 2022 a hearing was held to discuss the admissibility of three tickets during which the court found in favour of the NGOs, arguing that it is not up to a police officer to pass a judgement on the type of work performed by an individual (Plateforme de Soutiens Aux Migrant.e.s, 2022).

Aside from periods of lockdown or distribution bans, the authorities devote considerable attention to inspecting the NGO vans and vehicles. Indeed, by fining volunteers for “illegal parking” or “dangerous parking” the police found an alternative way to inflict penalties on NGOs. In these situations, it is the volunteers’ words against that of a police officer, even when no offence has been committed, it is extremely difficult to prove it⁴¹.

b. Surveillance and “fichage” of volunteers

To discourage people from supporting displaced people, authorities have established a climate of surveillance of those who demonstrate solidarity. All possible means are used to remind volunteers that they are being monitored. NGO workers thus regularly encounter CRS demanding to see their papers and check their identity (HRO, 2021). These ID checks are sometimes performed as often as “twice in five minutes”⁴². During controls, police officers

⁴⁰ Interview with Anonymous informant 8, Jurist, Jan. 18th 2023.

⁴¹ Interview with Anonymous informant 1, Volunteer and Activist, Jan. 10th 2023.
Interview with Anonymous informant 8, Jurist, Jan. 18th 2023.

⁴² Interview with Anonymous informant 1, Volunteer and Activist, Jan. 10th 2023.

oftentimes take pictures of volunteers' papers, while thoroughly questioning the workers on their activities.

For NGO workers and activists, this constitutes a form of "fichage", institutional surveillance⁴³. While volunteers do not have the means to prove the existence of such a system, there have been instances where individuals were called by their full name by police officers they had never met and before they were asked to hand out their IDs⁴⁴. For NGOs, this demonstrates that despite not having committed anything illegal, volunteers are sometimes known to the police and subjected to a form of preventive surveillance.

Even when they are stationed for a very short period of time, CRS are always able to pinpoint NGO vans, leading volunteers to believe that they are specifically trained to identify them. On multiple instances volunteers have witnessed officers describing a specific car as belonging to NGOs to their colleagues. Furthermore, CRS vans often tend to be parked around the NGOs warehouse, distribution sites or down the street of the Secours Catholique day centre. This proximity allows them to directly check vehicles coming out, a process which I witnessed myself during my fieldwork.

c. Discouraging assistance through pressure and detention: the example of the squats

In addition to the systematic fining and surveillance of NGOs, authorities have increasingly attempted to dissuade people from helping refugees through the detention of volunteers and activists. This strategy further demonstrates how the criminalization of solidarity in Calais has become integral to the State's strategy to marginalise and invisibilize displaced communities. Each arrest carries a symbolic message, not only is it unsafe to display solidarity but it can also be considered criminal by authorities. This further aims to isolate displaced people and push them farther away from the public sphere.

In February 2022, 150 activists came from all over Europe to launch an action in Calais. Multiple teams simultaneously installed squats in abandoned buildings around the city (Boussemart, 2022a). The action took an unexpected turn when the State sent a helicopter with officers from the RAID, an anti-terrorist elite unit, to evacuate an occupied building in Fort Nieulay, demonstrating an enormous show of force (Boussemart, 2022b).

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

At the same time, a squat was opened in the city centre of Calais. During the hearing regarding the expulsion of the squat house, the judge decided in favour of the refugees and activists, allowing the occupants to remain on the property for 3 hours (Odièvre, 2022). Out of the few activists that signed the paperwork officializing the opening of the squat, one received an obligation to leave the French territory (OQTF) and was detained in a CRA, while another received a ban on return to the French Territory (IRTF), a decision he appealed and won (Chemaa, 2022).

Upon leaving court, the police controlled the identity and recorded all the people who had attended the hearing, threatening to detain in CRA those who would refuse⁴⁵. A procedure rather questionable that may have influenced the judge's verdict according to activists. Meanwhile, CRS vans were parked in front of volunteers' houses throughout the whole squat operation.

For volunteers and activists, the State's full-scale "militant hunt"⁴⁶ throughout the establishment of the squats is a clear example of the disproportionate criminalization of solidarity in Calais. This is part of a wider policy consisting in maintaining constant pressure on those who support displaced people.

Through the criminalization of those who support displaced people, authorities deploy large efforts designed to completely eradicate all forms of solidarity towards displaced communities. By targeting distributions and preventing NGOs from gathering with refugees, the French State and the Calais city council reinforce their strategy to invisibilize displaced communities by removing them from public spaces while also actively pushing them to leave. Considering that any form of tolerance and compassion towards refugees might create a "pull effect" authorities have expanded their endless hunt for people on the move to include a broad campaign against acts of solidarity. This further marginalises displaced communities reinforcing their isolation and invisibilization.

⁴⁵ Interview with Anonymous informant 1, Volunteer and Activist, Jan. 10th 2023.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis has explored the invisibilization of refugees in border zones. Through a case study of Northern France, I have questioned: how are displaced communities invisibilized in Calais? Thus, this research aimed at identifying and analysing the strategies developed by the authorities whether it be the French State or the town hall of Calais to physically hide the presence of refugees in the area.

Based on the results of my fieldwork, I have found that the invisibilization and marginalisation of displaced communities are enforced through three distinct yet complementary tactics. Firstly, the systematic evictions of living sites carried out every other day forcibly allow authorities to remove refugees from a location ensuring that they cannot permanently settle down in Calais. Indeed, I have shown how the implementation of a strict “zero fixation points” policy has come to justify and support what resembles a permanent hunt of displaced individuals. The routinization of evictions has conferred authorities the power to invisibilize refugees’ presence in Calais placing them in a state of permanent mobility and vulnerability by physically removing them from their living sites and by destroying any sign of permanent installation. Secondly, over the years, local authorities have mastered the insidious art of reshaping public spaces to create an uninhabitable environment. Through the installation of hostile architecture and the alteration and destruction of the landscape, the city council ensures that evicted communities will not be able to settle back in their living sites making the eviction of living sites permanent. In addition to blocking refugees’ access to public spaces, the city hall has deliberately made living sites unsanitary, through its refusal to perform its garbage collection duty and to guarantee people’s access to sanitary facilities. This strategy allows authorities to control where refugees can settle and thus prevent them from gathering in public spaces. Finally, the criminalization of solidarity discourages those who support displaced communities. In that sense, the constant pressure of threats and punishments faced by NGOs and activists is designed to marginalise refugees and further isolate them. Through the criminalization of forms of solidarity, it is displaced communities who are being targeted.

These three strategies complement each other to install a climate of segregation where refugees are being chased away from the city centre and thus away from the public eye. People on the move face permanent harassment designed to deprive them of moments of respite in order to physically and mentally fragilize them. This forces communities to settle in more secluded and

isolated areas, where they become invisible to the rest of the world. These policies thus invisibilize the presence of refugees by ensuring that it is possible for someone to live in Calais while never seeing displaced communities.

Prevented from gathering in public spaces, refugees disappear from the landscape which further invisibilizes their struggles. Thus, invisibilization generates a form of general indifference through which the public is rendered unable to develop empathy for displaced communities. This allows the State to perform its necropolitical power through which refugees are forced into a state of “social death” (Mbembe, 2006). Thus, paradoxically, displaced people who remain in Calais while waiting to cross to the UK face constant reminders of not being wanted while at the same time being prevented from leaving.

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