

# Calais, Calais



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**For Buddy, thanks**

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# Preface

Sometimes we prioritize information: statistics, facts, images. But, in moments of need and despair, of building solidarity and maintaining hope, the most important thing we can do is share our stories. This is a story of solidarity in times of need, of what that need looks like, of putting oneself in the middle of things. It may not be pretty, nice, or easy to digest, at times filled with anger and always with hope. A lived experience of the continued struggles for human dignity with ups and downs, always honest.

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*This is about activism at the borders.  
On the one hand about experience, images  
On the other about inquiring, searching.  
And about questions, open ones  
Then a consequence, again.  
In the end it's about resistance.*



# Content

At first

Images

Seeking

Questions

Again

Finally

# At First

I collide with the streets of Berlin. Subway stations fly past, many lights, painted, light laughter. It's after hours, people are going out, the mood in the capital is easy.

In my head other images swim forward: rain, tents, police, cashiers with swollen faces, empty houses, lanterns in the ghost town, garbage, garde à vue, far too young men with far too visible fascist tattoos, yelling non-stop from behind a fence, hospitals, commotion, chaos.

The exhaustion which weighs so heavily on me is loaded with the ballast of the last few months. It starts in my head and pulls my eyes closed.

But they don't yield and still stare pointedly into the recent past, screaming at me to stay awake, not to put my thoughts to rest. The thoughts, for their part, paint pictures, they still can't articulate anything. What is reality? In any case, reality is a question of kilometers. And a question of **borders**.

I try to catch hold of the images and to describe them, to depict. Fragments of a chain of experiences which spur a radically different social reality inside my head.

Slivers of ideas and still more images slam against the inside of my head.

Situations break out which are tied up with everything and stir up the most diverse aspects of a topic that won't let go of me anymore.

Playback. Seemingly incoherent utterances. **Calais** paints images, situations, speeds. The connections between the individual pieces are somewhat incomplete, a clear picture is always blurred at the edges and a sharper focus just creates more edges.

Trains of thought don't find any end point, I am just plain tired. Station by station my journey ends, I exit the train-car, arrive at friends', carry the leftovers of my stay and probably myself upstairs to the first story, shower for two hours, sleep for three days.

I watch myself thinking, constantly. My head threatens to explode.

My intimate surroundings feel like a wilderness. I stand adversely in front of cafés and bars, try to concentrate on the conversations which float before me like soap bubbles, the images pushing their way in.

As I slowly adjust to the everyday, stories, ideas, people take their space and occupy me, put things in another light or just shut them out. Where content was is now often emptiness. What was important hasn't remained.

**I must** write it down, write everything down, as if I had to keep on holding the images straight, so they aren't pushed to the margins and blurred. So that the topic can't just be pushed aside, so that someone hears it.

**I don't want** to file anything away in a drawer of finished experiences, or to imagine I've done something, found something interesting and horizon-expanding and then just shrug my shoulders. I walked away and now I've lost my way. That is how it is. I can't accept that.

**I will** tell the story of what these images say to me, but I make no claim to completeness or a correct point of view. It may be that, at one of the many junctions which open up within my head, I took the wrong turn.

**I will not** dare, in my search for potential solutions, to judge what is right or wrong, except for my position against the government of France, regionally represented in Calais, the French apparatus of repression, fascists, the idea of borders and all those who realize these ideas or support them.



## **Images Seeking Questions, Again**

# Images

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# Arrival

New Year's. We decide to go to **Calais**, we've gotten bored hanging out on our pie in the sky.

A friend writes: Good luck in the saddest place on earth. I think: dramatic. He was right. 16 hours of driving later it's raining, as usual. It is old, windy, uncomfortable; far too lit up for so little life. Like a party that no one comes to. This climaxes in the absurdly blinking fairytale characters left over from previous Christmas celebrations.

A pretty big frog is sitting in front of the town hall.

The uninvited live at the port where the ferries to Great Britain are docked. In fact, they haven't come to stay at all. They live in so-called jungles, camps of tents and constructions out of pallets and tarpaulins.

Calais is a **place of transit**. People want to go to England, come from Eritrea, Ethiopia, Sudan, or else from Afghanistan, Pakistan or Syria and Egypt, from Iran. They've all gotten stuck in the saddest place on earth.

Across from them is an establishment which calls itself charitable. People push themselves into a sort of crowd control barrier, which disconcerts me. There they receive one meal a day of vitamin-free, loveless food.

So we ring in the New Year in the rain in front of the city deportation center, to wish the people inside a happy new year and show our solidarity.

Afterward, we go to the camp across from the food distribution, which is cynically called *Salam*, Arabic for 'peace.' There are maybe a hundred tents there and three times as many people.

Here the people are mostly from Afghanistan and Pakistan. There are many of these jungles. At the edge of the city live people from Sudan.

Behind the town hall are people from Eritrea and Ethiopia.

We stand outside around a fire barrel, there is drinking, dancing, laughter. I am overwhelmed, tired, bitter.

On the next day we visit the women's house. It is in the boulevard 'Victor Hugo' and for that reason is named the same. Victor Hugo is packed, chaotic, improvised.

It is the only place where women and children can stay in the city. It is a house squatted by activists. Normally, I'm told, squats are evicted immediately, in disregard of French law by the CRS.

Putting women and children out on the street is probably too much bad publicity.

Even here.

Many huddle around an oven with four flames, most of them come from Eritrea and Ethiopia, the other communities often travel without women in the hope that they can later come back for them. Later, Amanuel\* explains it took him seven years to reach Calais. He is now 23 and an exception in Victor Hugo, he's

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\* Name changed

injured, just like Taya\*. They were on the wrong parking place at night, they were shot. By the mafia. Apparently, the police were there as well. They did nothing.

In the town hall sits Natacha Bouchart.

She is mayor of Calais and would like the 'illegals' to disappear. She herself came from Armenia and changed her name. The prospects fit with the weather.

It just keeps raining. My friends drive back 16 hours with the car. I watch them drive away. I don't know for how long or why.

## Staying

I move into Victor Hugo. To provide a safer space for women and children, there have to be door shifts. Twenty-four seven. No entry for men.

They're outside, killing time, until evening, when they'll try again to sneak their way into England. They sleep in the jungles and come to the women's house to take advantage of the infrastructure: most want to charge their telephones or have something to drink. There's endless knocking on the door, there is no day and no night, hours swim in a sea of people.

Many end up drinking. The mafia is likewise responsible for beer deliveries at low prices. Then there are usually problems, desperation or aggression. Sometimes there's just a party. It's definitely too loud for the neighbors, who don't want to see or hear them. Who look for reasons to complain. The drinkers make the situation more difficult for themselves. I can't blame them. I've had less legitimate reasons to get drunk.

Inside are the women, who cook food in the day for themselves and the men, who leave the house at night in the hope of not coming back again.

I want to help and stand before the big question of how. The question of what is easier to answer: gathering food from the dumpsters, pallets from wherever, doing door shifts at Victor Hugo, loading telephones, making coffee, bring sleeping bags to the jungles and people to the hospitals, having meetings, buying sugar, tending wounds, documenting the police, writing testimonies, repairing bikes, listening to stories, playing football, running back and forth.

At first, I sleep in the basement of the house. On the Orthodox Christian Christmas on January 6, there is a coffee ceremony among the young women from Ethiopia, there is so much beauty in the reconciliation. Later it turns into a drama, they are also not used to alcohol. They run around outside, they're desperate. There is so much grief in this day.

The loss which hides beneath the day's events breaks out: one woman shares with me the sad story of a grandmother, others are buried in stories of the children they had to leave behind in Libya.

Sometimes conflicts break out in the house, too. Fierce, violent quarrels

\* Name changed

between the women.

Kitchen knives are pulled, the kitchen utensils become projectiles. Children stand in between. Understanding nothing makes conflict resolution very difficult. People find so many reasons to fight with each other.

The women live upstairs, spread across the rooms. I speak neither Amharic nor Arabic. I can speak haltingly in English with some and with some not at all. Eyes, expression, hands, that has to be enough. And laughter, lots of uncomprehending laughter.

I begin to clean the house, to get paint, to spruce up the chaos. Sometimes the women ask me if I would like to eat with them. Slowly we become friends. I move into the first floor. Together with four young women from Ethiopia, I live in at most seven square meters.

## **Garde à vue**

Houses are squatted as a political strategy. The city is half empty. I visit a friend in a squat. Time makes no difference here. To deal with the chaos you make friends with those who are there, special circumstances. Special circumstances demand special relationships.

We drink coffee at the window. Seven or eight CRS wagons come down the street. They stop. A smile freezes itself on my face, habit. show them that you're immune to repression, unbreakable.

The situation soon turns aggressive. They get a big black post and break down the door violently. They're all men in blue combat uniforms, they seem massive, well-trained and frightening. One of the people in the house falls down and starts bleeding from the head. We are dragged into a room, the bleeding person sits on the ground.

They put us against the wall, search our bags, stare at us. Hateful looks are exchanged. From the side of the police, there's clearly more hatred than can be explained by just doing their job. From the other side, too. My smile sticks firmly on my face, it's become frozen there.

After an interminable procedure we're lead away, the handcuffs cut into my wrists. I try to continue grinning while my usual unconcerned countenance starts to crack under the rising anger. Just keep smiling. Don't let them get to you.

I am treated like a problem. While we're taken to the police station in a police car the men in combat uniforms make comments about us. They think that no one understands them. I'm referred to as a dirty whore multiple times. They seem to be having fun.

When we arrive, I am brought into a room, where a woman gives me a maternal lecture, she says again and again something like "well, well, little one, you've gotten yourself stuck between a rock and a hard place, haven't you?". Yes, exactly. She's playing the good cop. It occurs to me that there's no camera in the room, which is more of a cell than a room. The same sad non-aesthetic

as in the rest of the building. Another one plays the bad cop, runs up and down and flashes his eyes at me, disgusting. I still keep smiling and try to imagine something else. Something far away from here.

After she completes a protocol of a conversation which didn't take place, I am brought into a room and I have to undress and hand over my bra and my shoelaces. There are men there, I protest, no reaction, only dirty jokes. I begin to understand where the hate in my friends' eyes comes from. I have the feeling they can do whatever they want. It becomes uncomfortable.

The cell is yellow and remains yellow even if you shut your eyes. I feel grimy and lost. They drag me out two times, once to take my fingerprints - my refusal doesn't exist for them, they just do it. I have to admit I am afraid, there are too many combat uniforms with too much hate in their eyes. The next time, I am allowed to have my things again. I stuff the bra in my bag while sexist comments are made. I am thrown out. The smile falls from my face.

I have no time to breathe. Police repression is just one problem. The fascists are another. **Sauvons Calais** has announced a demonstration for the next day. We try to prepare ourselves somehow for violent, racist attacks. But on the following day everything remains calm.

## The City

I observe the lives of the local population. The cashiers at the supermarket registers have swollen, tired faces. In the mornings in the bars in Calais, no one is drinking coffee. Lonely people kill time drinking because the city is so sad. Out on the streets, most of Calais is in a bad mood.

At some point, Calais was thought of as economically secure. That was before the Second World War. Afterward, branches of the economy broke off, coal, metal and textile industries lost their place, empty factories are the silent witnesses of that time.

There is a spiral in motion that lends Calais an especially melancholic touch. The statistics say that the unemployment rate is above average. So is the number of the unemployed under 25 and the number of empty buildings. The number of votes going to Marine le Pen and the Front National are on the rise. What is 'below average' is the number of refugees. According to the UNHCR. They're used to camps with 200,000 people, then it's 'worth it' for them to step in. Calais, with the few hundred people, doesn't make the cut. Calais isn't worth it.

There have been attempts to get into the service industry and tourism. In front of the train station, there is a dilapidated hotel. The empty, lit up tourist strip with equally lifeless bars and restaurants looks disappointed. In summer, it's probably a bit better, then at least it doesn't always rain and English tourists come to get drunk for cheap in industrial apartments by the beach.

Most of them don't stay, though, they pass through the Eurotunnel on their way somewhere else, don't stop for long. Probably they don't feel welcome either. It must be in the air. No one comes to stay.

## Manana

I start to get used to Calais, if you can get used to a situation which is constantly changing or getting interrupted by some emergency. Often I ask myself why I do what I do: I sleep poorly, eat what is there and often forget to do even that, because something else has happened, I smoke nonstop, make plans and try to find a structure with the knowledge that something will get in the way.

In the meantime, I've been here for weeks, imprisoned in this overfilled ghost town, I don't think further than the next step.

One evening, strangely, nothing happens at all, it's almost suspicious. I decide to visit a friend in the jungle, it's the first time I've seen a tent in a jungle from inside. And I learn my first word in Pashtu: Manana.

In Afghanistan, there is a tradition of living in tents. For this reason, people also know how to create an astonishing level of comfort out of nothing. Though these shelters often appear squalid outside, they hide a real treasure.

It takes some doing to find a comfortable seat, there are seven or eight of us. A candle burns in the middle. After everyone has found their place, from within the narrow confines a space opens up. We smoke and share the nothing that we possess, we can't speak a common language.

Despite this I feel safe. I let myself be carried away by the voices outside, someone begins to sing, even the rain, which I can hear dripping onto the roof of the tent, is beautiful. I find a brief moment of safety in the chaos, I am thankful for the hospitality, I can briefly let go.

On the way home I notice something like happiness for the first time, I smile inwardly.

**Manana means thanks.**

## Feeling

I no longer feel so deeply, in order to stay here, I bury images inside myself, take note of things without becoming too concerned with their truth and meaning. I understand what makes so many activists stay here so briefly and why they don't return: the overwhelmingness and the helplessness, the sadness and the violence, the suffering and the rage. At least these are the feelings that start, if I don't hold myself back and look too closely. Then there is an abyss.

There is a certain powerlessness that comes with feeling not just the innumerable dramatic individual stories but also the entire situation weighing down on my shoulders with each new day in this city. Sometimes I feel lonely.

I want to push it to the side so that I can move myself forward, step by step, so that I can hold onto something or someone, in this or another moment.



Something in me wants to take on responsibility. But being in the situation of being able to decide everything of my own free will makes everything into a privilege somehow.

Actually, I don't believe in inheriting guilt, but I see a direct connection between my privileges and my friends' lack of privileges, they are dependent on each other.

Guilt is not the same thing as responsibility, though. And you can only accept responsibility at all if you face the facts. You don't have to be guilty to accept responsibility. Just responsible.

Maybe it's also egotistical. I want it to stop. Because when people are forced to live in this way it pushes me into the class of the over-privileged. I don't want to be first world, but that's only possible if this insane idea of a third world finally falls. I don't want to have a jump start from a nation in which I was coincidentally born, when others, who were coincidentally born in another nation, are illegal. I can't support any state in which helping those who are illegal is a criminal offense.

When an Italian captain saved many 'illegal' human lives from drowning, he had to spend two years in prison. I don't want to have this filth sticking to me. Maybe watching something happen makes you complicit, taking action makes you responsible.

Considering the admiration that I have for my friends who left for Europe at an age when I had nothing better to do than lying stoned in the grass, I start to develop a strange new perspective on my own life. I recognize the privilege behind my political identity.

I belong to those who have been given chocolate bars so often that they are disgusted by chocolate, who are *allowed* to recognize what is happening with the world. I am one of a few – most people are forced to recognize what is happening with the world. My friends are forced to see what's going on. They can't be fed up with capitalism, because you can only be fed up with something once you've had too much of it. They want a chance, any job is better than none, they want a house, money, a future. They want to make it.

I don't want to pay rent anymore, I don't want to offer my wage labor and support the state in its self-preservation. I am voluntarily poor. I possess my own human capital. That is also one face of the so-called new elite. It's arrogant. And it's necessary. But that doesn't make it less elitist. I come from a world where economic refusal is cushioned by a welfare state. I can go way out on a limb – because I was given the branch closest to the ground. I can do without many things, because I could have all of them. I go away because I don't have to.

I start to realize that I have made the decisions I have because I could afford to.

Sometimes I want to flee before this, far away. I have the nagging feeling that I'll take Calais with me. I try to extract myself from all my privileges. I don't spend any more money, eat whatever and sleep wherever. Now and then, I take a shower. A friend says: actually, we should stop with this self-exploitation, after all we want the others to have these privileges, too, and not to give up

ours so that we appear to put ourselves on an equal level. In any case: this equality doesn't exist. Plain and simple.

We can express solidarity, yes, that's OK. We can show that we're not willing to stand by silently and leave all these people by themselves, we can duke it out with the police and the fascists, play little games, squat houses, do media work, throw soli-parties.

But we won't manage it, not totally, we will start to get a clue and then fall back on ourselves and our own histories.

The wish for change fuels action.

But we have insufficient answers to unclear questions.

We sit at a kitchen table, some have luck, make friends with people who live in Calais and don't use migrants as a scapegoat, they can stay.

Achmed\* tells about Syria, he comes from Aleppo. His brother is dead and his mother, too.

He wants the right to be here. He sees that he is defined through a politically constructed category of victim. He doesn't ask for asylum, from his eyes come incomprehension and a demand. Soon he starts organizing demonstrations. That is the best.

That's the light at the end of the fucking tunnel I think, sometimes. When this charity shit falls away, when helplessness ends. When nothing is given anymore, when there is no expectation of thanks, when sharing is accepted as a right and a duty.

When we win something through collective struggle. When we climb off this strange pedestal and no one can confuse political action with polishing their own halo anymore. When friends are released from the role of the needy, of those damned to passivity. When we collectively rise above this.

## **Calais, Calais**

The circumstances make organization very difficult or altogether impossible. There is no space for the development of processes, the infrastructure is either not there or is disastrous. Activists come and go, stay for different lengths and also have different ideas about solutions and actions. Sometimes we even work against each other without meaning to, don't understand each other, don't share the same experiences. I don't have the same experiences as those who have done this work for so much longer already, and others, who come for only a few days, don't have mine. At first, I point out hierarchies but I notice through my own process that it's about experiences.

Until now, nowhere else have I had such a feeling that a space can create such different perceptions, that attempted solutions could lie so far away from each other. That there are so many layers. That each solution generates ten new problems and every answer a hundred questions.

Many people call this feeling **Calais, Calais**. It's already something like a joke. Humor as the last salvation before surrender.

## Hope

A kid in Victor Hugo to a young man:

“you go England?”

“yes”

“good luck”

“thank you”

“see you tomorrow”

The perpetual hope wears you down. Every evening, I bid farewell to my friends, every morning I open the door for them, they are freezing and have tired faces, it begins anew. At some point we stop saying goodbye to each other.

Fatima has been here for a week, it's her first try. Her eyes still shine. She has come so far. She gives a heartfelt goodbye, she's not coming back, she will go to England now. I smile sadly at her.

## I Try England

Sometimes I visit the people in the Sudanese jungle. They live furthest from the center, a wasteland. From a nearby hill, on one of the rare clear days, you can see Great Britain. 32 km. A seemingly insurmountable barrier.

Great Britain is not an unrestricted partner of the Schengen Agreement, due to unwanted immigration the border controls have been tightened. Tightening means heart beat detectors and instruments to measure oxygen. It means pulling a plastic bag over your head and holding your breath as long as you can. It means the border of possibility. Often, impossibility.

They try to ride in the trucks. Or under them. To cross the border with them. They try to make it onto the ferry or the train. Most are caught. By the truck-drivers or the police. But the police have no capacity and France has no interest in arresting them all and identifying them. Instead, bad-tempered police drive people kilometers outside of the city and leave them there, as if that would solve the problem.

Sometimes people get into the wrong trucks. End up in Paris. Or the Netherlands. Sometimes they fall from the trucks. End up in hospitals. Sometimes they don't.

## Words, Peculiar

Days fly by. I meet Achmed\*, we speak about language.

Afterwards, I become openly hostile towards the word asylum and its corresponding verbs.

At least in its general usage, you have to ask for asylum. You can also seek it, it

says in the dictionary, or apply for it. When I think about it more precisely, exactly this normalization in the language and in the institutional handling of so-called asylum sets this cycle of insanity in motion.

What's more, you can allow it and refuse it and grant it and reject it. So, the starting point is a question of one party having the power to decide. And this is reproduced in the linguistic connection.

The dictionary also says that synonyms for asylum are homeless shelter, loophole, refuge, protected area, hideout, sanctuary, haven, harbor, hideaway or lair.

Aha.

When I ask someone for something, they may well say no. The fact that, at the same time, rights exist for which one should not have to ask at all, seems to be forgotten.

For example, Article 4 in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU: "No one shall be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment."

Or this one, it's pretty funny too: Article 13.2 of the Universal Declaration of Human rights (UDHR), signed on December 10, 1948: "Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own...", or Article 12.2 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights: "Everyone shall be free to leave any country, including his own." And then there's Article 4 of Protocol no. 4 on Convention Article 19 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU: "No one may be removed, expelled or extradited to a State where there is a serious risk that he or she would be subjected to the death penalty, torture or other inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment."

So first of all a right is something different than a request. You can claim your rights, but you don't ask for them. You also can't reject a right. But you can re-interpret a right. Well, that is, *you* can't. Just a certain few.

That's not just a grey zone, it's a black hole.

Asylum-seekers are those who are regarded as refugees. They fall into statistics, quotas are filled. The others are *sans papiers*, illegals, they fall out of the statistics. Criminalized.

Another word, or better put, a turn of phrase, that I think of is 'not at all.' It's a synonym for 'my pleasure' or 'you're welcome.' But 'not at all' literally means that this or that thing for which thanks is given is not worth the thanking.

Europe shouts you're welcome and my pleasure when it fills its quotas.

Patronizing.

Stooping.

Disgusting.

They should say '**not at all.**'

## Sauvons Calais

In Calais there's a nineteen year-old who founded a Facebook page. Sauvons Calais. Let's save Calais. Identitarian right. At first I thought it was a bad joke.

Sauvons Calais wants a city free of migrants and activists. Sauvons Calais is the absurd consequence of statistics about social problems, Front National and too little hope. The problem is just that a generation without perspectives is looking to unload. What was a piercing for me ended up as a swastika on Kevin Reche's chest.

The problem is that he is very convinced of what he's doing. He organizes demonstrations. The participation on the streets was initially not very big, the participation on Facebook, however, was considerably larger.

Coulogne borders Calais. If you walk along the canal, you'll reach this offshoot of the city. In February, a farmhouse which had stood empty for years was squatted there. Kevin Reche began to mobilize.

In the regional newspaper *Le Nord Littoral* there was an article about a squat in Coulougne, people talked about it. Apparently, a European couple had occupied the old farmhouse.

Apparently, the population of Coulougne had a problem with this. Which didn't surprise me.

Almost every day another article followed, in the second regional newspaper as well: *Le Voix du Nord*.

According to the reports, Sauvons Calais had called for a meeting because the house was allegedly going to be opened for migrants.

And they come, together with agitated neighbors. At first it's just a few. Then more and more. They begin to destroy the roof of the farm with stones, the newspapers report murder threats. Requests are sent over platforms to support the activists who, in the meantime, have been under constant fire for days.

One Saturday, more than a hundred fascists are standing in front of the door. Kevin Reche and his pubescent friends have gotten support from the big guys.

Some activists come to the city to support. That Saturday we go there together, we want to show our solidarity. As we turn into the Rue Emile Dumont, where the farm is, we are met with a paradoxical spectacle.

A raucous mob in front of the farm, a police line, us.

They push us back, the police position themselves clearly. They call a gathering of Nazis in front of a house a legitimate demonstration. Say that we want to play with fire. Lasers are pointed at our cameras. While we question the officers about the legitimacy of their actions, a firework flies towards us. No one's interested in preventing this.

From the other side dangerous small groups of Nazis come towards us. The police come between us. Slowly. Very slowly.

After an endless back and forth the police escort us a little bit away. We're supposed to go back to Calais. We follow the canal. Fascists pursue us in their cars, drive by very close to us. They want to scare us. They feel they are

strong.

Surprisingly, in *Nord Littoral* the front page story is dedicated to Kevin Reche, who is sitting next a friend, bare-chested with a swastika blazing on his chest. The title is **identitarian generation**.

They've probably gone too far. It's a success. Their fan club gets smaller. They close their website, swear that they will return soon.

Two days later the stable is burned. Molotov cocktails are thrown at the house. The activists leave the farm, there's a call for big demonstration. Many come. The sun shines. The terrors slowly come to an end.

Over the last few days I have the feeling I'm getting paranoid. The police support this feeling with many ID controls.

## **Right. Extreme.**

Along with a few other regions, the Pas-de-Calais is a stronghold of Marine le Pen's Front National. I read their demands, I try to understand the background of the anti-migrant attitude of the population. Attempt to fill in holes.

They call themselves traditional. They pave the way for the identitarians. From France, the identitarians flood into Europe.

They claim that they are neither right nor left, invoke tradition and ancestry. They see themselves as "revolutionaries of a national youth culture" and explain their transnational networking through the necessity of supporting the people of Europe in their struggle against foreign domination and Islamic expansion. And against mass immigration.

The identitarians began in 2012 in the French city Poitiers, where hundreds of activists tried to gain media attention by occupying a mosque which was under construction. In 732, the Islamic expansion was stopped in the same place.

It's clear that social problems support racism.

That slogans in the media create opinions and veil reality.

Putting a cross under a party name is something different than showing one's face.

In the 2014 Europe election, Marine le Pen and her association received twenty-six percent.

Her demands in the Front National range from withdrawal from the Schengen Agreement, nationalization of the armaments industry, a return to traditional values, and rejection of abnormal art to banning visible religious symbols in public.

The main issue is immigration. All *sans papiers* should be expelled, immigration should be limited. This is called "**preference nationale**".

## Revenge

It's the first day in March. Once again we've made the front page of the *Nord Littoral*: QUATRE SQUATS AU MÊME MOMENT POUR DÉNONCER LES LOGEMENTS VIDES À CALAIS

Four houses were occupied in Calais. All at once. The answer to Coulogne, the media reports. Revenge. For the first time the media reports about the legal procedure in house occupations. Spring. Enlightenment. They try to calm the population. Because many are afraid their houses will be squatted while they're away on vacation.

Of the four squatted houses, one is evicted. It belongs to the city.

The elections are just ahead.

Natacha Bouchart probably just couldn't stand the revenge. She has the house walled up. Walling up the entrances is one of the responses to house occupations. Solving problems doesn't seem to be her strong point.

I had concerns about whether fascist attacks might spread explosively, but it doesn't come to an all-out clash. Probably parents make their fash children stay at home. Grounded.

Smaller shit like graffiti and an increased presence of small groups walking by houses is the situation. After the events in Coulogne, it's bearable.

The houses are made open to people who don't have homes. There will be proceedings. We will lose, of course.

## Chocolate

It seems like you can't even buy chocolate in this city.

At some point between the farm and the fascists, we're going around the city with a small group of people. I go into the supermarket to buy chocolate. Food for the nerves.

Later I think: what a stupid idea. And of course: Calais, Calais.

We walk straight into an argument. A boy with dark skin is standing with a recently bought piece of meat in one hand and a receipt in the other in front of a security guard who's twice as large and wide with a typical Calais drinker's face and a visible SS tattoo on his neck. As I said, they're arguing.

The boy wants to exchange his meat, it's from pig and the security grabs him by the throat and tries to push him out of the supermarket.

We butt in, I run out and signal to the others to come in, a chaos breaks out, it's a moment in which there really is an overabundance of friends present for the boy. Stuff like that is unusual but it does happen. I don't even want to know how many others already experienced the same in this supermarket.

At some point the chaos subsides. We go. Of course without chocolate.

## Strategies

My self-preservation drive begins to express itself. It sends ever more clear signals. My appetite disappears, I forget to sleep and this strange way of thinking slowly takes the upper hand.

Subconsciously, it seems to be grasping at straws in desperation. To catch hold of something.

It's an attempt to control the situation.

Cleaning, straightening up, sorting things out, painting walls and repairing things becomes a type of meditation.

Every day the chaos begins and, since the outer chaos mirrors the situation, I try to work against it. Symbolically. Like Sisyphus. Still, it gives me a certain routine, in short I call it *daily life*.

While I wait for problems, I try to create some normalcy so that my sanity doesn't just run off.

I become calmer. Always one step after the other. Somehow it helps me. Tomorrow doesn't matter to me. I know that after every attempt to sleep a little – whether upstairs in the room or on the sofa in the entrance area, where I can open the door for my friends – the chaos will start anew and creep its way into the next day.

I will find it and then start working against it all over again. In the evenings, I learn to be satisfied with the results, not to expect any progress. A life in Calais is just one day. Again and again.

## “My heroes are my friends”

We're walking through the rain again. Talking about this and that on our way to solve some problem. A friend says that he doesn't need any heroes because his friends are his heroes.

I understand that. I look at the people who have installed themselves here, day after day and night after night, in the minority, David against Goliath. And I admire them. Maybe we ourselves are the reason. Day after day, I look into our tired faces. And we stay. Maybe I stay because they do, maybe they stay because I do.

While we walk, the loneliness suddenly subsides. We are too few but we're not alone. On our way to solve some problem, we'll run into someone else, we'll grin at each other, say Calais, Calais, we'll hold together and somehow we'll make it through.

Those are the good moments in this city. Through the extremes, solidarity becomes clearly visible. And because positive things can lead to more positive things, another thing occurs to me, while the rain becomes heavier and the wind howls unpleasantly at our ears.



I think of a banner I saw hanging from a squatted house: **You know why we always gonna win? Cause we have nothing else to do.**

Right. Stepping out of your so-called life for a bit and throwing yourself into chaos makes you free in a certain sense. Just like convictions. And it can mean taking a long breath. Without societal duties, you have time. A lot of time.

## Identity

I go walking with a friend. We want to go to the houses. We walk along the streets, visit them. The third house lies near to the canal. We turn into the street and knock on the door.

Soon enough, the police turn up, this time the national police. They need five cars and all possible personnel to check our IDs. And time. Time, in which they put us against the wall. Search us, hope to find something. They don't. Of course. At some point the repressive apparatus should understand that leftists aren't as stupid as they wish they were.

What they also don't do is arrest us. And I can see that they aren't content with this.

I could have even imagined that they would do it. Here everything seems to be possible. Maybe they're afraid of the media. They don't want to go out too far on any limbs anymore. Maybe they were reminded that France also has laws for its police forces. It doesn't suit them.

In any case, they go and push our papers into our hands carelessly. It doesn't matter to me.

**Many things have stopped mattering to me. Somehow my frame of reference is starting to crumble.**

## Grandma and Grandpa

"I don't want to sit by and watch that happen again."

They exist, too, the old people. I call them Grandma and Grandpa. Grandma and Grandpa don't have a romantic couple relationship. Not for 50 years. Grandma and Grandpa come to Victor Hugo or the jungles individually. They've found their own ways to take part.

Grandma is often in Victor Hugo, she lives nearby. She comes to check in on the children, brings by the newspaper, buys things, talks to us. She says that some of her neighbors won't talk to her anymore since she started coming to Victor Hugo to check in on the women and children.

Many tried to tell her to stop.

She says: "I don't want to watch that happen again." She means the war.

Grandpa has a small car. He brings cookies and other tasty things to the Victor Hugo and the jungles several times a week. He says that's his contribution, what he can still do in his sunset years.

Grandpa also talks about the war, about the time when there was nothing. It seems to me as if, as witnesses of that time, they had made a connection to something which I had long sensed.

The two of them, they can't sit by and watch people in need. It reminds them. They see similarities.

Grandma also says that many people push others away, just like then.

I love Grandma and Grandpa. They give me hope. Just like the other deeply engaged inhabitants of Calais, however few they are. Who decided not to sit by and watch. They are all hope.

## **Pregnant**

I am woken up. It's maybe five in the morning, the first of my roommates are coming back. Somebody strokes my head and whispers "wake up wake up".

I sit up, see my roommate, who smiles apologetically, next to her a young woman, probably actually a teenager, who looks at me fearfully.

My friend says she needs to go to the hospital, she might be pregnant. I explain the procedure to her. We have to make an appointment. Yes, several. No, today it's not possible. Appointments are problematic. Maybe it'll be possible somehow. Tomorrow.

If you want help getting past the border to England without valid travel documents, you have to pay for it. Especially if you're a woman, especially if you have a kid. When women run out of money, they have the possibility to try to go it alone. Or to prostitute themselves. They see it as a deal.

Is forced prostitution only forced prostitution when there is someone forcing you to do it? Or is a circumstance, a situation, a thing enough? Can't a non-human thing also force people?

We say that you are forced to do something because of a situation. And you are forced by somebody. The one is a situation, some kind of circumstance, the other implies an active pressure. Does a circumstance mean "that's just the way it is"? "That's the situation, deal with it"?

For the girls their pimps are a ticket to England. They succumb to the illusion of free will, as if they had another choice. Because it just is that way.

They are dependent, downplay the situation, see these people as their friends.

They probably wouldn't be able to take it otherwise. For the women, most of whom are under 25, it is very hard. They have traveled far. They've experienced a lot.

Once we talked about domestic violence and violence in general. I remember, we were sitting with maybe twenty women upstairs under the roof of the Victor Hugo, a big room full of mattresses, there was tea.

Sitting in a big circle. The mood was good on that day. We tried to say that whenever one of the women felt pressured or experienced violence it was important to share that information so that we could try to make the space safer.

It was a big laugh for them, I didn't understand the half of it, but they were apparently terribly amused. I inquire and one friend laughs and just says "Violence? You should try Eritrea". "Or Libya" says another, the laughter in their eyes is heavy.

I stand there and see that I can't say or do anything, that I don't know anything, that I also can't imagine at all everything that's happened. That I can't judge it.

## **Senay\***

They found him. In the canal.

He was gone, for two weeks already. Vanished. He was my friend. It's the beginning of the end.

I'm enmeshed too deeply, I can't see past my emotions anymore, I'm distressed, the city is cold now. It was old, windy, uncomfortable, rainy. Now it's cold.

We have a funeral at the camp at the canal, a small island made of wooden crates with flowers disappears in the direction of nowhere, floats on the water, dances, is carried away.

We stand there unmoving, stare at the flowers, trapped in reality.

Pictures flash in front of my eyes, Senaye smiling drunkenly in front of Victor Hugo, trying to help, stumbling clumsily with his big, lost heart. It's probably still in Ethiopia. Europe broke him. He drinks and stumbles and suffers.

He is often injured by the hopeless stumbling, and since he is a good friend of my roommates, he is allowed to stay in Victor Hugo for a time. We often sit in the room, he listens again and again to an Ethiopian church song, sings along, holds onto this, the girls take care of him, he came together with them the whole way. He tries to help them. And they save him for a time.

I need to hold onto something. I can see that this is not a place for people who can't carry their own weight.

It's at the edge. Calais killed him, Europe watched. A senseless death. One of many senseless deaths on the way to an allegedly better life.

\*In remembrance of Senay I decided not to change his name.

I can't take it anymore, I want to give up. I want to shut my ears. Bury myself under pillows. But the voices are in my head. It's repulsive but I sense how the fact that one person who died that I had a connection to leaves a deeper pain than an entire boat full of people.

But too much pain cripples you. And when I read the newspaper again and again that refugees met with a boat misfortune in the Mediterranean, I am angry. And anger forces me to action.

Finding Senaye lifeless in the water breaks my heart, brings me to places I didn't want to go. Forces me to leave Calais. Because I can't bear it.

And that's not OK. When it's gotten that far, I'm useless. Then I am a friend who's looking after her friends, sharing their suffering and who loses focus. Who's acting from the personal, not the political. How many friends can we watch die without going crazy?

It makes me incapable of action. Incapable of taking it anymore. Because it puts me in the situation of needing protection. And pausing. And somebody else has to rescue me. But if somebody does that, this person won't have time for all the other problems. It's not OK.

I can't allow this, I begin to hide myself. In the city, in the streets, at the port. In disused gardens and abandoned beach chairs, at the canal.

When it doesn't rain, I sit in the park, when it rains, I walk around. Nothing else.

I feel as if I had failed personally. As if I'd run aground. Failed at reality. Failed at Calais. Others said it to me. It can happen, you have to watch out, for Calais you've been here a really long time already, many burn out and don't come back.

I had thought it would just go on like that forever. Probably I didn't think at all anymore at some point. At the end, anyway.

After almost four months and a succession of dramatic events I break down. I can't do it anymore, can't sleep, can't eat, can't speak. I can only walk. Walk and, at the same time, stare at my shoes. And cry. The tears just flow. Like the rain. Constant.

## Out

It's hard to leave Calais. My friends help me to do it. It takes people prisoner and takes their lives away, replaces it with another one.

Everything's turned around. I can see so much wrong in what seemed good. Apparently smugglers ask for more money because they know that activists struggle for a safer space for women. Great.

A friend says **the way to hell is paved with good intentions**. And humor is probably the only chance to rise above it.

There is so much wrong hidden in good intentions. So many mistakes are made and still you have the feeling that it's better to have done something than nothing.

**We drive and drive and drive. Out of the city, the region, the country, with every white highway stripe that disappears behind us, the feeling that what I experienced was real also disappears along with it. I seem to myself like an alien.**

# SEEKING

**Labyrinth**

**Countries of Origin**

**Refugee Flows**

**Borders, physical**

**Paths**

**Calais, just an example**

**Illusion Paradise**

**Seeking images**

## Labyrinth

The pictures are there. They're searching. Searching for answers. For coherency. The central question is: what is to be done? It's a simple enough.

The answer looks for excuses, gets caught up in inquiries, says: wait a minute. To me it seems that this question knows that it cannot give an answer that will be satisfying. And that the way to this unsatisfying answer can't be any simpler. It's like a labyrinth. There's a major potential you won't find your way out of it.

I try to calm myself. Reading helps. I build texts around the pictures. I research things, look for information, fill in holes. About European refugee politics, Frontex, the laws in France. About countries of origin, flows of refugees, numbers, asylum laws.

Just like the pictures are vomited out, it's the same with the information. I place it around the painted pictures. It rattles through my head, like a train that's forgotten how to break.

## Countries of Origin

I start to read about **Eritrea**. I think briefly about reading about all countries but it seems impossible to me. The time I spent there and the people who told me their stories provide the impulse. It can only be fragmentary, at first.

In Eritrea people can be forced into military service for an undetermined period of time. I also find a funny synonym for dictator: a one party state. So in Eritrea everyone between 18 and 48 has to join the military. Supposedly it's for 18 months, an extension for an undetermined time period can be "requested" by the government if there's a need for it. In Eritrea there's always need.

In particular, it's about highly repressive working camps that are supposed to serve the reconstruction of Eritrea.

People who refuse service are, according to the reports of Amnesty International, persecuted, tortured, placed in forced labor camps, executed. They are guilty of "treason." There's talk of rape on a regular basis in the camps. Also of persecution from the state, the violation of human rights.

In many European states the refusal of military service is not an immediate reason for admitting refugees. These twisters of the law. The truth is that the force behind the military services guarantees refusers a high probability of torture, violence and persecution. And that is a reason. A name is created, a new category: military service refusal, for example, and they can be deported, if the consequences aren't clearly provable. In a state which demonstrates not even the tiniest freedom of press, gathering proof is suicidal.

In Victor Hugo, alongside women from Eritrea live women from **Ethiopia**. Both countries have been at war with each other for 30 years. The official Ethiopians call Eritreans separatists. According to Eritrea it was a war of independence. In any case. 30 years of war. Ethiopia is one of the poorest countries in the world. Hunger and drought determine the social and economic situation. The level of repression in Ethiopia is high.



I read that not even every second person has access to clean water and that almost fifty percent of people are malnourished. And that the wooded area has sunk to two percent, which contributes to erosion and natural catastrophes.

In **Sudan** they've had 22 years of war.

There was a national command council to save the nation. It tried to liberate the south of Sudan from the rebels. For 22 years. From 1983-2005.

Even after the independence of the south, the crimes go on. I read about genocide, of armed forces and militias that murder, rape, torture, burn, plunder. The UNO says that since the military putsch of 1983 about 3.5 million people have fled.

In **Syria** there have been struggles for over four years. The number of casualties is estimated at one hundred and sixty thousand. Peaceful protests in the course of the Arab Spring led to a bloody civil war. The president al-Assad against others, the Hezbollah and the Mujahideen, an armed and a political opposition.

## Refugee Flows

Alongside Eritrea, Ethiopia, Sudan and Syria, there's still the rest of the world. And it is categorized. In numbers and quotas and names and good and bad and needy or not. According to the UNHCR it looks like this:

Worldwide there are 45 million refugees. Among the reasons for flight are persecution, torture, rape, war and civil war, the threat of the death penalty, the destruction of access to livelihood, repression or the violation of human rights. Between 80 and 85 percent of refugees remain in their region of origin.

Out of the 45 million persons in flight worldwide, in 2012 in Europe 300,000 people sought asylum.

300,000!

45 Million!

That's 0.6 %.

But the current information is sensational. Rising tide of refugees! Europe will be overrun! Too many people! Where can the refugees go! Europe will be too full! We have to protect ourselves!

Manipulation seems to function so simply.

Can you seriously talk about a rising tide of refugees with a number like 0.6%? Even "flow" seems like a bit of an exaggeration, really.

Half a billion people live in the EU.

To calculate the relationship would be too much, I think.

But of course I can't leave it. All in all it's 0.0006%.

I find a new fragment. An inconspicuous diagram, with yellow bars ordered according to years.

Over the year 2011 is a pretty tall bar with the number 64,000 underneath.

Next to that is the year 2012. A suspiciously small bar. The number: 15,000. The yellow bars stand for the number of people who request asylum in Germany.

These numbers are not a coincidence. The royal court has closed its doors. For a long time already.

## **Borders, physical**

Europe has closed its doors. Many seeking entry require a visa. For those who have little to offer the European Economic Area, there are no visas. Therefore, they have to enter with forged papers. Or they have to try to cross the border undetected.

While the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall was being celebrated in Germany, Fortress Europa was closing its external borders. With help from, among others, the European Agency for the Management Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of Member States of the European Union.

Frontex carries out “military defensive measures against refugees.” I only know the phrase 'defensive measures' in connection with rockets and other deadly threats by armed force.

Its jurisdiction is “cooperation at the external borders of the member states of the EU.” Frontex was set up in 2004. The choice of words, again, is a bit strange. Frontex assists in border protection, but also does so outside of the EU, in the form of large refugee camps in Lybia, for example, and training for security personnel there. They work together with Europol and support security forces in non-member countries.

The activities of Frontex are intended to assist states in educating personnel, conducting risk analyses, and developing and monitoring systems. Surveillance is mentioned as well as the organization of joint repatriation processes. Seal the hatches.

Their missions have exciting names, like Poseidon in the Eastern Mediterranean, or Amazon for airport controls. Hermes on Lampedusa, Aspida and Zeus in Greece. Their mission in the Mediterranean between North Africa, Malta and Southern Italy is called Nautilus. Hera, in the Canary Islands and the coast of West Africa.

In order to exchange data and records, Frontex works with Eurosur, the system for the monitoring “problematic human flows.” Eurosur's goal is to “obtain timely information about the movement of refugees and organizations facilitating illegal entry into EU Member States.” They accomplish this using drones, reconnaissance equipment, offshore sensors and satellite search systems. Its budget is 244 million euros.

Again, the numbers. 244 million euros. 300,000 refugees. 0.6%. The expense pays off. I would like to break something.

# Paths

But they still come.

There are five possibilities if you want to cross Europe's borders (but really there aren't) – and three impossibilities.

The first possibility: the Strait of Gibraltar. From Morocco to the Spanish mainland. 14(!) kilometers separate Africa from Europe. But this path is closed, or at least nearly closed. Frontex is on patrol and Spain forces boats to turn around.

Second: the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, also in Morocco. Two fortresses, fences and walls and security cameras, the military, the police, loaded weapons. Whoever makes it over the fence, without getting shot or arrested and thrown out again, is in Spain.

Third: the Canaries, island colonies of Spain. From Senegal, some take off over the Atlantic in the direction of the Canaries, particularly since the Strait of Gibraltar is basically no longer passable. It's 29 km from Senegal to Tenerife, and so the danger of drowning is twice as high as the first possibility.

Fourth: from Libya or Tunisia over the Mediterranean to Lampedusa, Italy. Tunisia – Lampedusa: 150 km. Libya – Lampedusa: 300 km! Or you can go to Malta, Malta is very nice, too.

Fifth: Overland into Turkey and from there on to Greece. Europe can also be reached overland through Syria or Iraq. Could be, if there weren't those immense military and police apparatuses in place to prevent people from reaching Europe.

Actually there are many other paths. Or there would be. But with every euro invested in those “military defensive measures against refugees,” the possibility of reaching Europe diminishes and the risk of death en route increases: Poseidon, Hermes, Aspida, Zeus, Nautilus and Hera. That leads us to impossibility number one.

Impossibility number one: Death. Yes, death. By this point, deaths in the Mediterranean are just part of doing business. Greece simply mines its entry points. Some suffocate in shipping containers. The different ways of getting killed by Europe's borders are, shall we say, multiple. Estimates vary. Just one example: Spain's Guardia Civil estimates that between January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2006 and August 21<sup>st</sup>, 2007, at least 1,260 refugees died crossing from Africa to the Canaries by boat. Remember: that's the 29 km route, not the 150 km one.

We all know it: people are dying on Europe's borders. Every day. Now! But actually, no one is really interested. Only when hundreds of refugees drown at once do they create, for a few minutes, enough drama to get on television.

Impossibility number two: Push Back.

“The border control mission attempts, with the help of various European patrol boats and the support of reconnaissance aircraft, to prevent refugee boats from

putting out to sea on the African coast, in particular in Senegal, from which approximately one half of all refugee transports begin.”

“In the technocratic jargon of Frontex, this life-threatening course of action is called 'rerouting.' How exactly this 'rerouting' takes place the public is not told, because Frontex does not provide any meaningful reports. In 2008 alone, at least 6000 refugees were the victims of these maritime operations. Under the leadership of Spain, the Frontex organizations sent them back to West Africa like cargo.”

“The employees of the European Border Agency are to be obligated **in the future** to save refugees who encounter distress at sea. [...] The regulation is intended above all to prevent so-called “push back actions” on the high seas – in other words, actions in which often fully overloaded refugee boats are forced back in the direction of Africa or Turkey.”

Wow. In 2013, Europe has come so far that it will no longer imprison captains who save drowning people in the Mediterranean. Impressive, how well that works.

Impossibility number two can lead to impossibility number one.

Impossibility number three: Torture camps somewhere, but definitely not in Europe. We do a lot, so that Europe remains a dream for uninvited guests, so that they give up halfway, hopefully outside of the EU. Whoever doesn't give up on their own can be, for instance, detained in a large “refugee camp in the regions of origin.” And stay there. So to speak, preventively. What was it that I read earlier? “Frontex assists in border protection, but also does so outside of the EU, in the form of large refugee camps in Lybia, for example, and training for security personnel there. They work together with Europol and support security forces in non-member countries.” That's what you call 'development cooperation.'

And I remember something else as well: in the statistics it said “of 45 million refugees, 80-85% remain in their region of origin.”

## **Calais, just an example**

I find an article, in which Calais is referred to as a focal point of undocumented migration in Europe for the last fifteen years. Starting in the 1990s, after the collapse of Yugoslavia. 24 years to find a solution...

Calais became an unofficial transit point. But that won't do. Not for France, not for Great Britain. Because there was already a constant circulation of people.

Great Britain and France came to an agreement. Found a solution: France stops “assisting” people in transit and Great Britain tightens its asylum laws. Sarkozy called the solution France's *tolérance zéro* policy and closed the Red Cross reception camp at Sangatte. At the time, the camp, which had been built to hold 200, housed 1,800 people.

There hasn't been an official reception camp in Calais since.

Unfortunately, Calais is only one example of many. The circumstances in other countries and other refugee camps have been condemned by human rights observers in many places.

Some European countries, for example, have stopped deporting to Greece, since the situation there is unacceptable. The same is true of Italy. Overcrowding in the camps is cited almost everywhere, in Greece, Italy, the Spanish enclaves. Many people, especially in southern European metropolises, are at the very least homeless.

In Greece, in addition to racist attacks, notes describe how 40 people are housed in 20 square meters; in Italy, they speak of "inhumane" treatment. In the barrack camp on Lampedusa, the reality exceeds the capacity by three to five times, and will until it is closed as a result.

I come across the phrase 'impoverishment strategy' for the first time in this context, in a discussion of the thousands of homeless people in the big cities of Italy, where people live in ruins and tent cities. In Italy, the reception camps are provided for six months; after that, the people are left to their own devices, or to those of hate and repression.

The number of those who are eligible for housing exceeds the supply many times over. And those who are not: well, may their gods help them. The Spanish exclaves are overcrowded, too. Besides, people have been shot to death there, probably by the Frontex-trained security personnel.

## **Illusion Paradise**

The dream of Europe. For many, it falls apart, but it remains the only supposed hope. People can be held in the most precarious conditions inside and outside of Europe and never stop believing in their dream. They have come so far and for the most part have an extremely long and dangerous way behind them.

Some have marched through deserts, others were stuck for years in reception centers and refugee camps, in Libya, Sudan or Greece, in deportation centers, homeless in Italian cities, in Moroccan forests behind NATO wire, they came by boats or on foot, were raped and criminalized, they paid money to the mafia, an incredible amount of money.

The prospects are dismal, there are no prospects, only hope and illusions remain. A precarious existence awaits most of them in Europe, as well, only supposedly a better one. Paradise. Castle in the clouds.

Europe gives people paradise, like an act of mercy, after we have kept them in absolutely traumatizing circumstances, made it as difficult as possible for them to seek protection or take advantage of their rights, treated them repressively, like second-class citizens with no humanitarian priority, after we have explored every available avenue to keep them away, force them back or undermine them with impoverishment. If they are still there and still living, we try deportation. If that doesn't work, then the next stop is paradise.

The German version of paradise often means toleration without permission to work. You can live in so-called asylum seeker housing and kill time until we bring you a piece of paper with important information on it. When and if we will do that, however, we won't tell you.

That we not only refuse those who have arrived in paradise well-paying jobs, but rather, as a matter of course, with no questions asked, stick them into the exploitation machinery way at the bottom, and are inclined to pay them such a miserable wage that they could never support themselves on it, seems normal.

And so modern slavery is born. Forcing people into the informal sector, only to scream "what did I tell you, they're all criminals" and "if you've got to stay here, don't get too close," and turn up our noses.

These people are the hope of their families and usually have to support them, but who really gives a shit?

How can you face these facts? It's just not possible. It's almost as absurd as going back. Thousands of kilometers. Over borders and seas in boats and through the desert? Sure thing.

Of course, the result for me is the completely logical compulsion to revolt. Nothing else is left. When I put what I see and and what I read together, when I see the completely inhuman treatment before my own eyes, when I am first shocked and then only filled with bitterness, there is no other possibility.

I don't want to discuss things anymore, because I can't support things that are contemptuous of human life, but are okay, because self-described important people said so. As if a crime ceased to be a crime, because some idiot has too much power.

I want the whole fucking bleary-eyed European civil society to stop watching in silence, if not for flattering reasons like morality and conscience or whatever, then at least out of embarrassment or shame.

I want to destroy these people's illusions without taking their hope. That happens through action. I want to blur the lines between approved activists and unapproved ones, how they call themselves: refugees, sans papiers, migrants, only to notice once again how I am categorizing, dividing, cementing the lines. Damn it, it's not easy...

## Seeking Images.

# Questions



**The curtain falls and leaves all questions open**

**Images seeking questions**

**Words, again**

**Trauma, n.**

**State, n.**

**Privilege, n.**

**Activism, n.**

**Death, n.**

**Sexism, n.**

**Chaos, n.**

**The end of the inventory**

**Images seeking questions**

**The curtain falls and leaves all questions opens**

## Images seeking questions.

We have images and text. I see that the question *what is to be done?* is bound up in naming those things, to which there are no answers or no solutions. That are just things that are there.

If there are questions, they are questions about difficulties. The questions about solutions are still too intimidating. I can't find any solution-oriented approach.

Maybe I have only taken an incomplete inventory. That points, but doesn't answer. It is just an inventory after all, dancing in front of a heap of desperate-looking question marks, incessantly spinning around themselves.

Maybe the images are also trying to explain themselves, by looking for distinctions from the familiar. And maybe the conclusion to be drawn is that we have to cast it all off and start from the beginning, to accept that the old way isn't working.

It's like if you packed up all your tools and took off, only to discover when you arrive that none of them really fit. That all the preparation was useless. That your only insight is that all theory fails in practice. Lost in the world without orientation.

In the past, I worked hard on theoretical tools. I tried to free myself from my own past. To break out, develop radical ideas, bear the consequences.

In the elite bubble in which I am at home, they can be translated into practice. The bubble produces the illusion that it's possible to apply these tools, to base your actions upon them and so start down the path toward changing the current situation. Prefigurative bullshit.

Calais reflects the social reality of most diverse communities and backgrounds. And so it reflects a piece of unknown realities. Repressed realities. What is normal for me, the norm, natural, doesn't count anymore. The laws of nature seem to work differently. Attraction to things, to which there should be none. Solidarity, where there is nothing to share. We can't even work on making our tools usable. Time and the situation and the city work against it.

So we don't.

Not the tools and ideas against hierarchy, for a non-hierarchical way of living together.

Not the ones against capitalism in its unrestricted form.

Not the ones against borders, the way they are understood by those who live inside the borders that represent paradise for so many.

Not the feminist ideals, not the demands for spaces without sexism.

Not the idea that charity supports exploitation and helps the state to outsource its deficiencies to civil society.

Not the time it takes to develop things, not so-called justice, not dialogue.

But at the end of this string of negations comes a nevertheless. And a but. And that's why the images are seeking questions. The question isn't just 'what': it stumbles over an even bigger 'how,' and falls into a formulation: 'how to deal with...?'

It's personal. If the goal is to make Calais sustainable, then the individuals who come have to look for answers to all the questions that have none. And then decide.

Many go and don't come again. Some go and do come again. Go back. Toolbox unopened. Few stay. And what about me?

## **Words, again**

Words. I'm paging through the dictionary, scanning words. I'm looking for a method. A beginning. Words are an orientation and build bridges to the images.

I decide on thematic groups, blurred and inseparable from each other. They overlap, are justifications and phenomena simultaneously or are the consequences or causes or something else of another thing.

They are defined. In the dictionary. Definitions lead to associations, show points of view. Never complete, of course. They only show more than the words do alone, show my mind more doors, show the labyrinth more paths. They aren't likely to complete anything, only increase the number of fragments. Calais, Calais.

But it is a method. A method in search of answers to questions. Questions about how to deal with issues. These issues are stumbling blocks, points of confusion.

My analysis is grudging and personal. It's complicated for me. But of course it's absolutely necessary, if I want to continue in a deliberate way. It also means confronting my experiences and the honest question: can I really take it? And if so, how?

And somehow the words determine the way forward, they order my brain according to priorities and feasibility, they must be honest enough to admit that you have to endure a lot along the way.

The answers are a reflection of Calais itself. For some questions, they exist, for others, all you can say is: no idea. Some are feelings, some just say: forget it and others still are not a priority. There are some where the question itself is the answer.

## Trauma, n.

***“powerful emotional shock, which remains active [in the subconscious] for a long time ... (Medicine) a wound caused by external force to the organism”***

In Calais, it's pretty easy to get traumatized, as cynical as that might sound. Trauma for everybody.

The first problem is the nonexistent or at least seriously questionable infrastructure. The scarce (or again, nonexistent) opportunities to rest, the limited access to sanitary facilities, the irregular meals, the lack of sleep, the too many tasks for too few people. The basic situation is precarious.

From the starting point, you run right into the situation itself, without much preparation. The ongoing one. The events that come along with it, that often make it impossible to step back until your stress level is out of the red.

And that the borders are brought to the persons. That the unpredictability of what follows will throw them into situations, whose full effect will only become clear in hindsight. That, too.

Then there's everything that came before: you have to understand that a 'trip' to Europe, not to mention the situation in the countries of origin of the so-called 'sans papiers,' is extremely traumatic. On the way to a better life, they don't have access to help of any kind dealing with their experiences and their fate, which often lies far outside of what we can imagine.

And then there's me. Again. There's a serious danger of relativizing yourself in the face of others' experiences. It's difficult to say, 'I can't do it anymore, it's too precarious, chaotic, repressive, whatever' when people are sitting next to you who were child soldiers, spent five years imprisoned in Greece, witnessed civil wars, lost their families, were raped, live in constant terror of the police, whose friends have drowned. The list is long.

My own state of mind often gets defined as less important because of the circumstances, which in turn leads to me pushing myself past my own limits.

But a trauma is still a trauma. If we could stop classifying people by who was supposed to be traumatized when or stop asking, whether somebody can afford to be traumatized at a given moment, we would have accomplished a lot.

It's about revealing emotions that need to be processed, and not about preserving a facade. And I, as a person from paradise, live in another reality. I come to terms, so to speak, with having a trauma, most of all because of the stories of my friends. They traumatize me passively. That's what I'm there for.

Because I feel that the situation is so inhuman and unjust that it forces me to act. That's how I feel. And then, it is okay, I can afford to fall apart now and then, to vent, to accept help, to talk with people who I can trust and who have had similar experiences. Or to write. For this question, the answer for me lies in the question itself. How to deal with a trauma. Deal with it. Deal with it consciously.

## **State, n.**

***“the current manner or character; the mode of being of a person or thing at a particular moment; composition; condition”***

I write the word 'state' on the list (no, not that one). I like its definition. It is a question of someone's condition at a particular moment. A person is in a state. In Calais, this is often 'a state of transit.' In the best-case scenario.

This state sets the pace of time and determines how one acts, on all scales. It dictates the realization of actions.

It's important for me to remind myself that for the people in Calais or other transit points, the days are less important than the nights (here, in order to try to cross to England). Nothing is oriented towards the morning. In the morning, we will be in England. Correspondingly, any improvement of their state here, of this temporary situation, is relatively unthinkable, not a priority.

For me, this was one of the most important realizations that reduced my level of frustration and extended the time I stayed. All actions that include a tomorrow are difficult. It's easier living from day to day. Moment to moment.

Second part of the definition. The mode of being of a person or thing at a particular moment.

It makes a state into a permanent state.

Can a moment last five months?

Can it be the normal state of things for years?

How to deal with the state of things? I remind myself: Calais is just one day. Again and again...

## **Privilege, n.**

***“a right reserved for an individual or group, beyond the advantages of most; special provision, prerogative”***

Another perpetual question is privilege. The voluntary condition of witnessing a situation that others cannot escape.

It's difficult to figure out how to deal with it, since everyday habits are governed by privileges and the question of giving up these privileges also entails confronting them personally. Does that mean self-denial? Who am I without these privileges? What is left, when my privileges are gone?

Confronting one's own privileges gives rise to a rainbow of negative emotions. A sense of responsibility for feelings of guilt, for instance.

For me, it was very helpful to face them directly and give up my sense of guilt for having them in the first place. To understand and base my actions on the consciousness of these privileges. Examining them helps makes this possible.

In practice, it's not only my privileges that are important, but the lack of privilege of my friends. Everything has to be organized differently when people are criminalized. The practical answer is easy: make access easier. But, at the same time, this answer is too easy.

Besides, all privileges were not created equal. There are those that are obvious, like coming from one of the richest countries in the world, getting a good education, having as much food as you could want and more, the treatment that comes with being seen as white, and so on.

And then there are others, hard to make out, hidden, that form the basic of what we think and how, which assumptions we make, how we handle things, speak, feel - all the unconscious processes.

Make access easier. But how? How can I? There is no answer. Not yet. In order to find an answer, everything would have to be conscious and transparent. Which it isn't.

Here, the next part of the definition might help: special provisions. I think it's very fitting. And a good way in. Special provisions have a bitter aftertaste. For many people, the word 'privilege' is much too pretentious, it seems. At least, in many conversations I notice that the hands come up to wave it away. Where can I get rid of the special provisions? Declare them invalid? Where can I make new ones? Calais, Calais.

The rest has to do with rights. Special rights, prerogatives, rights reserved for a particular group. Of course, that's bullshit, these rights were simply taken at some point and privileges are the bitter consequence. It's like having unknown blood on your hands that doesn't wash off.

How to deal with privileges? No clue. My Yogitee bag says: you have to accept things in order to let them go.

## **Activism, n.**

***"active behavior, [progressive] goal-oriented activity, the urge to engage oneself, stay busy.  
(Lit.) (predominantly between c. 1915 and 1920) a political or spiritual movement which understands literature as a means toward accomplishing certain goals"***

The urge to engage oneself. Goal-oriented activity. Don't we often just react to achieve goals? Or does just doing something, anything count as the urge to stay busy?

The inventory says: there is a problem and I must be active. I want to take on responsibility. But that's all it says, it's just an inventory. It's just singing and dancing in front of those oversized question marks, and they are still pretty desperate-looking.

The urge to engage yourself: getting engaged is no problem in Calais. Treating wounds, doing door shifts, talking to people, finding food, distributing food,

repairing all sorts of things, printing fliers, organizing, visiting the hospital, dealing with the police, going to the food distribution, dealing with fascists, finding houses, tents and sleeping bags, taking photos - people, voices, languages, sometimes even an us ... all the time.  
In Calais there is always something to do. You are engaged. Then urgent turns into the urge.

The way the kinds of things I was doing in Calais is generally interpreted, even if it makes me stare at the floor in embarrassment, is charity. Or social work. It leaves an ashen taste in my mouth. I swallow. It's still there.

In my self-image, at least, I am not a reformist. I believe in radicalism, in the word radical, in its most original meaning: going to the root. No one has to tell me that that making tea and finding band-aids and a bit of garde à vue isn't going to bring the borders down. And that is the problem. That, too.  
I watch myself as I do things that have no connection to my political motivations whatsoever, like buying sugar, or refusing to let people into the women's house, and can only throw my hands into the air in desperation and ask myself: what the hell am I doing here?

There's a word missing in the definition: the *compulsion* to act. It's good that it's at least missing in the dictionary. Because in Calais it seems to be engraved in stone. The edges become sharper, the images clearer.

Part two: goal-oriented activity. Problematic. Goal. Goal? To support, change, destroy, survive? How does the urge to engage yourself and this goal-oriented activity relate to one another? Where does one negate the other, where do they work at cross purposes? Consciously and unconsciously? Does this urge, this compulsion to stay engaged, preserve the situation because it makes it easier to survive? Calais, Calais - again and again.

Goal-oriented activity demands political action on a larger scale. This takes time and space. For goal-oriented activity, Calais is too much of a good thing. It's an ideological tight rope act. Potential trauma.

What can I say? What is the answer to the question: what is to be done? Maybe: The situation in Calais is everywhere. (Un)fortunately.



## Sexism, n.

***„<no plural> an attitude, according to which one of the two sexes is naturally superior; discrimination, oppression, devaluation, and prejudice [held to be justified for this reason], particularly against women, on the basis of a person's sex”***

In a group of 90% men and 10% women, it's going to be pretty difficult, probably anywhere. Most of the time. The quota in Calais is, so to speak, not the best. And ten percent is completely exaggerated.

In this respect, I am lucky. I am a so-called 'hibrid child.' Well integrated. In my past, I often thought that because of my background I would never be able to walk the narrow path between emancipatory feminist struggles and tradition.

I often asked myself how I would explain feminism to this part of my family. The desire for safe spaces and the questions they bring with them. I often failed in practice. Visited less and less often. And when I was there, I behaved submissively.

I look at the definition: “the attitude, according to which one of the two sexes is naturally superior.” First of all: one of the two? At least here, my dictionary seems to be out of date.

Then: naturally superior.

The situation in Calais is sexist. Directly and indirectly. The whole time. Through words and glances, presence and gestures. In all possible situations. Reinforced by all possible people and groups. Whether it's the police, male fascists, or our friends, with or without papers.

The answer to the question 'what is to be done' is not always an answer at all. Unfortunately, it often is not: do something. More often, it is: do little. Look away. If you really want an answer to the question, 'how can we deal with sexism,' the only one I can give is: it's unacceptable. Almost always. Almost everywhere.

I am dismayed, because the answer keeps going. It means repressing a great deal, tolerating a lot of what cannot be controlled. On the Calaisian front, so many wars are already being waged. An apologetic, defensive 'this, too?' rises up inside me. Fighting sexism in Calais seems like too much. Again.

If I was seriously looking for an answer to this question, if I was really honest with myself, it would probably be: no more Calais. I can't do it. The struggle against sexism is too big. The continuous, persistent, omnipresent sexism that affects me as a self-defined woman. Another permanent state of affairs.

I'm fighting another battle, against borders, physical ones. Am I in danger of turning from the path if I acknowledge the sexism here? Precisely because I know that this battle must be fought, at all times and places, that nothing will change as long as this patriarchal, sexist construct remains a reality? The labyrinth opens up before me. I look away.

Just like with my family. I help my aunt in the kitchen and bring the tea, because I have the sense that discussion won't do any good.

In Calais, I also bring the tea. For the sake of peace and quiet. Because of my priorities. Terrible. This answer is a disgrace.

## **Death, n.**

***“cessation, the end of life; the moment in which all vital functions of a living creature cease.”***

People die in Calais. It's true that the border kills. Kills senselessly.

It is a fact, it's happened in the past, it's happening right now, it will continue. As long as the border stands, people will try to cross it. And accidents will happen. That's what murder gets called: an accident. People are so desperate, they will try to swim. Some end up on the wrong parking lots. And some are found dead in the water.

Death is a part of life that we have to deal with. It triggers feelings of sorrow, pain and shock in me. In Calais, it also fills me with rage, despair, hate.

A rainbow of strong, negative emotions.

I had heard a lot about accidents in the time before Senaye was found lifeless in the water. In the week that we found him in the canal alone, four people died in Calais.

That's the reality. I felt that dealing with meaningless death marks the macabre limit of the bearable. Those responsible are sitting in cubicles somewhere. In the evening, they turn off their computers, drive home and probably don't give any of it a second thought. They don't even feel bad.

Here, whole communities are traumatized, lose friends. Europe kills.

I try to organize the feelings that rise up in me, to pick out a few of the negative ones and place them before the others. I try to push down pain, sorrow, despair and bring rage to the top. At least, I used to.

How to deal with death? That's a bit too ambitious. I don't deal with death, death deals with me. Tears come to my eyes. The image collapses.

## Chaos, n.

***“Absence, dissolution of all order; complete confusion”***

The absence of all order. How to deal with confusion?

How do you deal with: doorshift-loud-broken pieces-police-incidents-fights-children-football-knock knock: can I charge my phone?-Christmas-houses-voices-people-awake all the time-knock knock: they arrested ... people ... because of ...-Sauvons Calais-new arrivals-chicken-knock knock: I need ...-bike chains-garde à vue-water-workshops-interruption-knock knock: can you register my French SIM card?-telephone-filth-knock knock: I need a tent-sleeping bags-where is the telephone-we need a car-who is it now?-knock knock: I need Western Union...-hospital-eviction-meeting-knock knock: I am sick-news-meeting-knock knock: fascists in the jungle! Everybody! Now!-briefing-meeting-another briefing-Salam-knock knock: I am looking for ... can you tell her to ...-funeral-antimold paint-knock knock: there are five new women and 3 children coming now-where are the band-aids? knock knock: could I charge my phone?-buy baby food-the telephone again-doorshift-“Hi! I'm new and I'm staying for three days”-Western Union-drunken-we need a car-neighbors-knock knock. Doctors without Borders-You want me to give the shot? Me?-people-we-languages-trash-broken bottles-knock knock: I need water-morning watch-accident-the gas is-knock knock: don't worry about it-empty-telephone-assembly-knock knock: I think we have scabies-hospital-ahhhh!-deportation center-where is...?-knock knock: can I charge my phone?-argument-briefing-knock knock: can I ...?-eat-go-telephone-everything is missing-sleep-knock knock: I am drunk-knock knock-accident-where is the fucking car-breathless-boundless-endless-stress-shock-hospital-knock knock: can I charge my phone...-laughter-taking photos-police! Everybody inside!-lock the door-the windows-the police are gone!-everybody out-please-knock knock: can I...-rage-reading-a visit- activism-newspaper-French-a brawl-baby diapers-knock knock...

The answer: to breathe. In and out. And again. And again.

## **The End of the Inventory**

We have arrived at the fourth act. Here comes the climax, then catharsis, no worries. The inventory sings, wobbles up and down.

**Images seeking questions.**

# AGAIN

**Difficult**

**Italy**

**Stones**

**Hospital**

**Away, again**

## Difficult

As hard as it is to leave Calais, it's just as hard to go back.

I get in my own way, the tension is unbearable.

I buy tickets and don't go to the station, try to hitchhike and just stand there drinking coffee at the gas station, only to walk back again, I'm nervous. I didn't even ask anyone for a ride.

I cry a lot, I've gone soft. I try to force myself, it takes four or five tries.

I can feel the realities splitting apart. Sitting in the bus, I'm relieved. My head tried its best to stand in my way, magnifying all the obstacles and getting stuck on preconditions that aren't necessary, security measures. Because there is no security in Calais.

I have to change buses several times, in Cologne, in Lille, I have to get out and wait and find connections, which leaves time for thoughts of escape. I have to disregard these instincts, again and again. Somehow I manage it, I win my inner struggle.

My friends pick me up from the train station, strangely enough it's not raining. Somehow it feels like coming home. I'm happy to see everyone again, even if it means that they spent another month in vain trying to cross this fucking border. Today, I'm happy that they're still there.

## Italy

I meet people and talk to them. We go to Victor Hugo, it's completely overfilled. Actually, "overfilled" doesn't come even close. The living room doesn't exist anymore, for the moment it's been sectioned off with bed sheets, about 20 women are living behind them. There are so many people that it's not bearable any more. I'm shocked.

The jungles have multiplied as well. The only thing that hasn't increased is the amount of food that Salam is distributing.

I wonder if summer is always like this in Calais. Less rain. More people. Friends tell me that Italy isn't taking fingerprints anymore. That as soon as they said they weren't staying in Italy, the police just waved them through.

From there, on average, they needed three days to reach France. Apparently there are 10,000 people in Paris, living under a bridge, waiting to continue their journeys. That is insane.

Something else that hasn't grown is the number of activists.

It means, though, that at the moment there are no borders.

Natacha Bouchart is still sitting in the town hall. She was reelected. She decides to evict the camps. Applause.



## **Stones**

We make breakfast in the former camp of the Eritreans and Ethiopians, instead of Ethiopians now people from Sudan are living there. Since the camp was evicted, some of them have been living in a squat, newcomers hang out under the bridge.

Here, too, the borders are clearly drawn. So we make breakfast. First there, then at the camp in front of Salam. On the way back, we go by the bridge that leads over the camp on the canal. We witness a fight.

Next to the bridge run the tracks that lead to the train station. The stones from the trackbed can be used as weapons. One large group is standing on the bridge, throwing stones at another that has gathered below, throwing back everything they can. They are screaming. War on a small scale.

We stop at the traffic light and jump out of the car, run between them screaming Stop and Please. Stones whiz by our heads. People with eyes insane with rage come toward us, broken bottles in their hands.

Across the street is a school. Of course they have recess right now. The children watch the refugees let loose on each other. Great. How long it took us to calm the groups down, I couldn't say. Too long. Passersby take photos.

In the end, more than a hundred people are sitting on the steps that lead from the bridge back down to the camp. Farther down, the other group, about thirty or forty. On one side, people from Eritrea. On the other, people from Sudan.

Alhamdulillah, a friend speaks Arabic and, after some back and forth, can figure out what the conflict is about. Someone from Sudan put his tent a meter too far into the territory of the Eritreans. Madness.

He also manages to figure out who the chiefs are, usually the oldest. They talk things over, hands are shaken. I am completely beside myself, I gather stones and throw them into the canal. This is my second day here.

## **Hospital**

I'm back to doing door shifts at Victor. I sleep in another squat, though. I want to be more cautious this time, take better care of myself.

Someone is pounding on the door. I open it and an excited, a drunken kid is standing in front of me. He beckons me to come with him. I don't understand and follow him.

He points to his friend and says something to him. The boy rolls up his sleeve and I have to restrain myself not to pull away.

His skin is no longer visible, there are only gaping wounds, little volcanoes of scab, blood and pus. As far as I can tell, everywhere.

What is it? I can only think: shit, shit, shit. Dangerous? Infectious? How many people have it? Which camps are affected?

We organize a car. Drive to the hospital. It's the weekend and the Pas Clinic isn't open. The Pas Clinic is the hospital for refugees, a container next to the normal hospital. The doctors there are all volunteers. Without them, we would be lost.

The doctors in the hospital treat the refugees the way police treat us when they've found a reason to arrest us: disgusted.

I wait outside with the drunk. He wants to go with his friend, but I manage to calm him down. Someone else goes, instead. When he comes out, I can see the rage in his face.

They took mercy and admitted him.

Seemingly it was not so simple. The doctor said, if he's been sick this long, he can wait a few days longer, then the Pas Clinic would be open. They are responsible for "people like him."

## **Away, again**

I go back. This time, I set myself a deadline, something that obliges me to go back, something from normal life. To avoid getting sucked in again for months. To get some clarity. To respect my own boundaries. To process my trauma and make a decision.

I can't just pick and choose anymore. Staying away and doing nothing isn't an option. It would be difficult to deal with normality. Staying away and organizing is one possibility. To stay there, another. I decide for something in between.

I want to come back in four weeks. I don't know yet that I'm not going to do it. That I will have to write everything down first. That I have to do it sustainably, without burning out. I can't always be there. I have to learn that.

# Finally

While images seek questions again, and I can watch it all from a comfortable windowseat in some big city or another, the camps are evicted. All of them. I shake as I watch the video: these disgusting police officers beating my friends! I want to jump up, drive there, be there.

I look at the pictures of police officers, standing in front of a bulldozer that's just driving straight over the tents. Logically enough, they could care less that they are destroying people's homes. I have to keep a grip on myself, not to run straight there. I know something will always happen, today, tomorrow, next week, it will never stop, as long as this border exists.

I see videos from May 28<sup>th</sup>. Collective action: the food distribution center is squatted and made into housing for hundreds of people. In protest of the eviction of the jungles. Together.

A month later, the food distribution center is evicted. And the three squats. In one day. People are deported to no one knows where. It starts all over again.

**Tabula rasa.**

Very early on in my life, I came across a quote. It's from Voltaire. It goes: "To be reasonable in an insane world is itself insanity." I still like that.

Unfortunately, Voltaire is not general knowledge. Many are reasonable. If for no other reason than that you seemingly have to be. What has to though? Why? For whom? Really? Can't it work some other way? What if I don't want to? What if I don't want to because it's idiotic? Because it's insane?

I don't have to. In practice, especially in Calais, that means that I don't act on the basis of positively formulated goals, but rather from a negation of the existing order. At least. Because there isn't much hope for positive things there. Is that embittered? Is that already resignation?

Janis Joplin sings: freedom is just another word for nothing else to lose. No, that's no embittered, that's not resignation. Negation can be freedom. For me it is. And how did it go again? **Do you know why we always gonna win? Cause we have nothing else to do.**

Maybe it's a circle, too.  
Circles have no beginning and no end.  
They are circles.  
Continuous.  
First search for images.  
Questions again, finally.

## Epilogue.

Sometimes it overwhelmed me. The language. I know how I want to write about myself. But what about all the others? Because there they are: the others. And they are more important. More worth writing about.

It goes so quickly, images emerge. I have consolidated people into groups, categorized them. First category: activists. Bam. A fiction unity is created. And on it goes: it's not enough, I create more categories, consciously, reluctantly: migrants, men, sans papiers, fascists, displaced persons, women, friends, etc. You can't think like this. I know that.

I would rather have described each person that appears in this text exactly, told their story, gave them names, let them out of these categories. I would have liked to express my respect for all the people I encountered this way. But personalizing them would have been dangerous and stupid. I can only hope that categorizing is a bit less dangerous, a bit less stupid.

Transparency and lack of transparency, sharing but not betraying. A tight rope. Again. Danger of falling. On the one side, the 'yes': to help people get started, to make the beginning, the connections easier. To more activism in Calais or on other borders, to more refusal. But on the other side, the big 'no'. I want nothing less than to expose structures, to endanger people. The answer can only be a compromise, another explanation for a fragment.

Calais, Calais. From the beginning to the end.

## **Support**

I share my thoughts, my feelings, my experiences with you. I offer suggestions, food for thought, maybe something different. And all for free.

I would be very happy if in return you would share something, would offer something. All of the profits from this book go to Calais Migrant Solidarity ([calaismigrantsolidarity.wordpress.com](http://calaismigrantsolidarity.wordpress.com)), which urgently needs your donations. Like so much else in Calais, money is scarce.

### **Account Calais Migrant Solidarity in France:**

Au delà des frontières "La Banque Postale centre financier de Lille

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## **AMY NON**

And one last time: no name. There is no name to go with this text. No face. Not that I won't sign it, because I don't stand by what I wrote or because I'm not open to criticism. It's more that texts exist to be read and it's completely irrelevant who I am. Whether it was me or someone else: it doesn't matter, it's completely exchangeable.

I want to emphasize again, that in all the notes and thoughts, all the attempts to come to terms with the experiences recorded here, the views expressed are entirely my own.

The content of the current text is my individual experience and has no claim to completeness. I, as an individual, am responsible for it. I would like to make a contribution. There isn't a right way, I think. It has to be fragmentary. I think.





## Memorial

50 years later. It's raining in Calais. The clouds hang low and it's old, windy and uncomfortable in the saddest place in the world. But the wind has changed.

Natacha Bouchart's grandchildren and those of all the other fascists who construct and maintain the madness and the absurdity. Behind them, the grandchildren of those who collaborated, who carried out the law, the employees of Frontex, for example. Next to them, all of those whose grandparents shrugged their shoulders and said: we can't do anything, there are laws, you know. Those who, out of disdain, never concerned themselves, they're all standing there. The party is over.

They're all standing in front of a big, black post.

A huge, hideous monstrosity. A memorial: a reminder. Not half so big as the little toe of the scandal.

The monument stands there and remembers. It remembers the crimes that were perpetrated on people over the decades in the course of the so-called impoverishment strategies.

The grandchildren of Calais's former mayor, Natacha Bouchart, have their names changed. The frog has finally stopped blinking.

They stand in the harbor and scratch their heads ashamedly. Down at the foot of the massive, hideous post, which, strange to say, fits in quite well with the rest of the city, a plaque has been mounted, on which the number of dead on Europe's borders is engraved. The number has a lot of zeros.

There can be no more discussion, when the situation is like this. There can be no dialogue between those that make these decisions and us: the people they decide about and the people who refuse to stand by and watch. We have to resist.

I had some idea of how I wanted to live my life. An idea, deep inside. I suspected that reason would not fit too well in my life plan. But I stumbled. Two, three, four times. I stumbled over that word, 'have to.' Have to do this and that and that just is like that and if you don't do that then and that's just because.

Back to the quote: in an insane world. At some point, after the fifth, sixth, seventh attempt, I started to question all these facts.

Don't I live in a place on this planet that has freedom written on its banner? So why, when I ask what I should do with my life, in a place where, at first glance, you choose whatever life you like, does the word 'have to' come to mind so often?

There it is, right in front of me. The collective insanity. It might call itself society or system, capitalism or something else. But the result is that you have to, the compulsion and advertisements and work and still more compulsion, little hope of insight. The numbing stupidity and manipulation and fear spin round and

round in this bizarre carousel. Whoever has everything has got everything to lose, right?

It works, still, again and again.

Because I don't have to, I don't want to. I don't want things. Even the thought that I'm supposed to do so much wanting is unbearable to me. I don't want to reproduce myself and put more people, lost souls or collaborators, into this world. I don't want a private empire, don't want things that force me to work for a wage.

My answer to life's questions is: not me. I don't have to.

# Additional Info

# Activist trauma and recovery

## How to manage your psychological reactions to heavy emotional circumstances and traumatising experiences.

One of the amazing things about activists is that we often deliberately expose ourselves to brutality when we believe it necessary. What is sometimes equally surprising is how little we know about the psychological effects of this violence. We need to prepare ourselves and learn how to support each other through the physical and emotional consequences of trauma.

### Three reactions to trauma

...that can occur after direct or indirect experiences of brutality are called "Post-Traumatic Stress" or PTS. You might experience all, some or one of them:

1. Re-experiencing the traumatic event: nightmares, flashbacks, intrusive memories, the feeling of not being able to let go of the experience
2. Avoidance / Suppression / emotional numbing: Losing the memory, self-medication (alcohol /drugs), self-isolation, social withdrawal, avoidance of everything that may recall the experience (known as avoidance behaviour)
3. Increased arousal: Sleeplessness, irritation, rage, emotional outbursts, panic attacks, fear, hyper-vigilance, difficulties concentrating and performing normal tasks

These are common reactions to extreme experiences. A lot of people have been through and get over it. People react differently and in different intensities to a traumatic experience. They also have different needs in terms of support. You can become traumatised by your personal experience, by witnessing, but also outside the action by knowing the victim or by just hearing about it.

### Two essential components of recovery:

1. Stay in a calm place for some time, where you feel safe and you have people around you who you can trust and who can care for you.
2. Work through the experience. Find words for what happened. Tell a friend in detail. Write down what happened. Express it in whatever way suits you.

For about 70% of people, these symptoms slowly disappear after about 4-6 weeks. But if they continue, this condition is called "PTSD" (post-traumatic stress "Disorder" - we disagree with using the word "Disorder" for something we see as a normal reaction). If your reactions don't settle after this time then seek 'professional' help (which might be helpful anyway if the reaction in the first weeks is strong).

It may be that "PTSD" only occurs months or even years after the experience (delayed "PTSD"). Basically, it is a processing dysfunction - our system does not process the experience. The experience is blocked, so it keeps on hurting.

There are different kinds of therapy or healing. The aim is to integrate the traumatic experience into your life. It will not disappear, but the pain will diminish.

### **Background to Trauma:**

Reactions are the attempt by the brain to regain control of our lives. Our lives depend on having a sense of some sort of influence on what is happening to us. If this power is taken away from us, we literally feel powerless, at the mercy of brutality, and this produces stress.

Afterwards, our brain and body systems seek to regain control and make sense of the experience to prevent it from happening again. So the brain replays the experience in front of our inner eye to try and grasp it, while at the same time we want to avoid anything connected with it. We become emotionally disturbed because we never feel safe, we feel bad about what happened. Even blaming ourselves is based on that concept, because if it's our fault, we'd act differently next time, wouldn't we? It's true that we don't have total control over our lives, but our actions and thoughts are nevertheless based on a sense of power and personal effectiveness.

### **Prevention:**

Go into actions grounded. Close bonds with your group and mutual trust make you all stronger. Have a go-round about how you feel, before the action, so you are aware of everyone's needs and strengths.

Inside our political movements:

It is vital to us that we are aware of how brutality and oppressive situations affects us emotionally. Repression or injustice is in other's hands, but we have the power to deal with its effect on us. It will be less effective if our mutual support is strong. Far too often, post-traumatic stress is still thought of as personal weakness. Often the support is not sufficient. It is essential that our whole culture changes its attitude towards this. What we can do within our groups is to create the foundations of a culture where talking about fear and emotional consequences of trauma is not taboo, or seen as weak or "uncool".

### **Possible reactions after a traumatic experience:**

- Pictures and memories of what happened keep coming back
- Flashbacks (the impression of reliving the situation), nightmares while asleep
- Depression, not being able to enjoy life, feeling lonely and abandoned
- Feeling numb, switched off
- Becoming withdrawn, avoiding social interaction, self-isolation
- Changes in eating, sleeping or sexual habits
- Stomach pain, nausea, muscle tension, fatigue
- Fear, anxiety, hyper-vigilance, panic attacks, phobias
- Restlessness
- Guilt, shame, self-blame, regret
- Inability to function as normal, make plans or decisions
- Irritability, rage, emotional outbursts, uncontrollable crying, inner pain
- Suicidal thoughts, feeling that there is no point in living

- Doubting political activism and relationships with friends
- Reliving previous, other traumatic experiences
- Hopelessness, belief that this phase will never end

### **What you can do for yourself:**

- Remind yourself: your reactions are normal and there is help available; this is a difficult phase but you will get better.
- Immediately after the experience: get to a place where you feel safe and take care of yourself. This may mean allowing other people to take care of you.
- Don't isolate yourself. Turn to your friends and tell them what you need.
- See a professional if that is what you need.
- Get rid of the adrenaline that is still stored in your body: go for walks, cycle or run, do exercises.
- Take your own time to heal, be patient with yourself and don't condemn yourself for your feelings and reactions. Inner wounds take time and patience to heal, just like physical ones.
- You might feel bad if you think that others are dealing with an experience better than you are. Remind yourself that people are different and react in different ways. There is no "right" way to react. (If you have had a previous experience of trauma, including childhood abuse, you may have more intense reactions.). Also, more sensitive people often experience stronger reactions. It's not a sign of weakness to feel pain after being attacked.
- You may feel guilty about what happened and blame yourself. Remind yourself: It was not your fault!! The aggressors carry the guilt.
- Family and friends often don't know how to help. Tell them what you need and don't need.
- If you think: "I don't have the right to feel this bad - what happened to me is nothing compared to X," remind yourself that you have experienced something terrible and that you have the right to feel as you do. If you feel bad, that's because the experience was bad for you. There is no point in comparing and contrasting brutality. If you accept your condition, you will get better faster.
- Avoidance and denial have damaging effects in the long run and will restrict your life. Selfmedication with alcohol and drugs may seem to help for the moment but has negative effects in the long run.
- Bach Flower Remedies and acupuncture can help you deal with the emotions. Valerian is good for sleeplessness. Massages and hot baths are always a good idea.
- Find out more about post-traumatic stress. The more you know, the easier it is to see your reactions as normal reactions to "abnormal" events.

### **How to support your friend:**

- Don't wait for them to ask for help. Be there for them
- Telling the story in the order in which it happened, chronologically, helps the brain process the experience.
- Carefully encourage your friend to talk about what happened, what they saw, heard, felt and thought. But don't push if they don't want to.

- Lack of support can worsen the reaction. This is called "secondary traumatisation" and is to be taken very seriously. It involves "shattered assumptions" - aggressors are known to be brutal, but if you feel that your friends don't support you afterwards, you feel as though the whole world is breaking down.
- The days immediately after the experience are crucial. This is when all the emotions are easily accessible. It's good to talk then. Later on, people often close up.
- Often traumatised people withdraw from social activities and isolate themselves. You may not see your friend around anymore. Go and find them.
- Sometimes you might feel you're up against a brick wall or rejected. See it as a symptom, don't take it personally and hang on in there.
- You might feel insecure about how to help. Find out more about post-traumatic stress so you understand it better. Ask what they need, don't impose your solutions.
- Behave normally. Pity or self-indulgent "overcare" do not help. The most important thing is that your friend feels safe and warm in your presence.
- Bear in mind that many people seem all right after traumatic experiences and that reactions may come later.
- Listen. Avoid talking too soon, too long and too much. We often long to give good advice rather than be a good listener. Put yourself in their shoes. Try and understand how they feel, not how you might have felt.
- Traumatised people often find it hard to ask for help. Be proactive but not pushy
- Traumatised people often struggle with the smallest tasks. Cooking, shopping, handling the chores for them can be invaluable help, as long as you don't patronise them or undermine their independence.
- Irritability, ungratefulness and being distant are common reactions. Don't take it personally, keep the support going. Saying "You really should have got over this by now, get on with life", is obviously completely unhelpful and will just distance your friend.

Important: helping and caring can be very hard for you, too. Take care of yourself, do things that make you happy. Talk to someone else about how you feel. Getting support for yourself will help you support others.

Good therapists can help. Help to find one. The therapist should have some experience of trauma work, otherwise it can be pointless or counter-productive. It also helps if they are politically sympathetic or at least neutral. You'd see a doctor if you had a broken leg. Trauma is a very real emotional wound.

### **What you can do as a group:**

- If you've all been involved in a traumatic experience, take time to talk together about what happened. Groups often go round, taking turns to give everybody the space to talk about what happened, where they were, what they saw and heard, what they felt and what thought, if they want to. Participation is voluntary and it is more useful if people have the same level of trauma; if not bystanders could become even more traumatised.
- You can also work collectively with a therapist.
- Remember: a supporter needs support, too. Supporting a supporter is essential.

## **Refugee support groups in the UK**

### **Asylum Aid**

(They can give free advice if you call them, and they have interpreters if you cannot understand English very well):

[www.asylumaid.org.uk](http://www.asylumaid.org.uk),

Call on Tuesdays 1.00pm - 4.00pm: 0207 354 9264

### **Bail for Immigration Detainees:**

[www.biduk.org](http://www.biduk.org)

Tel 020 7247 3590 (Monday - Thursday, 10am-12pm)

### **Other organisations and charities:**

#### **London:**

Hackney Migrants Centre:

Spensley Walk (near Clissold Park, off Stoke Newington Church Street),

Hackney N16 9ES.

Tel. 07504 332706.

Open Wednesdays 12.30-3.30pm.

Praxis Community Projects

Pott Street (by Bethnal Green tube stop)

City of London

E2 0EF

Phone: 020 7729 7985

[www.praxis.org.uk](http://www.praxis.org.uk)

The Migrants Resource Centre

South Westminster Legal Advice Centre

246 Vauxhall Bridge Road,

SW1V 1AU

Phone: 020 74026750 / 0845 241 0961

[www.migrantsresourcecentre.org.uk](http://www.migrantsresourcecentre.org.uk)

Haringey Migrant Support Centre

(only open Mondays 12-4pm)

St John Vianney Church Hall,

386 West Green Road,

N15 3QL

Phone: 07544078332

[www.haringeymsc.org](http://www.haringeymsc.org)

RAMFEL - Refugee and Migrant Forum of East London Ilford

Cardinal Heenan Centre 326 High Road

Ilford IG1 1QP

Phone: 020 8478 4513



Barking & Dagenham  
Ripple Centre  
121-125 Ripple Road  
IG11 7PB  
Phone: 020 8478 4513  
[www.ramfel.org.uk](http://www.ramfel.org.uk)

JCWI – Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants  
115 Old Street  
London  
EC1V 9RT  
Phone: 020 7251 8708  
[www.jcwi.org.uk](http://www.jcwi.org.uk)

London Welcome Project  
Stockwell Centre  
1 Studley Road  
London, SW4 6RA  
07438506392 (Mon., Fri. – Sun. 10am – 5pm)  
[londonwelcomeproject@gmail.com](mailto:londonwelcomeproject@gmail.com)  
[www.londonwelcomeproject.org](http://www.londonwelcomeproject.org)

### **Manchester:**

Manchester Migrant Solidarity  
Phone: 07466850588  
E-mail: [manc.misol@gmail.com](mailto:manc.misol@gmail.com)  
[www.mancmisol.wordpress.com/](http://www.mancmisol.wordpress.com/)  
The BOAZ Trust

Boaz Trust  
First floor, 110 Oldham Road  
Manchester M4 6AG  
Telephone: (0161) 202 1056  
Fax: (0161) 228 7332  
Email: [info@boaztrust.org.uk](mailto:info@boaztrust.org.uk)

### **Liverpool:**

Asylum Link Merseyside  
St Anne's Centre, 7 Overbury Street,  
Liverpool L7 3HJ  
By phone: 0151 709 1713  
By Fax: 0151 709 1734  
By e-mail: [info@asylumlink.org.uk](mailto:info@asylumlink.org.uk)  
<http://www.asylumlink.org.uk>

### **Glasgow:**

Glasgow Unity Centre:  
Open Monday-Friday 10am-5.30 pm,  
30 Ibrox St, Glasgow, G51 1AQ.  
EMERGENCY number is: 0141 427 7992

**Bristol:**

Bristol Refugee Rights  
Malcolm X Community Centre  
City Road  
Bristol  
BS2 8YH  
Email: [info@bristolrefugeerights.org](mailto:info@bristolrefugeerights.org)  
Phone: 0117 908 0844  
[www.bristolrefugeerights.org](http://www.bristolrefugeerights.org)

**Oxford:**

Asylum Welcome  
Unit 7, Newtec Place, Magdalen Rd, Oxford OX4 1RE  
Phone: 01865 200515  
[www.asylum-welcome.org](http://www.asylum-welcome.org)

**Leeds:**

Leeds No Borders  
Phone: 07784194431/07466699812  
Email: [leedsnoborders@riseup.net](mailto:leedsnoborders@riseup.net)  
Nottingham:  
Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Refugee Forum  
The Sycamore Centre, 31 Hungerhill Road, Nottingham, NG3 4NB  
Phone: (0115) 9601230