

**Safe Cracking: From Safe(r) Spaces to Collectivising  
Vulnerability in Migrant Solidarity Organising**

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## **Abstract**

In the context of the expansion and restructuring of the European Union, the borders of 'sovereign nation states' and their significance in an ever-globalising world economy are under continual scrutiny. The rejection and traversal of these borders occurs daily by illegalised migrants who continue to move; activists and community workers obstructing the physicality and enforcement of border controls, amongst many more quiet micro-political and everyday resistances. In this context it becomes important to analyse organisational frameworks and practices of transnational activist and charitable organisations working with migrants that construct boundaries and borders in their own practices. In particular, it's necessary to recognise that the political activity of these groups takes place against a background of racialised discourses, which, for instance, construct migrant men as retrogressive on issues of gender and sexuality and shared spaces as unsafe or less safe as a result.

This critical ethnography of migrant solidarity groups draws from fifteen interviews with activists and fifteen participant observations. This project looks at the ways that terms like 'otherness' and 'safety' are constituted, concluding that these conditions can be unmade and reconceptualised collectively through exploring shared vulnerabilities and the possibilities for solidarity through every day micro-political activity. Building on critiques of 'Safer Spaces', this project argues against the necessity for all participants to 'feel safe' in order to take part in the collective social reproduction and that there is room for productive discomforts as a form of praxis. The tensions that emerge when examining the individualised experiences of tackling vulnerability in terms of a reliance upon personal 'strength' and 'resilience' concurrently with more collective attempts at embracing uncertainty reveal

vulnerability to be a concept deeply necessary as part of bringing together disparate subjectivities in migrant solidarity organising spaces.

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Everything for Everyone.

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## **Introduction**

This thesis is an examination of a pivotal set of issues in many antiracist collectives arising from discussions in and about the space created at the intersection of gender, race and solidarity. Throughout my time in migrant solidarity collectives in particular I have witnessed many confusing and contradictory questions for current social movements, but none quite so challenging as those around safety, community, and *gendered vulnerabilities* - the latter a problem that is often made apparent in dealing with incidents of sexual and interpersonal harassment or violence. This research is an inquiry into the activist culture of migrant solidarity projects, but draws also on feminist and antiracist collectives more generally, and addresses projections of Otherness (through stereotypes, assumptions, dominant colonial narratives, individual interpretations of experiences amongst many others) and the

radically different distribution of the affects related to 'safety' in these spaces. It is a study of the impact of particular individuals feeling safe in these kinds of organising spaces and what this may mean for the Other individuals who inhabit them.

This work analyses activist attempts to create 'prefigurative' organisations (with the kind of praxis that could pre-empt the activity and ethos these groups would ultimately like to inhabit) and communities in which to enact experiments in creating safety: which will be referred to as collectivising vulnerability. The ideas here are informed by activists from Calais Migrant Solidarity, the No Borders Network, Feminist Fightback, detention centre visiting groups and other antiracist feminist organisations. I also interviewed one person who was active primarily through the charitable organisation SALAM. Through these conversations, meetings and my social/emotional/cultural life as an activist in Calais and London I have been witness to attempts to theorise the ways that various actors involved in these social movements differ from each other - primarily activists, migrants and local communities. What became evident through the writing and life of this thesis was that working on the practical and emotional issues (referred to as sharing the social reproduction or 'life work') necessary to produce these spaces together as migrants, activists and local people is of principle concern to transnational migrant solidarity activists at the present time as a way of undoing conceived forms of otherness. This resonates with Silvia Federici's proposal for 'a collective struggle over reproduction, reclaiming control over the material conditions of our reproduction and creating new forms of cooperation around this work outside of the logic of capital and the market' (2012, p. 111). Creating prefigurative spaces in which solidarity activists can enact communal ways of being is a fundamental aim of Calais Migrant Solidarity.

Part of the practices of organising across differences will be explored through the lens of intersectional inclusion. The Roestone Collective refer to intersectional

inclusion as the relational work of cultivating safety. They argue that the pursuit of safer space cannot be understood as seeking static or decontextualised notions of 'safe' or 'unsafe' places and people, but instead as a process of understanding and creating the kind of spaces people feel able to live together in, through negotiating difference and challenging oppression (2014, p. 9). It is a way to both acknowledge where processes of otherness are causing problems as well as a way of embracing the possibilities of otherness and what it would mean for the majority to attempt to become marginal in order to subvert current practices of exclusion. This thesis is designed to analyse some activists' proclaimed desire to pause the 'fire-fighting' mentality that has held back social movements from making plans, or strategising for a better way of living together. This is difficult as there is pressure to balance taking action against distressing and disastrous humanitarian issues in Calais, as well as to identify and remedy destructive patterns of interpersonal relations in the solidarity spaces which activists inhabit. Ideally these are the spaces in which activists can relax and reconstitute themselves, and without which there is little respite or time for self-care. It is a reflection of the way that activist communities approach conflict, Otherness and solidarity both in ways that can be built upon and in ways that ought perhaps be discarded, in order for the kinds of spaces used and produced by transnational migrant solidarity groups, feminist groups and others to become mutually-sustaining projects that can make migrant solidarity a form and act of counter-power and mobile commons.

My interest in this subject comes from my experiences in migrant solidarity activism over the past decade-and-a-half, and the conversations, particularly with queer people and women of colour, about the impact of assumptions about Others subjectivities in preventing these collectives from fostering a political climate that feels safe, mutually sustaining and enjoyable. This thesis is an act of critical love for these collectives and is born of questions, not only mine, about how we can think and do better to make a space where we can collectively thrive.

This project will navigate the political activity and organisation of transnational migrant solidarity collectives and projects based in the UK and on the French/British border zone of Calais, an economically-deprived border town that has in many ways found itself at the focal point for both the left and the right in the debate about irregular migration in to the UK. It is the location at which my political experience is at its deepest, the place where my life is intertwined with the lives of people very unlike myself in ways I have not found in other left-wing organising.

### **Political Climate**

At around nine o'clock in the evening, during the summer of 2010, a group of twelve activists from the 'Calais Migrant Solidarity' group pulled off the motorway that leads to the French port, and drove up to the stretch of abandoned road known as the 'Kurdish Jungle' ... we'd arrived with bags of rice and lentils as we were invited to dinner with a group of Iraqi Kurdish migrants. They'd already sourced fish and potatoes from elsewhere.

Suddenly a large truck printed with the logo of a well-known British grocery store swung violently round the corner. The driver stuck his head out the window: "Hey, girls! Get out of here! It's dangerous!" he shouted. "Why?" a number of us replied, although we already suspected we knew his answer. "It's not safe, this place is crawling with immigrants!" he bellowed dramatically. "We are also immigrants" shouted a German comrade in reply, "and we've come here to eat with them."

The driver swore loudly in disbelief and lurched the van back in to reverse, then forwards spraying sand as he turned the corner, the last we

heard from him was: "Well then, you girls are bloody asking for it! You deserve what you get!", as his truck sped toward the border.

(English, 2014, p. 5)

This excerpt draws attention to the gendered nature of imagined vulnerabilities at the border produced by the categories of 'them' and 'us', demonstrated above in the truck driver's implicit desire to protect 'our' women from 'their' men. It illustrates the tensions present in Calais as a town and as a political environment in which to organise. In the climate of such a casual hostility towards migrants - and in this case also towards women who will not ignore them - there is a pressure (and in some ways a political anxiety) to make migrant solidarity organising spaces 'better' than the rest of the world. There is pressure, also, to make the spaces that activists invest in into places without gendered fear of the Other<sup>1</sup>, into places where women and non-binary people need not fear gendered violence. This thesis looks at the ways Otherness is produced, including otherness as migrant Otherness. This means Migrant Otherness not only as other to many 'activists' but also considering migrant Others as a historic category produced through practices of racialisation, colonialism and Orientalism.

The above account of safety is but one of a proliferation in migrant organising in Calais. The Wellbeing team at the Calais No Border Camp were left to deal with numerous complaints about activist men drinking too much and doing things such as punching a young man for being too loud and 'hysterical' about the police helicopters flying overhead, and at another point, setting fire to rubbish bins next to the police cordon at the edge of the camp, one of which exploded leading to rumours of a make shift bomb outside the camp. The way that safety is performed and undone in activist communities by all those involved, from offensive language to sexual assault is the object of study here.

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<sup>1</sup> I use Other with a capital letter when referring to marginalised groups, and their Otherness in an attempt to bring this noun in to a more central focus.

Otherness will also be examined as occurring within activist groups produced through re-inscribing other norms such as sexism, racism, homophobia and other forms of structural oppression. Within the contemporary political and social context of variously-layered 'practices of homeland security' in the everyday (Brown, 2003, p. 1) it is easy to understand anti-racist activists' increasing investment in the construction of an activist notion of safety 'from below', and/or an interest in creating alternative or community-based forms of 'security' and 'justice' as a response (Smith, 2013; Wang, 2012; Jackson and Meiners, 2011). This thesis shows the ways in which this is truly a struggle, as to attempt this work is a constant unlearning of the societal norms about who counts as dangerous Others, and the understanding that people fail each other in their actions but can and ought to be collectively brought to account through community justice processes where possible.

I will detail the ways in which migrant solidarity activists have experimented with embracing a variety of concepts, including safer spaces, community accountability and grassroots justice, as an attempt to negate often brutalising and racialised state-sanctioned security practices, where 'protection' is guaranteed through tighter border controls and the consolidation of the prison-industrial complex<sup>2</sup>. In Calais the various organising spaces, squats, rented buildings, the 'jungles' (a more in-depth analysis of these infrastructures will be outlined in the second chapter on the Calaisian context) are spaces that are under constant attack by the police and immigration officers and yet still manage to be vibrant environments for experiments in solidarity; eating together, sleeping together, talking about the

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<sup>2</sup> The 'Prison Industrial Complex' (PIC), is a 'multifaceted structure that encompasses the expanding economic and political contexts of the corrections industry' (Davis, 2003; Gilmore 2007; Jackson and Meiners, 2011). Angela Davis describes prisons as rapidly expanding institutions reacting to the (US) national fixation on insecurity, leading to the use of prisons as 'warehouses' in which the state is able to deposit its 'undesirables' in the name of making communities 'safer'. She argues that prisons disproportionately affect poor communities and communities of colour because the notion of safety as it is currently constituted is gendered, raced and classed. The term 'Prison Industrial Complex' was popularized by Critical Resistance, a grassroots prison abolition organisation co-founded by Angela Davis (Davis, 2003).

politics of migration or war or gender, about our families, about our hopes and dreams, learning languages and about the communities we choose to inhabit.

The conflicts that have arisen in these spaces have brought up pain and confusion about the most appropriate ways to raise certain issues like racism, sexism and homophobia, given the individual and structural power imbalances and the short length of time activists, locals and migrants are likely to share these spaces before crossing borders. Questions of gender and safety became an issue of interest here following the limited discussion, and indeed a lack of discussion, in and around the jungle following the rape of a Canadian journalism student in 2008 whilst she was in town conducting interviews (Chrisafis, 2008). Although the suspect was 'unlikely to have been a migrant as he spoke fluent French' (Chrisafis, 2008) the atmosphere of fear and insecurity arose partly from this event and the media hysteria following the event. Organising in Calais continued to be shaped by issues of gendered safety at the Calais No Border Camp in 2010 (more about this in the fifth chapter of this thesis on Safety) and afterwards in an on-going manner, with instances at various locations including squats and the activist 'office' space of attempted assault, usually of women, in all cases reported to me during my fieldwork, by men- from various backgrounds.

From the perspective of the interviewees, their experiences of vulnerability in terms of safety and experiences of Otherness were both negative and difficult, but also potentially expansive in cases where it could be collectivised. The tensions that emerge when examining both the individualised experiences of tackling vulnerability in terms of a reliance upon personal 'strength' and 'resilience' concurrently with more collective attempts at embracing uncertainty in the face of structural power, reveal vulnerability to be a concept that, whilst not unproblematic, is also deeply necessary as part of bringing together disparate subjectivities in migrant solidarity organising spaces.

## **Chapter Outlines**

### **Chapter One: Literature review**

This chapter reviews and attempts to interlink the literature and theoretical frameworks that underpin discourses of migration, safety and organisation in transnational migrant solidarity projects. This research is situated within the interdisciplinary fields of Feminist Studies, Queer and Postcolonial Theory, Migration Studies and Organisational Studies, and uses various lenses to understand the constructions of Otherness within transnational migrant solidarity groups such as individual experiences and narratives about personal and collective vulnerability, activist conceptions of safety and security and whether or not individual privileges and power imbalances can be remedied in part by a collective commitment to become 'minor' or marginal Others' (Kaplan, 1987; Moraga and Anzaldua, 1983) as part of an embedded praxis. The chapter will begin by describing the postcolonial terrain upon which these organisations shape themselves, followed by a reading of Otherness and current theories of its construction. Then moving to then look at safety and the idea of safer spaces as a response to feelings of insecurity in syncretic organising spaces (Gilmore, 2007). Finally, it turns to the concept of vulnerability and the strengths and weaknesses of this concept as a theoretical response to the way transnational migrant solidarity groups have fostered cultures of Otherness in their organising strategies.

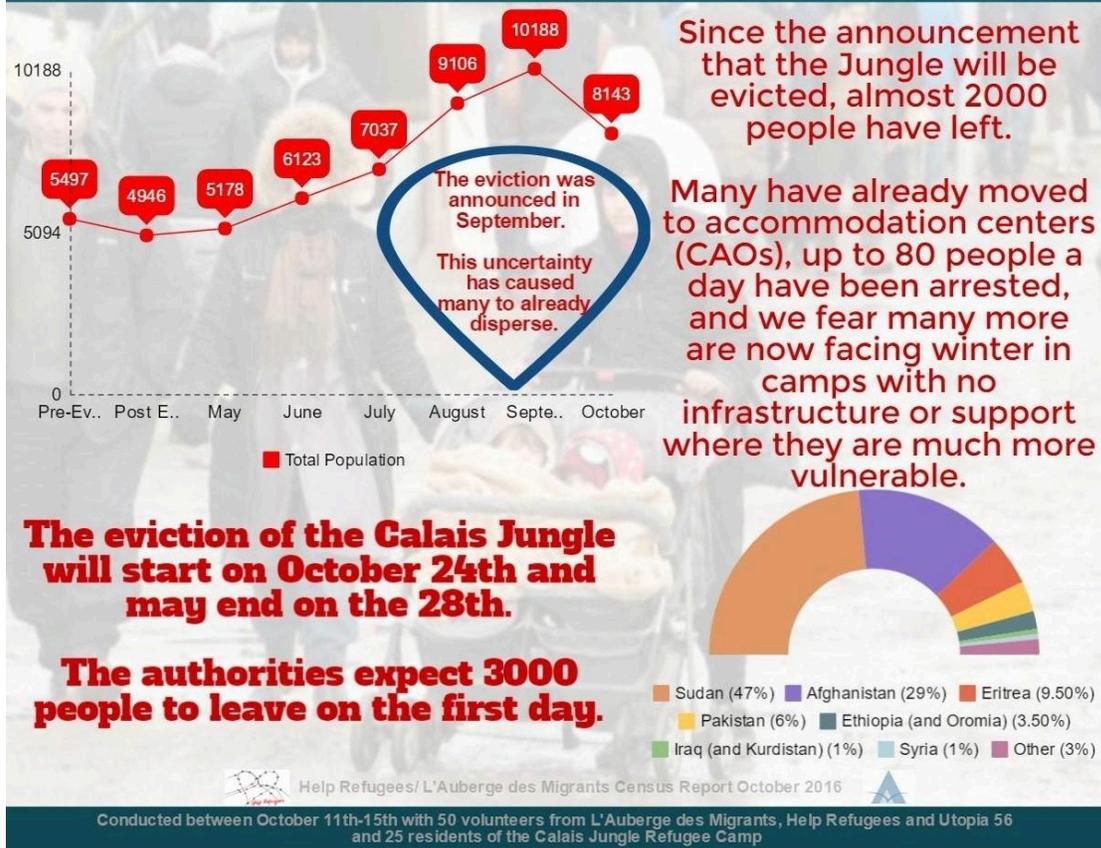
### **Chapter Two: Contextualising Calais**

This thesis will begin by looking at the site of my ethnographic work, Calais. Although this work is less about the location itself and more about the culture of

migrant solidarity work, it is important to lay out the forces at play in Calais in order to understand the tensions this thesis discusses. My argument is built predominantly from my interactions with activists who frequent the spaces in which Calais Migrant Solidarity organises, but it is a broader project about the operation of the kinds of activist spaces built by feminists and anti-racist activists more generally. Some of my interviewees when discussing migrant solidarity organising spaces drew on comparisons with people's experiences organising with trade unions, the not-for-profit sector, detention centre visiting groups, traveller and gypsy solidarity groups, and feminist academic reading groups, so there are multiple influences on them, which will be discussed in this section.

When I first started going to Calais there were a couple of hundred migrants sleeping rough in the jungle, at times during my research period (2011-2014) this increased to around 500, depending on the political climate, i.e. there was a large influx of Libyans and Egyptians at certain points, Eritreans and Afghani's at other points, some conflicts were on the news and other smaller scale and invisibilised by the mainstream media. In 2015, the summer after my research period, the numbers in Calais of illegalised migrants increased to 5000, and then 10 000 by the following October (see the context chapter for more on this, and the graphic below from L'Auberge des Migrants Census info-graphic for a break down of the numbers of migrants and their country of origin). The numbers of activists on the ground ranged from less than ten to over fifty depending on the severity of the situation and the ability to gather volunteers- the numbers usually peaking over the summer during university holidays. There was often more women than men in the Calais Migrant Solidarity organising spaces, so the absence of group-wide conversation and decision making around gender and feelings of security felt marked at particular times, as was reflected upon by those I interviewed (interviews with Rita and Anna).

# 8143 residents of the Calais Jungle face imminent eviction



(Graphic from L'Auberge Facebook Group, 2016)

Calais is a particularly good example of the kind of environment where a broad demographic of people are forced either by the conditions of their lives (the migrants in Calais and the local people) or drawn by the potential of such an environment to 'make a difference' to the migration regime (activists) as it is a political hotspot, represented by the media as one of Europe's biggest refugee camps (Dewast and Leenhardt, 2015). The specifics of Calais as a site will not be covered in explicit detail following the context chapter unless it is useful to do so in order to analyse the culture of safety and otherness in transnational migrant solidarity organisations.

## Chapter Three: Methods

My examination of the practices and conceptual underpinnings of safety in migrant solidarity organising emerges from my participation, particularly over three years (from 2011 to 2014) in both London and Calais with London No Borders and Calais Migrant Solidarity, No-One is Illegal and similar groups. In addition I draw on fifteen in-depth personal interviews conducted with solidarity activists drawn directly through my personal activist networks. I also draw on activist resources such as grievance policies, materials associated with solidarity camp training days, activist trauma support literature and other social movement documents, particularly regarding safe(r) space policies and trauma or activist support.

My research is largely conducted as an 'insider' activist and relates to the common problems raised by activists about the ways that we organise with Others. I have chosen to focus on the communities I am directly involved with rather than attempting to summarise the experiences of migrants traveling through in Calais, who are clearly the recipients of much more specific and concrete attempts by the border authorities to compromise their physical and emotional safety in systematic ways. I will go into detail about this in the methods chapter. As a participant/activist ethnographer my story (my subjectivity, my experiences) in Calais and the complicated ways that engaging with space and these activists as a researcher, has both integrated me further in to and excluded me further from producing a clear or objective analysis of the field, and my approach, as with all participant/activist ethnography, is partial. The question of personal distance will be discussed along with the barriers I faced to my research, the ethical questions it raised, and the aspects of activist ethnography that I found helpful and unhelpful in understanding the production of otherness in transnational migrant solidarity collectives.

## **Chapter Four: The distribution of Otherness: Race, Authentic Activists and their role in 'Migrant-led' Organising**

This chapter focuses on the ways that constructions of Otherness create barriers to the necessarily joint projects undertaken by migrants, local people and activists in Calais. It will start by looking assumptions made about migrants and their 'moral frameworks' that lead to islamophobia, racism and Orientalism blocking the ability for collaborative organising and intersectional inclusion (Roestone Collective, 2014). It will then look at the complex discussions and negotiations around issues such as abortion, domestic violence and women's rights in Calais, as well as pervasive ideas based upon Orientalism (Said, 1978; Prasad, 1997; Nandy, 2010; Abu-Lughod, 1998; Westwood, 2006) and racialised ideas of what it means to provide safety for women (Moallem, 2001; Leonardo and Porter, 2010). Secondly it will look at privilege theory (Smith, 2013; Leonardo and Porter, 2010), and what kind of analysis takes place by those who decide that by undertaking solidarity work you are 'leaving your privilege behind' in the hopes of eliminating hierarchy and forms of structural otherness in activist spaces. Thirdly, it will be made clear that there are elements of Otherness that are deeply important to becoming separate from normative conceptions that block the ability to work with others of differing subjectivities. The section will finish by looking at how becoming ungovernable, becoming the Other and becoming marginal (Kaplan, 1987; Moraga and Anzaldúa, 1983) can be important parts of co-creating spaces and environments for migrant solidarity.

## **Chapter Five: Activist Cultures of Safety and Security**

This chapter will examine the creation of Otherness through the lens of safety by exploring the political activity enacted by transnational migrant solidarity collectives, specifically practices of seeking and enforcing ideas of safety. Here, I focus on Calais Migrant Solidarity and the utility and/or impact of safe(r) spaces

policies in negotiating and confronting feelings of safety and insecurity within activist praxis and organising spaces. I will then provide an overview of the Calais No Border Camp of 2009 and the establishment of the Feminist Security Group as an answer to experiences of gendered insecurity. Following this, I draw from my fieldwork, including participant observations and interviews with fifteen of collective members, to examine a set of four emergent themes around the concept of safe(r) spaces policy in managing collectivity in transnational migrant solidarity activisms. The first is: Safety in the Spaces we construct together- Safety, Substances and our Limits, the second: Safety in/as Separation: Organising Along the Lines of Identity, the third: Safety in Discomfort, and fourth: Safety in Complexity. Using these themes, I will attempt to provide a series of reflections on ways to build on intersectional forms of inclusion as a way to avoid exacerbating forms of Othering and exclusion in the search for safety in activist organising spaces and practices.

## **Chapter Six: Collectivising Vulnerability: Organising Strategies, Sustainable Practices and Learning from Others**

This chapter will explore whether the production of Otherness that occurs in some organising practices, as mentioned in the previous chapters, can be undone through a reconceptualisation of disparate subjectivities as part of an attempt to become marginal. Shared projects necessitate collectivising individual vulnerabilities and redeploying them as tools in the quest to be open, brave, reflective and mutually sustaining, and in our desire to struggle together. According to Devenney (2007), this

entails a demand for equality in conditions of inequality. This demand is not that those excluded, marginalised or exploited are extended the same rights and obligations as dominant 'races' and classes. It is a demand for a re-articulation of the body politic which

transforms the conditions in which lives are lived, and the terms on which subjects recognise each other and themselves.

This process of recognising each other and ourselves is part of a reflexive practice that, this thesis argues, collectivises vulnerability through the socially reproductive work of intersectional inclusion. Individual vulnerabilities, far from impediments, could in fact be tools in our effort to create spaces for solidarity that are open, brave, reflective and mutually sustaining. The argument at the core of this chapter is that care needs to be collectivised as part of our work in producing transformative structures within migrant solidarity projects.

This is an unfinished project, and whilst this work will gesture towards instances of solidarity and trust gained through shared social reproduction and politics of the everyday in migrant solidarity organisations (those made up of activist, local people and migrants), it is difficult to know at this point what ongoing contribution the short moments of joy and understanding we share in Calais might indicate in terms of our collective ability to truly change the material conditions of migration. However, it is a start, and an attempt to be vulnerable together so that we may be dangerous together.

## **Chapter One: Literature Review**

### **1.1 Introduction**

This chapter will outline the different ways in which a study of the production of otherness within migrant solidarity networks is at the intersection of disciplines: migration studies and the mobile commons, protest camps literature, postcolonial organisational studies, queer and feminist studies. My contribution will bring synthesise work in these fields, arguing that safer spaces and the critiques thereof are part of prefigurative politics that relies upon collectivising vulnerability in everyday activist organising practices. By linking an analysis of borders, feminist conceptions of safety, arguments about what creates Otherness and what kinds of everyday strategies could be used to shift the connections between who is safe and who is Othered, this thesis attempts to wind together various theoretical strands to see what potential migrant solidarity collectives have in employing useful experimentations with the activist organisational form.

### **1.2 Migration Studies**

This thesis looks more at borders in terms of barriers to organising sustainably with Others, 'the borders between us' rather than looking at borders as simply divisions between nation states. Nevertheless the context is one in which borders are discussed constantly. Whilst my work does not take the experience of migrants or migration as the object of study, it relates irrevocably to the subsection of migration studies that analyses the operation of borders as 'a mixture of differential regimes and locations' (Sassen, 2015). Borders are designed by nation states as well as supranational entities (Castles and Miller, 2009; Mezzadra and Neilson, 2011), and generate subjectivation processes by establishing 'a specified stabilised circulation of desired social and economic effects' including but not limited to 'profit, property, racial division' (Nail, 2012).

That is to say, ultimately, that borders are biopolitical devices (Mezzadra 2015) turning the body of the migrant in the carrier of bordering enforcement, punishment and exploitation (Sassen, 2015). Yet, the borderscape is a space of political and social contestation. There exists the daily defiance of these bordering practices by migrant solidarity groups such as Calais Migrant Solidarity, No Borders and other borderworkers, defiance that would be meaningless without the autonomous action and community-building activities of migrants themselves across borders (Papadopoulos and Tsianos, 2013).

This has been taken up by academic activists in social movement studies such as Schlembach and Rigby (2013), Rygiel (2011) and King (2016) in their work on the informal settlements known as the 'jungles' in Calais (for more on this see the second chapter on the Context of Calais). For Schlembach and Rigby, who write specifically about the No Border Camp in Calais in 2009 (the precursor to the establishment of Calais Migrant Solidarity as a long term presence in Calais), the jungles act as spaces that allow for a 'rethinking of the nature of citizenship' and belonging (2013). Rigby notes that in the No Border camp, experiments were undertaken in breaking down some of the social borders which accompany physical ones through everyday exchange, 'discussions, exchanges and encounters occurred which disrupted the rhythms of everyday lives and the habituses of the activist, the citizen and the undocumented. In facilitating this, the camp helped undermine assumptions and preconceptions about different kinds of difference' (Rigby 2010).

In fact the places where bordering devices are most strictly enforced are also the sites where unprecedented forms of kinship, assemblages of subjectivities and organisational practices arise, at the crossroads of the complicated interplay between subjection and subjectivation characterising the so-called 'fabric of migration' (Mezzadra, 2015). These practices show the extent to which migrants'

autonomy exceeds migration management, designed with the imperative of a highly mobile yet controllable and selectable workforce (Moulier Boutang, 2012; Mitropoulos, 2007; Papadopoulos et al., 2008; Andrijasevic et al., 2010; Anderson, 2010; Mezzadra and Neilson, 2011). For Tyler, the border's principle role is to enforce social segregation through processes of othering (2013). This thesis will examine the points where new relations can be formed against the 'push' of bordering, and the instances where despite the objectives of solidarity activism it is a place where the border is most policed. The border in this instance is not so much a physical process so much as one bound up with processes of othering.

This thesis locates the organising spaces of Calais Migrant Solidarity, No Borders and others as part of an imperceptible, non-conventional, affective politics of mobile commons, encroached in everyday practices aiming at enhancing mobility and settlement, producing space through alternative organisational practices and challenging the mixed spatial and temporal constituency of borders and cities as well (Sassen, 2015). The autonomous practices of solidarity explored further in organising spaces in Calais challenge borders, they re-adapt pre-existing spatialities and create new forms of existence that recast social justice as politics of matter in everydayness (Papadopoulos, 2014; Vasudevan, 2015).

Migrants, as autonomous actors of our present, are makers of new routes, solidarities, spaces and organisations. The encounter of differences thanks to migration today opens the possibility for re-thinking political struggle and organisation (English, Grazioli, et al., forthcoming). This encounter is an occasion for a struggle that is not only a gesture of solidarity toward someone who has fewer rights, but a fight for a common – although not homogeneous – horizon, that is to say the construction of a new model of social life for everyone. This is what the politics of migrant solidarity and migrant solidarity activists are

experimenting with, and one such method for doing so is through the cultivation of protest camps.

### **1.3 Protest Camp Literature**

Rather than seeing Protest Camp literature as a 'punctual and case-based' subset of Human Geography studies, there is an emergent theorisation of the 'spatiality of, as well as the affect and autonomy' in these forms of organising (Frenzel, Feigenbaum et al., 2013). An analysis of Calais Migrant Solidarity as a protest camp is important in terms of both the social life of the infrastructures of the camp - what the structures are and what this means for relationships with Others (English, 2017) - and an analysis of prefigurative social relations or 'assemblages of affects' (Fox and Alldred, 2015; Pickerill and Brown, 2009).

Calais Migrant Solidarity as a project and set of organising spaces emerged from the No Border Camp in 2009, but arguably has ongoing particulars that make it part of a Protest Camp model. Camps at the border are often temporary (an example of this is the No Border camp in Lesbos see Alberti, 2010), but an ongoing presence can be considered a form of protest camping so long as it is classifiable as 'contested space, representational space, home space and convergence space' (Frenzel, Feigenbaum et al 2013, p. 3). Similar to other protest camps, Calais Migrant Solidarity organising spaces exist in contentious locations and are designed to communicate views that are at time unpopular with politicians and the mainstream media. The organising spaces are designed so that people can come together to imagine alternative worlds and articulate contentious politics, often in confrontation with the state (Frenzel, Feigenbaum et al 2013, p. 3), demonstrating that protest camps are 'unique spaces in which activists can enact radical and often experiential forms of democratic politics' (ibid).

According to Routledge, the 'convergence space' is one of facilitation, solidarity, communication, coordination and information sharing (2003, p.335). Frenzel and Feigenbaum et al (2013) argue that protest camps may be seen as the materialisation of Routledge's 'convergence spaces' and call for protest camps to be seen as not only a base for 'collective action and political convergence', but also as contested spaces of 'home building' or collectivised forms of social reproduction (2013, p. 6). Protest camps, cast as autonomous expressions of political questionings of the status quo (Feigenbaum et al., 2013) also constitute forms of shelter and care and have to grapple with the challenges and contradictions of autonomous care provision<sup>3</sup>.

This thesis follows in the tradition of activist/ critical engagement with protest camps such as the queer feminist analyses of Greenham Common (Feigenbaum 2013, Roseneil 2000, Mendes 2011) and the importance of analysing the distribution of power in these spaces along the lines of gender, race and class. The analysis by anti-racist and postcolonial scholars of the 'Occupy' movement in colonial settler states (Messina 2012, Hugill 2012, writing from the North American context and Sam Watson in McIlroy 2011, and Thorpe 2011 from the Australian context) also provides background to the way that race in particular shapes ideas of Otherness in protest camps and social movements. An analysis of race and otherness in No Borders organising practices will be the subject of chapter four. This thesis also joins writings analysing No Border Camps and the No Borders network more generally (for example: Alberti 2010, Alldred 2002, King, 2016; Rigby and Schlembach, 2013, Milner 2011, Rygiel 2011).

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<sup>3</sup> Frenzel et al.,(2013) goes on to argue that 'camps set up by state and supra state authorities, conversely, seem to provide shelter and care in the contexts of high levels of managerial control, in some cases deliberately aiming at producing conditions akin to incarceration. Refugee camps and tent cities however also show a long history of autonomous political organising.' (Papadopoulos et al., 2008).

Following an analysis of the No Border camp in Strasbourg in 2002 (Alldred 2003), Alldred and Fox argue that activist organising spaces, including protest camps, can be seen as 'events' or 'assemblages of relations - bodies, things, ideas, social institutions' (Fox and Alldred 2015). Within an assemblage, 'relations affect and are affected by other relations' (ibid.). Through analysing the relations between individuals, infrastructures and ideas circulating in migrant solidarity organisations during my fieldwork, it began to emerge, where and at which point a sense of belonging was accessible to some and not Others. I began to ask my participants what impact they thought it might have to try and collectivise the vulnerabilities felt by participants (see Chapter six). Vulnerability, in the sense that it is used in this thesis, could be seen to be what Alldred and Fox call the 'flow of affect' in assemblages; they also see it as productive of specific capacities in bodies, collectivities and things. Affects may aggregate bodies and capacities, (ibid) i.e. in this case, into a particular kind of activist, racial or gendered subjectivity. The development of activist subjectivities and how they function to create forms of otherness within migrant solidarity organising spaces will also be analysed in Chapter 4 of this thesis. The context in which these assemblages come together is steeped in historical power relations; colonialism, imperialism and empire and their role in the creation of national borders on the one hand, and the subsequent struggles against them on the other. This thesis joins other works that attempt to analyse forms of organisation in postcolonial, syncretic or hybrid spaces.

#### **1.4 Organising with Others: Syncretic/ Hybrid/ Postcolonial Space**

Migrant Solidarity projects as a set of experiments in social relations are just one of many similar attempts to re-express the activist organisational form as one that can incorporate strategies that may mediate the legacies of colonialism and subsequent issues of racism and power imbalances. Calais Migrant Solidarity is comprised of a network of activist organisations and individuals, people who live

and work locally to the area, migrants who are settled locally (some call themselves activists but many do not) and those mid-journey, people from faith groups, people who volunteer with the charity kitchens, and most are part of many of these overlapping categories. The coming together of these groups creates a certain kind of uneven space in which to organise collectively. This section will look to the theories that underpin the ideas that those I interviewed used to understand themselves and others as solidarity activists and the role that different subjectivities play in trying to create space together.

Conceptions of difference and how encounters among differences work are central considerations in postcolonial theory. One key concept that has fuelled debate in recent years is hybridity. For Homi Bhabha, hybridity is conceived as the encounter of two social groups with different cultural traditions and potentials of power as a special kind of negotiation and translation that takes place in a third space of enunciation (2009, p. xiii). Hybridity is the moment that cannot be translated in terms of the discourse of 'cultural difference'; it is the disjuncture that 'makes it possible for discursive authority to be renegotiated, despite the asymmetrical relations of power' (2009, p. xi). One way, therefore, to understand the shared organising spaces created in Calais is as those hybrid or third spaces (Bhabha, 1994), as the people in these groups tend to bring experiences and stories from both the global north and global south, and other complex forms of subjectivities, which can create certain conflicting aims and objectives. Bhabha's theorisation of hybrid locations or third spaces as the 'productive and aesthetic spaces of new cultural formations, consisting of all the doubts, split selves and ambivalences that constitute the colonial encounter itself' (1994, p. 34) is the basis from which I will seek to understand the gendered and racialised tensions involved in organising and forming transnational organisations, particularly in terms of processes of Othering (Abu-Lughod, 1998; Moallem, 2001; Nandy, 2010; Chari and Verdery, 2009).

The way that people interact with others who may have different ideas of what seems to them to be the very fundamentals of life (what it means to have a particular gender or race, or the responsibilities we ought to have for our family, what children can and should do for others and many other views and values that shape individual and collective subjectivities) is the basis of the tensions that occur in the third space and shape all elements of societies, economies and formations of knowledge, leaving western knowledge as simply one form amongst many others, produced by hybridisation and encounters, resistances and conflicts. Bhabha describes these spaces as occurring in the midst of the encounter between the colonised subject and the coloniser, where 'the incalculable colonised subject - half acquiescent, half oppositional, always untrustworthy' produces an unresolvable problem - the formation of a space where there can be neither the decisive victory of one over the other, nor a combination of the two, but a third entity (Bhabha 1994, p. 48).

Critiques of hybridity, such as that of Ruth Wilson Gilmore, who argues that hybridity tends to relate to two static and immobile subjectivities (2007) and that of Bojadžijev and Karakayali, (2010) who argue the concept of hybridity is inherently Orientalist as it relies upon the idea that there is a fundamentalist Other that refuses intermixing, lend themselves instead to using the term 'syncretic' or 'desakota' (explained below) organising spaces as ones made up of many fluid elements. These spaces are punctuated by moments where people have to negotiate their differences and the way that they feel 'othered' by particular discourses, such as those of gender and race.

When attempting to understand what kind of solidarity activists are attempting to build in their interactions with migrants, activists and local Calaisians it may help to try to assess the spaces used. Ruth Wilson Gilmore talks about the prisoner

solidarity groups and spaces she organises in (particularly 'Mothers Reclaiming our Children', 2007 p.181) as a chance for marginalised people to become effective political actors by bringing together those that have seemingly irreconcilable interests and backgrounds. She uses the term *desakota*, a Malay word that means 'town-country' which refers to places that are hybrid ('syncretic' is her preferred term as 'hybrid' implies a mixture of two pure origins) and are a 'form of organisation that is neither spontaneous nor naive nor vanguard and dogmatic, but rather, mixing methods and concepts... exemplifying the type of grassroots organisation that renovates and makes critical already existing activities of both action and analysis to build a movement' (Gramsci in Gilmore, 2008 p. 35). In her book about prison expansion in California, critical spaces are occupied by prisoners, prison abolitionists, family and friends of those in prison and the poor and racialised communities most affected by the social and environmental degradation associated with the construction of 'Supermax' prisons. These diverse communities work together as a mix, 'composed of those linked through coordinated as well as apparently uncoordinated forces of habitation and change' (2008, p. 36). Within these *desakota* organising communities there is a 'respatialisation of the social', so that communities previously united around race or ethnic categories form the basis for syncretising previously separate political movements, 'illuminating shared problems without by-passing particularity' (2008, p. 44). The concept was picked up by Robert Alvarez to discuss the political economy of bricks and mangoes across the US-Mexico border as a way to move away from state-centric accounts of the border, emphasising instead the way that both mangoes and bricks are shaped and reconstituted by processes of movement illuminating what borders are and what they can do (Alvarez 2012).

If we use the *desakota* as a way to think of the office, or the series of spaces hosted by Calais Migrant Solidarity, it can be understood as processes of movement and containment that have brought the various transborder people together in what Gilmore refers to as the 'forgotten places' that plant the 'seeds of grassroots

planning', places of imperceptible politics (Tsianos, Papadopulos and Stephenson, 2012) and places in which experiments in care and everyday utopia (Cooper, 2013) can take form.

## **1.5 Otherness**

The initial argument of this thesis is that Otherness, and the feelings people attributed to it, has been a root cause of transnational migrant solidarity activists failing to act in cohesive collective strategies to change life at the border. This conception of Otherness has drawn from sociological perspectives about how people who are part of a majority understand Others who are part of a minority and the assumptions and power relations that emerge as a result. There are writings about Otherness as a sociological category with its origins in philosophy, some of which will be discussed below, and there are texts about how Otherness is enacted through political and historical processes that rely upon racism, sexism, homophobia and so on (Agathangelou et al 2008, Haritaworn et al 2008, Moallem 2001, Richardson 2005). This second set is of interest as it is important to political activists that they are able to monitor changes in social relations as political relations also change, for example the increase Islamophobia following the September 11, 2001 terror attacks.

The Other is for Sartre, another 'free-self' a fellow human being, another 'being-for-itself, as the Other is also for themselves, concerns are often initially raised in determining if they ally with, or rather limit and challenge our freedom?' (1946). Sartre illustrates this dynamic through the colonial encounter and the amorphous master-slave relationship that he argues best embodies this tension between self and other. This concept may be seen by some postcolonial theorists as relying too heavily on the master-slave binary, but power in this scenario is erratic and interrupted. Hegel notes the ambivalence of this relationship where the master

relies on the slave for his definition; how can he ever be sure he is the master when the slaves are only saying so to stay alive? (1967, p. 800).

This master-slave dynamic is the basis of conversations about Otherness in postcolonial texts as it continues to haunt social relations today. This analysis of power relations was readily apparent in my interviews, as activists know that racism in different forms haunts migrant organising projects in Calais and elsewhere. The question people most wanted to explore was what Simone De Beauvoir asks in the *Second Sex*, 'When we are with others, can we become 'for-others?' (De Beauvoir in Ferencz-Flatz, 2015). De Beauvoir writes about Otherness becoming exclusionary in social relationships if the groups in question cannot see the need for reciprocity in their relations, what she calls 'friendliness and solidarity'. She relates this concept to Heidegger's *Mitsein*, which involves both 'indifference' and 'quarrelling' but can also mean a sense of community, citizenship, understanding, care, empathy: a being 'well-disposed toward each other'; creating interdependent projects in and for the world (Ferencz-Flatz, 2015). According to Hegel, this is not always possible; He argues that consciousness itself is a 'fundamental hostility towards every other consciousness; the subject can be posed only in being opposed – he sets himself up as the essential, as opposed to the other, the inessential, the object' (in Ferencz-Flatz, 2015). It is in countering this desire that it becomes necessary to explore Otherness as it is experienced through gender, race, class, sexuality and other markers.

The critique of Othering can itself, if unreflexive in its importation of activist politics, produce Otherness. Indeed, the problems with critiquing experiences of difference along the lines of gender in Calais is not necessarily that they are incorrect - at times it can be more a more dangerous place to navigate as a woman. Rather, the problem is perpetuating the idea that it is an unalterable fact attributable to another's 'cultural bias' (Mascia-Lees 2010, Fitzgerald and Muszynski 2007, Stoler 1989,

Levine 2000). This can foster an environment where a particular subjectivity is continually projected on to Others, making relationships more difficult to forge. The idea that if women go in to the 'jungles' alone then they have to 'admit they are taking a risk' (fieldwork notes, Calais August 2014) and other such assessments of what 'migrants are like' and what 'women should do' is an on-going challenge for Calais Migrant Solidarity.

Vron Ware argues that gendered and racialised assumptions are widespread because definitions of womanhood and femininity are 'culturally constructed within the interlocking systems of domination that they also help to shape' (1992, p. 253). She goes on to say that it is not necessary to stop fighting the sexism women experience just because an analysis of power that takes race in to account is developed; 'feminists can dissociate themselves from racist assumptions about predatory black men and vulnerable white women while continuing to campaign against violence from men in general' (1992, p. 253).

The historical precedent for this sort of understanding of racialised gender relations harks back to an earlier phase of the colonial project where 'white women were mobilised as bearers of morality... as they were supposed to have qualities of gentility, morality and piety and to embody the 'purity' of the white race (Perry 1997, p. 501) constructing white women as natural agents of social control (1997, p. 502, Mohanty 1984). The discomfort felt by activists who are people of colour in migrant solidarity projects and their relationship to racial othering, and activists who spend more time with migrant men than activists in Calais and thus have a different experience of who to trust will be explored further in the chapter four on Otherness.

Ware concludes that 'white and black women can unite ... against the combination of gender, class and race relations that forbids cultural differences and fears the dominant culture will be 'swamped' by an Other one' (1992, p. 253), and this project is one attempt at fostering the spaces to create this desire.

Another way of viewing this combination of gender, class and race relations is through the lens of intersectionality, a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1991.

Intersectionality is an analytic sensibility, a way of thinking about identity and its relationship to power. Originally articulated on behalf of black women, the term brought to light the invisibility of many constituents within groups that claim them as members, but often fail to represent them. Intersectional erasures are not exclusive to black women. People of color within LGBTQ movements; girls of color in the fight against the school-to-prison pipeline; women within immigration movements; trans women within feminist movements; and people with disabilities fighting police abuse — all face vulnerabilities that reflect the intersections of racism, sexism, class oppression, transphobia, able-ism and more.

(Crenshaw, 2015)

My work builds on the way that the Roestone collective have instrumentalised this term as a way to call for social movements driven by 'intersectional inclusion' (2014). There are similar calls for understanding the way that all identities are shaped by multiple forces outside of ourselves such as Avery Gordon's 'complex personhood' (1997) that refers to the way that each identity or category of being is 'haunted' by the ghosts of others- by which she means that the identity 'woman' is in many ways shaped by forces outside of it but, equally, transformed by it such as race, ability or disability, class and so on. I have chosen to use the term intersectional inclusion as part of an experimentation with ways to create syncretic spaces existing across the mobile commons.

One of the struggles around questions of difference and identity that migrant solidarity work produces is the question of whose voice matters most and how to be led by those who need material change the most. This is related to by my participants through the lens of 'privilege theory', which will be discussed further on.

Privilege theory or politics has gained traction in left organising in recent years as part of a move towards being more reflexive about one's own personal situation or position in society (Blum, 2008; Gordon 2004; McIntosh, 1988; Smith 2013). Activists in my interviews used this as a lens to convey that they believed they had greater access to forms of safety and feeling safe than migrants, but as Lewis Gordon has pointed out, there is a problem in referring to the benefits all should have but which those of the dominant social group (white people/those with citizenship papers/heterosexual people and so on) disproportionately do have currently as 'privileges'. Privileges are generally counterposed to 'rights'. However, many of the things that are called 'privileges' have the character of either rights or things it is appropriate for someone to expect to have, such as; being able to have a home of one's choice, having one's voice heard in various settings, and so on. These are referred to as 'privileges', of course, because of the comparison with marginalised people who do not have them. However, Gordon suggests that we revise our vocabulary for expressing this point, as we do not want to imply that anyone who has these things should not have them nor expect to have them (Gordon, 2004). Privilege was generally used in this thesis as a way for people to describe the effects of safety that they experienced. Safety and making spaces safe will be discussed below. The conversation about 'privilege' as a lens of power analysis is a much discussed, disputed and revisited topic amongst activists<sup>4</sup> with a tension between the necessity to reflect on one's social position and the need to take action to remedy imbalances in society at the fore.

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<sup>4</sup> A comprehensive overview of the critiques of privilege theory in activist communities can be found here: [http://dysophia.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Dysophia4\\_Complete.pdf](http://dysophia.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Dysophia4_Complete.pdf)

Privilege theory has arguably been brought to the attention of activists via Peggy McIntosh's invisible knapsack (1988) with the idea that white people, especially men, go through life with the means to deal with any given situation successfully because of the tools of privilege, sometimes connected to the idea of social capital (Bourdieu, in Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 11), that they take with them. The differences in the material conditions of the lives of the activists in Calais Migrant Solidarity (CMS) and those sleeping in the jungles is frequently appraised as stark, and thus it has felt necessary for some activists to try and make sense of how to participate together and understand the barriers to doing so. The trappings of privilege can be seen as one explanation of white supremacy and borders and a way of personalising an antiracist perspective.

Some argue that privilege theory is emergent the writings of Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth*, and his decolonisation theory (O'Driscoll 2013, p. 55, Kane 2007, p. 353). O'Driscoll argues that Fanon's attentiveness to internal processes and psychoanalytic readings of race and everyday political praxis make reflecting on one's individual privilege irrevocably intertwined with practices of decolonisation. Fanon's work arguably challenges each person to ask themselves about their own complicity in 'Western hegemony' (Dei and Simmons 2010, p. 2) which some argue is the reflexive element of privilege theory. Those that disagree that privilege theory can ever be a motivating factor in antiracist politics argue that in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), Fanon makes explicit that no one is responsible for the privilege they were born into: 'I do not have the right to allow myself to be mired in what the past has determined. I am not the slave of the Slavery that dehumanised my ancestors. I, as a man of colour, do not have the right to hope that in the white man there will be a crystallisation of guilt toward the past of my race' (Fanon, 1952, p. 226). Instead, Fanon argued that decolonisation would be 'born out of the womb of the revolution and take shape through self-awareness' (Fanon, 1952 p. 232). Some activists in

Calais claim that the self-awareness they develop in Calais is the reason that they wish to abandon or compensate somehow for the 'privileges' they enjoy. They discuss the tensions between examining individual responsibility and institutionalised inequality and the struggles against both in the chapter on Otherness.

One way that the activists in migrant solidarity organisations struggle against their own feelings of inadequacy about being born with so much relative privilege is by setting up hierarchies of oppression within activist circles to displace their feelings of relative power onto others. According to Harriss writing about the feminist movement, 'an obsession seized the movement for self-labelling and labelling others, not to elucidate but to fix a (woman) somewhere along a pre-determined hierarchy of oppressions in order to justify or contest a political opinion by reference to a speaker's identity (Harriss in Briskin, 1990). This is known as 'identity politics', and whilst openly maligned within the movements themselves, the use of identity to gain legitimacy is not uncommon. Similarly there is a sense of competition amongst activists about how much 'solidarity work' they do to offset these feelings of privilege. The more one is seen to be doing, the less it matters that one enjoys relative social privilege.

Through this project it became clear that it is difficult to find anyone who feels like an 'authentic activist' with most of my participants suggesting that they do not do enough 'political work', or look the right way or know the right language to be a 'real' activist. They largely feel like outsiders to a project with seemingly no insiders. Szerszynski's analysis of activist culture argues that activism is a 'cultural politics which operates not simply by marking and performing the boundary of its own form of life. It does so in such a way that beckons those outside its boundary, hailing them with a moral claim that one *should* be on the *inside*' (1999, p. 212, emphasis in original). This is a reflection upon a certain kind of moralism where those on the

outside, certain Others on the peripheries, are compelled through certain emotions such as guilt or despair to enter a 'doing' space or culture that activist culture claims for itself. The idea that activists always feel that they are not doing enough and are not authentic activists is a kind of Otherness produced by activist culture that will be explored in the first empirical chapter on Otherness. The next section will look at the construction of safer space as an answer to mediating otherness.

### **1.6 Approaching Safer Spaces as Prefigurative Politics**

The origins for this focus come from an investigation I conducted in my Masters dissertation into concepts of safety at the No Borders camp in Calais in 2009. At the camp, a complaint was brought to the general meeting about 'Afghan men' following women in to their tents uninvited. The solution was the formation of a 'Feminist Security Group' set up to 'patrol' the 'Afghan area' day and night for the duration of the camp (more details can be found in chapter five on safety). I started to look at what literature existed around white women's safety being posited as if it is in competition with the safety of non-white people - sometimes referred to as the gender versus race dichotomy (Fitzgerald and Muszynski 2007, Stoler 1989, Levine 2000, Haritaworn et al 2008, Agathangelou et al: 2008, Moallem 2001, Puar and Rai 2001, Richardson: 2005, Ware 1992).

The provision of safety or a safe space (Salvage Project- see Downes and Hanson et al., 2016; Roestone Collective, 2014; Ahmed, 2007; Evans & Boyte, 1992; Gamson, 1996; Polletta 1999) particularly for marginalised identities within activist organising, has been taken up in various ways by activist communities, employing methods such as: establishing spaces organised around identity such as lesbian-only spaces (Roestone Collective 2014); through the enactment of safer spaces policies and subsequent removal of those deemed 'unsafe' (Duff, 2016); and through the creation of alternative models of 'justice' separate from calling in police or

mainstream legal measures such as community justice projects, (Davis, 2003; Klieman, 2009; Gottschalk, 2006; Lambie 2013; and the writings of organisations such as INCITE!, 2013; Salvage, 2016; LaDiYfest, Sheffield, 2015) . There are writings about the climate in which a focus on safety has emerged following the events of September 11, 2001 and their impact on everyday life, including the spheres of feminist and queer activism (Puar and Rai 2001; Moallem, 2001; Vaughan-Williams, 2008) and more general work on prison abolition, not only in activist spheres but across society (Davis, 2003, INCITE!, 2012, CARA, 2007). As an activist ethnography, this research follows the work of anti-prison activists such as Ruth Wilson Gilmore whose work examines the organising of the mothers of prisoners and local people opposing prison expansion (2007). The strength of this work is the focus on the ways in which collectivising aspects of social reproduction (the mother's groups would do each other's washing and cooking and care for each other's children whilst others visited their children in prison or advocated for them at police stations) became a powerful part of their organising strategy. It is important to note that none of these examples have looked at the concept of safety in terms of collective organising in transnational migrant solidarity organisations, but the contributions that follow are from black feminist scholarship and current works on the idea of safety and the importance of the principles of intersectional inclusion in activist spaces.

According to critical race scholars Jackson and Meiners, feeling 'safe' in the first place appears to be indicated by an absence of particular emotional responses such as anger, disgust, pain, shame, pity and fear (2011, p. 276). These 'negative emotions' can be projected onto marginalised bodies, those we might call 'Others'. It makes it difficult to call upon a positive notion of safety when public space is *constructed* as dangerous (Koskela, 2003). In my interviews with those working and volunteering in Calais the increased policing and surveillance in Calais had not left people feeling that they were safer – in fact the rapid increase in the number of police patrolling the ports made people more worried and suspicious, not less.

Additionally, the locations where surveillance is likely to be most dense, and which are thus thought to be the most dangerous, are places not frequented by the general public. Wang argues that these locations – including urban ghettos, prisons, and Native American Reservations (2012, p. 154) are examples of such sites. This thesis argues that the migrant ‘jungles’ of Calais would also fit within this remit. Besides the one-dimensional representation of these places as ‘zones of abject vulnerability’, criminality and danger, the everyday realities of these places are almost entirely outside and absent from mainstream media representations, appearing only as places to be feared and avoided at all cost (Jackson and Meiners, 2012, p.155, Koskela, 2003 p. 294).

As part of an experiment in how to keep (women in particular) feeling safe in Calais without having to involve the police or organise ‘patrols’, the collective tried to prevent potential issues of interpersonal violence by providing ‘women-only sleeping spaces’ in the office in Calais. There are numerous examples of women only ‘barrios’ or neighborhoods such as the one at the No Borders Camp in Strasbourg in 2012<sup>5</sup> and the G8 counter-demonstrations in Rostock (Global Policy Forum 2007), women-only protest camps such as Greenham Common (see Roseneil 2000) and women-only feminist organising spaces (see Freund 2011 writing about the Occupy protests in Zuccotti Park, Roestone Collective (2014) writing about Lesbian Land) as a strategy for finding an ideal and safe way in which to organise collectively. Attempting to decide who would make a space safe or unsafe dependent on their gender identity was eventually found to have varying consequences (see more in chapter four on safety).

The Roestone collective write about the demise of a lesbian community that existed in the 1980s after some women gave birth to sons, leading to debates about the age

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<sup>5</sup> More about the ‘barrio’ system can be found here:  
<http://www.noborder.org/strasbourg/topics/univ/display.php%3Fid=161&lang=en.html>,

at which young men might become 'unsafe' (2014, p. 10). Similar critiques were made at Occupy Vancouver in terms of constructing women's safety as something that is inherently more possible in women-only spaces, something not always felt to be true by black feminists in particular (Mindful Occupation, 2012, p.9). The gender-versus-race dichotomy in feminist organising has a long been critiqued by black feminists, one example being the 1980s Reclaim the Night marches, where feminist calls for higher levels of policing in economically deprived neighborhoods in the name of women's safety had a criminalising effect on communities of colour, for both men and women, leaving the streets safer for women with particular class and race privileges rather than for women as a unitary category (Bhavani and Coulson, 1986, p. 88).

The Roestone collective<sup>6</sup> argue that organising around identity has a depoliticising effect on the community and that the practice of organising 'outside of or separate to' the rest of society can create a belief that one can opt out of sets of social dynamics that make individuals feel unsafe, when this does not seem to be true, particularly for women of colour (2014, p. 9). This issue will be explored more deeply in the empirical chapter on safety as experienced by women from Calais Migrant Solidarity and what it meant that they often felt safer sleeping in the jungle with men that they knew than sleeping in the activist space with men they did not know. Throughout this thesis it becomes clear that setting up any list of guidelines or rules in terms of what would make a space safer for everyone is incredibly difficult. One attempt at prescribing these sorts of guidelines is described below. These are known as 'safer spaces policies'.

### *Safety, Space and Policy*

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<sup>6</sup> Along with many other feminist scholars such as Audre (1984), Bernice Johnson Reagon (1981), Kimberle Crenshaw (1991), Brah, Avtar and Ann Phoenix (2004), Patricia Hill Collins (2000) and others who look at identity politics as both strategic in certain moments and as a block to the usefulness of intersectional politics at other moments.

Allocating time and energy for collective action around issues of safety, particularly since the Occupy camps during 2011, has led to the creation of safer spaces policies – a kind of document that demarcates a space as safe, and then usually relies upon the principle that people will either self-regulate or be prepared to be ‘called out’ in case any oppressive behaviour occurs within that space (Coalition for Safer Spaces, 2014). This has been seemingly impossible to translate into a set of organising principles for Calais Migrant Solidarity, though many policies of this nature have been written<sup>7</sup>. Sarah Ahmed’s article, *‘You end up doing the document rather than doing the doing’: Diversity, race equality and the politics of documentation*’ argues that documents have a lot to answer for in terms of who is doing what. Documents not only ‘circulate alongside other things (within organisations), which in turn shape the boundaries or edges of organisations’ (Ahmed 2007, p. 591) but as Lindsay Prior has suggested, written materials also involve ‘fields, frames and networks for action’. Prior also suggests that documents are what shape or even make organisations (Prior in Ahmed, 2007, p. 591). Ahmed also makes the important connection between documents and performance. If documents ‘act’ or at least prompt the performance of acting, then what does it mean when organisations use documents to perform an image of themselves, and as a way to perform ‘doing well’ (2007, p. 594) in spite of ongoing incidences of harassment and interpersonal violence.

‘Safe space’ is usually understood as a space in which the deconstruction of hegemonic discourses, as well as a ‘relational production of alternative spaces constitutive of known logic and rules’ can take place (Evans & Boyte, 1992; Gamson, 1996; Polletta, 1999; The Roestone Collective, 2014). This will later be referred to as ‘safer spaces’ as part of a prefigurative and anticipatory practice (see chapter five on

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<sup>7</sup> This is the literature that was in the office during my research period. It relates the kinds of trauma activists might experience during their time in Calais, but does little in relation to gendered vulnerabilities [https://www.activist-trauma.net/assets/files/ATnobor\\_A5\\_4pp\\_leaflet.pdf](https://www.activist-trauma.net/assets/files/ATnobor_A5_4pp_leaflet.pdf)

safety). A guarantee of 'safety' has long been a formative culture within queer communities. In feminist, LGBT and queer discourses, a 'safe space' is usually a physical/virtual space, either temporary or permanent in time and space, which is defined as an open and accepting environment, designated to allow its attendants a feeling of individual safety, and a 'space for full self-expression without the threat of violence' (Polletta, 1999), be that verbal or physical.

The concept of 'safe space' is an ever-changing, fluid, and flexible concept - dependent on time, place, participants, spatiality, temporality, environment and more. Moreover, 'safe spaces' are designed to work as a tool for dealing with the violent and oppressive sanctions used to discipline queer individuals and bodies in public space, so it is a space to contemplate the violence that occurs both within and outside of the spaces themselves. Altogether, these different features lead to a definition of 'safe space' as essentially a place of refuge; a space intended to offer a solution, even if only a temporary and partial one, to an everyday where people lack a sense of security (Evans & Boyte 1992; Gamson 1996; Polletta 1999; The Roestone Collective 2014).

The desire to establish the ever-shifting activist spaces in Calais (rented spaces, squatted buildings, 'jungles' etc.) as safer spaces, especially through the 'safer spaces policies', have been continually disregarded as not viable or appropriate (this will be explored in the empirical chapter four on safety) as the subjectivities of those involved do not fit with 'activist norms' (i.e. those suffering from post-traumatic stress, with serious mental health issues, problems with addiction, the fact that the spaces used are often raided by the police and so on). The fact that who feels safe is at least partly down to systematic inequalities, i.e. the fact that safety is gendered and racialised (Smith 2014; Drake 2014; Bhavani and Coulson; 1986) makes the implementation of these policies difficult in Calais as with other syncretic organising spaces, especially the ones that rely on a static spatial arrangement. It is for these

reasons that this thesis will argue for a tactical use of safer spaces as part of a move towards a project of intersectional inclusion (Roestone Collective 2014, p. 9). They refer to intersectional inclusion as the relational work of cultivating safety and argue that the pursuit of safer space cannot be understood as seeking static or acontextual notions of 'safe' or 'unsafe' places and people but instead as a process of understanding and creating the kind of spaces people feel able to live together in, through negotiating difference and challenging oppression (2014, p. 9).

A critical use of safer spaces policy is not the way that all activists think issues of safety ought to be resolved. Those arguing for a distancing from the notion of 'safety', insist that it is an affect centred around white privilege and ideas of thriving (DiAngelo and Sensoy, 2012). Some activists are instead fighting for 'Braver Spaces' (Tran Myhre , 2013; Self, 2010), spaces for anger or new configurations with pedagogic violence (Leonardo and Porter, 2013). These are spaces for conceptualising shared, though differently embodied, vulnerabilities (Gilson, 2011; Cohn, 2013), spaces that make it possible to experience and collectively deconstruct feelings of anxiety (Institute for Precarious Consciousness in Plan C, 2014), and spaces that embrace the politics and emotions associated with risk (hooks, 1989, Hanhardt, 2013). These are all approaches that could be fruitful, but throughout my ethnographic work the words 'safety' and ideas around making spaces safe were so prolific that it led me to believe that embracing ideas of safer spaces with an eye to intersectional inclusion is the most appropriate approach for this thesis. These alternative approaches led to questions about how to implement a culture of safety that surpasses the spaces used, and relies instead upon the creation of shared spaces for social reproduction sustained via a mobile commons. The details of this will be discussed below in the literature on sustainable organising.

*Safety through Community Justice*

The insistence that community issues can be resolved through dialogue, whilst respecting the fact that all people are affective beings embedded in contexts and relationships and personal/political histories, is one that will be further explored throughout this thesis as part of understanding how Otherness is created in migrant solidarity projects. Project Salvage (Downes and Hanson et al., 2016) describes what they see as a necessity in the UK left to provide a survivor-led 'network to share experiences, resources, skills and build communities of belief, support and action' as part of changing the way that problems of interpersonal violence are currently dealt with in activist communities. The INCITE! collective argue that people are responsible for addressing the harms that they witness, that witnesses are not innocent and that all people have a responsibility to respond to Others' pain (INCITE 2017). This idea that there is a collective responsibility to respond to the pain suffered by people in the community and also a collective harm done to that community that needs rectifying through contribution back to that community is echoed in other similar projects (Creative Interventions, 2012, LaDIYfest Sheffield, 2016, Philly Stands Up, 2003). Rather than suggesting that safety always relies upon a lack of conflict, these resources suggest that safety comes not from an absence of negative experiences, but rather the ability to flourish through collective action against interpersonal violence.

Following the INCITE! model, activists and community members were interested in attempting to initiate different forms of communication based on values of 'safety, respect, self-determination, whilst nurturing a culture of collective responsibility, connection, and liberation' (US Prison Culture, 2012).

The final empirical chapter draws from the expanding body of work concerning vulnerability (Butler, Gambetti et al., 2016; Cavarero, 2011; Bergoffen 2001; Murphy 2011; Ziarek 2013), care (Puig de la Bellacasa 2012; Barbagallo 2016, Feigenbaum et al 2013) and ways to generalise these concepts through a mobile commons

(Bishop, 2012; Papadopoulos, 2012; Martignoni and Papadopoulos, 2015). This section will begin with the concept of vulnerability, looking particularly at if and when power can emerge from places of uncertainty, confusion and uneasiness (Butler, 2009) whilst recognising the limits of a concept that leaves individuals open to both care and potential wounding (Cavarero 2007, Butler 2009, Murphy 2011). Instead of hostility or even indifference towards clashes in values or behaviours that arise within political organising (for example, one participant talked about their feelings of confusion, sadness and anger following a debate about abortion in one of the squats, see chapter six on vulnerability) this research asks: How might 'staying with the trouble' (Haraway 2016) and seeing the value of moments of vulnerability help to reshape our methods? Intimately connected to vulnerability is the concept of care - the response most frequently cited in my interviews when discussing the possibility of mediating the vulnerability of selves and others. The third empirical chapter focuses on what that care can be in order to be sustainable, and what it might mean to spread that care and generalise our vulnerability in shared organising spaces.

### **1.7 Vulnerability and Collectivising 'Negative' Affect: Neoliberal Fear and Individualised Risk**

George Shulman suggests that political theory begins in a sense of danger - in emotions of fear or dread, in perceptions of impending or potential harm, in experiences of vulnerability or injury (2011, p. 227). This may be expressed as what is termed a politics of fear, involving tighter border controls, calls for pre-emptive strikes and collective punishments (Butler, Gambetti et al., 2016), but also for a potentiality of shared pain, grief (Butler 2009) and a sense of communality or collective goodwill. In short, what would a move from injury to politics look like?

If, as my participants inferred, feeling vulnerable at least in part comes from being afraid of unknown factors (e.g. 'I don't know what others have done or what others might do in the future') or the potential of already known factors (e.g. 'I have seen this person speak in a threatening way and don't know what that might mean for me') and the feelings that these factors evoke. According to Smail (2012) in the 'Manifesto for a Social Materialist Psychology of Distress', fear and anxiety are vitally important elements for understanding how politics 'feels';

Before anything else, we are feeling bodies in a social world.

Primordially, experience consists of a continuous flux of bodily feedback, or feeling. This feedback – which is the raw stuff of consciousness itself – reflects our embodied, material situation (hot, tired, hurting etc). It situates us in a particular setting, and furnishes an on-going sense of our bodily potentials: an embodiment. This feedback is also continuously social (influenced by the changing social relations of the lived moment) and socialised (somewhat habitual, shaped by the impress of prior experience). Bodily feedback, in the form of feelings, is the most elemental stuff of our being human.

The idea that fear is both a feeling and a basis for politics is not new, especially when it comes to the politics of race and migration (and oftentimes a subsequent drive towards projects of national security). However, fear as an embodied affect has come to play a complicated role in the psyche of populations also<sup>8</sup>.

Ferudi (2007) notes that as emotions are experienced and expected to be processed on an individual level, fear is something that is difficult to collectivise under the current social conditions;

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<sup>8</sup> Along with being experienced bodily, fear adapts to social, economic and political environments. No doubt 'fear' is experienced very differently for the migrants in Calais and the local citizens in the places in which they settle. Although fears may be mediated by similar events globally including war and economic crises, they will be experienced in different ways. For the purposes of this research I will examine the concept of fear in relation to anti-migrant sentiment and the way that this feeds in to the safer spaces policies proposed by activist groups. Admittedly this is not a conclusive study of fear, and does not take in to account the more generalised affects of fear likely to be experienced in the process of migration more generally, as limited as this may seem in the current context. For further justification of this focus please see the methodology in chapter three of this thesis.

The very real dynamic of individuation means that fear is experienced in a fragmented and atomised form. That is why fear is rarely experienced as a form of collective insecurity, as it often was in earlier times. This shift from collective fears to individuated fear is captured well by Nan Elin (1999) that the fear we sense today is no longer the fear of 'dangerous classes'; rather, fear has 'come home' and become privatised. The sensibility of fear is internalised in an isolated fashion, for example as a fear of crime or as a rather banal 'ambient fear' towards life in general. Hubbard notes that this is a kind of fear that 'requires us to vigilantly monitor every banal minutia of our lives', since 'even mundane acts are now viewed as inherently risky and dangerous.'

(Ferudi, 2007)

Capitalising on the fear of the everyday and building on the banal and ambient fear that Ferudi (2007) and Hubbard explore, Susan McManus takes up these points in her article *Hope, Fear and the Politics of Affective Agency* (2011). In it she illustrates this fear with an example of a five-week advertising campaign run by the Metropolitan Police in 2008. 'There is a performative indeterminacy at work here in the affects cultivated: objects of fear were rendered indeterminate, vague, amorphous, emptied of content and specificity but embedded in the routines and, literally, the detritus of everyday life,' (2011, p. 8) where anyone and anything could be a potential threat. The everyday is an important terrain on which to examine fear and vulnerability as well as solidarity and care. If there is a sense that anyone and anything could be a potential threat (and thus a reason to feel vulnerable), what needs to also be examined is how groups can function if anyone and everyone is a potential source of care.

An example of how solidarity groups function when their primary purpose is to grow alongside and care for each other and themselves was prevalent in the role of

women in the miners' strike in the UK in the 1980s. For Shaw and Mundy, it is important to recognise the fears and ambivalences about the strike that women held, even though they were vital actors in the strike's continuation. They make an argument for a less comfortable and uneven picture of solidarity activism, one that acknowledges ambivalences, rather than certainties, and contradictions, rather than romanticisms. They suggest that this allowed the political and historical records of women's activism to have an 'integrity' that saw the importance of solidarity in and with their feelings of vulnerability as a form of strength, adding to the movement rather than detracting from it (2005 p. 154). This project similarly wants to link the different moments of vulnerability and confusion in transnational activist organisations about what these groups are trying to do, what kind of solidarity they are trying to show and to whom, what atmosphere organising spaces ought to have and what roles individuals in the groups should have, to a politic that can embrace difficulties as part of trying to collectivise individual feelings of vulnerability and fear in migrant solidarity spaces.

Criticisms of vulnerability as a concept that ought to be collectivised are also circulating. Feminist scholar Ewa Ziarek argues that vulnerability has become associated with individualistic celebrations of self-help discourses. 'As a moral virtue, vulnerability loses its negative connotations and becomes associated instead with empathy and the ability to connect with others - that is, with the capacities traditionally associated with middle class white femininity' (2013 p. 67). It is for this reason that safer spaces policies and migrant solidarity organising spaces must not be organised around an affect of gentle vulnerable 'niceness' over anger, sadness and rage (Diangelo and Sensoy 2012). Vulnerability need not be associated with a need for a calm safety free from anxieties or challenges. Indeed, in Calais Migrant Solidarity there is such routine upheaval due to the material difficulties of everyday life that a collective experience of vulnerability could not be one that relies on the calmness of individual participants or organising environments. Ziarek refers to this as a vulnerability 'outside the hold of biopolitics, security, and self-management.

Vulnerability needs to be reclaimed as a condition of intersubjective freedom, action, and political engagement (Ziarek, 2013, p. 68; see also Butler, 2016). This may be achievable by *disidentifying* from oneself in order to empathise with others (Muñoz 1999).

Disidentification is informed by Foucauldian understandings of power and discourse and can be described as a strategy that resists a conception of power as a fixed discourse (Muñoz 1999). Instead, theories of disidentification argue that words like ‘vulnerability’ can be recoded. José Esteban Muñoz explains it this way:

Disidentification is about recycling and rethinking encoded meaning. The process of disidentification scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded message’s universalising and exclusionary machinations and recircuits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications. Thus, disidentification is a step further than cracking open the code of the majority; it proceeds to use this code as raw material for representing a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture.

(1999, p. 31)

An example of the power of the ‘unthinkable’ was apparent during my field work in Calais in August 2014 when a female activist laughingly noted: ‘It is the so-called rage of migrant men that keeps women safe around here. The more anger they perform out the front of the squats during the dawn patrols, the less likely small groups of police are to raid the squats while we’re asleep’ (field notes, 2014). Whilst this thesis does not intend to explore a postcolonial critique of the rage of brown men meaning that women need saving (Spivak, 1993 p. 93), it is these kinds of conversations in Calais which act as reminders that a constant recoding of majority understanding of gender norms needs to be taking place as part of activist culture and praxis. In this context it helps to understand that just because just vulnerability

is differently distributed due to power imbalances in society's structural organisation, it doesn't mean that the vulnerability of one person is 'worth more' than the vulnerability of another. It understands that counter-discourse, like any discourse, can always fluctuate in the service of different ideological ends, being 'flexibly employed' for example. Thus, rather than viewing perceived privileges as nullifying the experience of vulnerability (this will be explored further in the section on privilege politics chapter four on Otherness), the subject can *disidentify* with them in order to enact a counter-discourse: 'the aim being to make allowances for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy' (Foucault, 1999 p.101). This connects to the argument made below that it is important for vulnerability to be read as both a potential to wound and a potential source of care (Cavarero, 2011; Butler, 2009).

As part of making a claim that the inherent, but differently distributed, vulnerability of those involved in migrant solidarity projects could hold an answer to what it means to be part of a collective humanity (Murphy, 2011), this section will be dedicated to what collectivising vulnerability could shift within and beyond projects such as those in Calais. The thinking around vulnerability in feminist discourse (Butler, 2009; Cavarero, 2011; Bergoffen, 2001; Diprose, 2002), is part of what is being referred to as a new corporeal humanism, 'grounded in the ontological fact of vulnerability, dispossession and exposure... attentive to the differences that mark bodies, and respectful of the radically different ways that vulnerability and dispossession are lived... as part of a global community in which each [body] is vulnerable to the other' (Murphy, 2011). The environments organised for activists to sleep in is a good example of this. Each night my participants would fall asleep not knowing if there would be a police raid or an inappropriately drunk activist trying to crawl in to their sleeping bag, but the idea that others would be by your side through any difficulty that one confronted within the organising space was of great

comfort because an injury to someone within the collective was an injury to the cohesion of the organisation as a whole.

There are concerns raised by the suggestion that by opening up and showing vulnerability to the Other, a recognition of our reliance upon others is necessarily reached. One concern is that upon exposing individual vulnerabilities, one is then equally open to both being cared for and being wounded, in equal measure (Butler 2009; Cavarero 2011). Insofar as the vulnerable body is by definition exposed to both, it remains 'irredeemably open to both responses' (Cavarero 2011, p. 20). The other critique is that whilst in theory individuals attempting to carry their vulnerabilities on the surface as part of constructing space together is interesting, in practice this lacks any 'normative or prescriptive content' (Murphy, 2011). What does it mean to be vulnerable alongside those considered 'other' to us? What commonalities are there between vulnerability and otherness? One answer to the way that we collectivise vulnerability is through practices of care, which will be discussed in the final section of this chapter.

### *Vulnerability, Otherness and Becoming Marginal*

Through the process of writing this thesis it became clear (mostly during my fieldwork period) that rather than dealing with the different experiences of otherness by attempting to forge a solidarity based around sameness or lack of conflict, activists were seeking instead to move further from solutions that required solidarity through unity and towards embracing more chaotic and marginal tactics and fluctuating moments of coherence. Gareth Brown argues that the challenge for groups like Calais Migrant Solidarity is that

Social movements orbit around bodies that can be fleeting, ephemeral, or fluid in much the same way that they themselves are. Along with

mainstays such as hunger and energy-use, we (activists) face complex questions such as to how to build collective power, how to remain dynamic enough to move with (or one step ahead of) history whilst maintaining enough coherence to recognise each other, communicate with each other and act together.

(2014)

The question then becomes: can the work being undertaken in Calais be considered a form of choosing Otherness and embracing marginality? Can collectivising vulnerability be compared to a nomadic subjectivity where solidarity is achieved once we all become marginal? (Kaplan, 1987; Moraga and Anzaldua, 1983). King writes that the people involved with one squat in Calais on Rue Victor Hugo

demonstrated marginal or oppositional consciousness in how they chose to live together with people trying to cross. It can be seen as a form of chosen otherness, where the choice is to identify with and positively value exclusion or marginality (Janz, 2002; Kaplan, 1987). This is not the same as presenting such otherness as some kind of heroic state of being, but rather, I think, comes from a recognition that one's own struggle is about becoming marginal'.

(2016 p. 74)

If one's own struggle is about being marginal, what processes are there for becoming closer to the Other? Gloria Anzaldua describes the process as creating bridges (2002). Anzaldua states that to bridge means to loosen our borders, not closing off to others. The work of opening the gates to the stranger, within and without. 'To step across the threshold is to be stripped of the illusion of safety because it moves us into unfamiliar territory and does not grant safe passage. To bridge is to attempt community and for that we must risk being wounded' (2002, p. 3). This learning to feel safe in transitional space when all one may want is fixity is a call to action. The nomad, in the theory developed by Deleuze and Guattari, is not

the migrant, who has a clear destination and goes from one point in space to another, nor the exile who is never 'home' and is always endowed with a sense of foreignness, loss or separation (Janz 2002). The nomad is neither at home, nor homeless, but can recreate home anywhere because they do not seek fixity (Braidotti in King, 2016). Anzaldúa asks us to occupy the in-between space of the bridge more often, so that it may feel like home. Insecurity can become its own security, or hold its own possibility (King, forthcoming). This offers a slightly different approach to Otherness; rather than it being actions taken that alienate Others and activist selves, it is a quality to be embraced. Otherness can be seen as something that we embrace by considering ourselves as others too and also as a move to approach the other in a boundless way. This otherness is then an action that makes these spaces ungovernable, connected through building bridges and never seeking home. This project seeks to negotiate the space between competing forms of Otherness, encouraging activists to embrace their vulnerabilities as part of embracing themselves and the Others.

### **1.8 Mobile Commons, Otherness and Care**

This final section attempts to bring together the ideas of shared processes of social reproduction<sup>9</sup>, organising safety through collectivising vulnerability, and the need to move toward marginality and otherness through everyday praxis. Firstly, by looking to examples of communities centred around the processes of providing care<sup>10</sup> and

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<sup>9</sup> Social reproduction is sometimes referred to as 'life work' and relates to 'activities and attitudes, behaviors and emotions, responsibilities and relationships directly involved in the maintenance of life on a daily basis, and intergenerationally'. Marxist feminists involved in the 'wages for housework' campaign use this term to describe the way that domestic work is made invisible and thus fails to be remunerated, and others argue that social reproduction is above all the reproduction of labour power and class society (Farris, 2015).

<sup>10</sup> Maria Puig del la Bellacasa (2012) suggests that 'not only do relations involve care, care is itself relational. We can read this in Joan Tronto and Berenice Fisher's much quoted generic definition of care as including 'everything that we do to maintain, continue and repair 'our world' so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment' (p. 198).

resources for each other, this section will explore the ideas of a 'mobile commons' and how this has been used as an expression of the ways that migrant communities reproduce themselves across borders (Bishop 2011, Papadopoulos and Tsianos, 2012). Can the idea of a mobile commons lend something to the everyday praxis that might be used in activist organising? Rigby and Schlembach argue that the syncretic organising that takes place in Calais acts as 'the affirmation of an 'axiomatic' equality that disrupts and disarticulates the borders between citizens and noncitizens, the political and non-political' (2013, p.161). This has echoes in the 'autonomy of migration' approach, where organisation acts 'as the practice of producing alternative ontologies, that is alternative everyday forms of existence and alternative forms of life' (Martignoni and Papadopoulos, 2015, p. 40).

The production of alternative forms of everyday existence is considered as 'part of an 'imperceptible politics', that is, politics that are imperceptible first because we are not trained to perceive them as 'proper' politics and, second, because they create an excess that cannot be addressed in the existing system of political representation. Nevertheless, these politics are so powerful that they change the very conditions of a certain situation and the very conditions of existence of the participating actors (Tsianos, Papadopulos and Stephenson 2012, p. 450).

This thesis focuses on the everyday life and forms of post-capitalist social reproduction and cooperation, capable of transforming boundaries' relationships' (Cooper, 2013; English et. al., forthcoming; Gibson-Graham, 2006; Brown, 2014). Moreover, the emphasis on the situatedness of daily experiences brings into the spotlight 'space' not as a given, smooth surface where human action is deployed, primarily, as the outcome of 'sedentary' power that is unstable, porous and full of possibility (Elin, 1999). An exploration of the workings of these spaces allows for a consideration of whether a mutually constituting environment in Calais is a form of embracing and reclaiming life at the margins. There are questions around whether

setting up alternative spaces for care outside the institutions set up by the state is in fact doing the work of neoliberal governmentality (Prügl, 2014 p.613), an example of this being David Cameron's 'Big Society' relying on what some refer to as Victorian-style philanthropy (Corbett and Walker, 2012 p. 487). However, for Feigenbaum and Frenzel et al (2013), social reproduction is necessary as part of our protest camps (and related spaces) to 'make visible reproductive labour and the infrastructures in which this labour takes place. The social and biological becomes political' 2013, p. 206). This can involve various interventions such as creating activist camps and spaces where children can come and are welcome (Evans, in Harvie and Milburn et al., 2005, p.203), where political movements move beyond symbolic protest by recreating structures of solidarity and social care (Federici, 2012), where the gendered nature of this work and who is doing it is always explicit (Graeber, 2009, p. 516) ensuring direct action is never seen as the 'real work' whilst caring for each other is maligned (Brown and Dowling et al. p. 80) and insisting upon a recognition that movement building requires reflexivity (Walia, 2013).

The main research question of the thesis will look at whether collectivising social reproduction within migrant solidarity organising spaces can offer alternatives to current forms of organising that put the focus on struggling against power dynamics outside the collective and instead bring the focus inwards. It will ask whether the subsequent experiences of interacting with other's individual vulnerabilities (and the responding acts of care) can act as a form of imperceptible politics that may mediate practices that have historically made marginalised people feel unsafe or Othered in activist settings. Additionally, an in-depth study of the way that 'white privilege' and other ideas about power have been mobilised within the collective will be undertaken in order to discuss whether some projects about power and safety in fact reinscribe and invisibilise negative experiences of otherness within activist organising. Lastly, questions around what can be done to recognise intersecting and overlapping vulnerabilities as a point of both commonality and difference will be explored, seeking to find whether these moments of vulnerability

can be read as moments of strength and a basis from which to carry out political work across borders.

## **Chapter Two: Contextualising Calais**

In 2008 I was one of the people coordinating the fortnightly organising meetings for London No Borders and was occasionally answering the collective's email address as part of my administrative tasks for the group. We received a rather desperate and exasperated email from someone called John who had recently moved from the UK to a town nearby Calais. He was shocked and appalled at the conditions in Calais and wondered why British activists weren't acting as though the UK government needed to be called to account. He asked for activists from the group to consider coming to Calais to see what the conditions were really like, and to organise a No Border Camp to bring media attention and the attention of activists across Europe, who he considered remiss in their inactivity in Calais. Following this it was decided that London No Borders would send people to Calais every month for a year, so that any camp we organised would be done in conjunction with activists on the ground; any migrant organisations we could find; local trade unionists and charity workers that saw the need for the camp. These meetings grew from 5 to 50 people in the lead-up to the camp in June 2009. This was the beginning of my relationship with Calais and the beginnings of Calais Migrant Solidarity (CMS).

This chapter will provide an overview of the kinds of forces at play in Calais that contribute to an environment of fear and instability for many in their everyday lives, be they migrants, local people or activists. Again, whilst the migrants are statistically more likely to experience fear and violence toward their bodies and in the city more

directly, it is the way that this impacts upon the possibilities for migrant solidarity activism as a form of care that is the point of interest here. This chapter will cover larger societal factors that contribute to individual conceptions of safety, so that it becomes possible to understand the context in which the shared spaces of Calais Migrant Solidarity exist. Calais is a place that is shaped by its physical location as the closest town to the British coast, and its economic environment as one of the poorest towns in France,<sup>11</sup> effectively defunded by the closure of businesses at the port following the 2008 economic crisis. This chapter will begin by outlining the discourse in Calais relating to irregular migrant populations from the 1990s onwards, including the Sangatte centre that infamously closed in 2002. It will then go on to describe the border workers present in Calais who shape the work CMS does, from far right protest groups like the English Defence League through to religious charities, and the issues that CMS face in their organising practices which shape the way that activists understand their role in this space. Finally it will look at Calais Migrant Solidarity as an organisation shaped by anticipation of a different future, represented by the ways the organisation runs and decisions are made, its conflict resolution and gender dynamics, so as to explain why both safety and also the necessity for activists to organise together despite individual vulnerabilities became the basis for this thesis.

Calais is currently one of the busiest ports in the world: its Port of Dover is a transit point for 13 million passengers each year (World Maritime News, 2015). As the shortest and most heavily trafficked sea-route linking continental Europe to the British Isles, it is also one of the routes into the UK most favoured by so-called irregular migrants. The gathering of migrants in large numbers in Calais gained political significance with two waves of migration: firstly during the 1990s, after the fall of the 'communist' regimes of Eastern Europe, when those fleeing the former

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<sup>11</sup> Poverty is heavily concentrated in France's Nord and Pas-de-Calais areas, which include the city of Roubaix, long known as 'ground zero' for France's less privileged. These areas, like many formerly industrial places, have struggled to recover from France's declining industrial base (OECD, 2013)

Yugoslavia, including an influx of Kosovan families and children, drew widespread media attention (Rumford, 2012, p. 2), and secondly following the September 11 attacks and the subsequent raft of new 'anti-terror' legislation linking immigration, especially of Afghans and Iraqis, with 'national security' issues (Rumford, 2012, p. 4), again sparking the attention of the mainstream press.

During the late 1990s, concerned by the increasing numbers of migrants sleeping rough on the streets and in public parks, the local French population mobilised, and together with the charities (or 'associations' as they are known in Calais) put pressure on the state to provide places to shelter refugees (La Marmite aux Idées, 2012). In 1999 local charities, with an undisclosed amount of funding from the town hall, were able to open a hangar space, primarily to house Kosovan families, in a building previously owned by the Eurostar Corporation (Rumford, 2012, p. 2). The space remained largely unnoticed by the UK or French media until 2001 when images emerged of migrants climbing Eurostar security fences and attempting to board trains or walk, sometimes en masse, through the tunnel toward Britain (Schuster, 2003, p. 508). The hangar was subsequently closed due to public pressure. Following the closure of the hangar space, the 'Sangatte Centre' opened in 2002. This was a Red Cross humanitarian shelter in Calais that provided meals, showers and a place to sleep for up to 2000 migrants each night. The problem of undocumented migrants residing at the Red Cross 'refugee reception centre' or 'refugee camp' in the nearby village of Sangatte became the subject of European-wide attention (Rigby and Schlembach, 2013). The migrants, it was argued, were using the centre as a base from which to attempt illegal border-crossings to the UK (Freedman, 2004, p. 64-9) leading to politicians calling for the shelter to be closed.

Since the closure of the Sangatte Centre in 2002, the British and French governments, often in coalition, have prevented any permanent and recognisable accommodation and any reception spaces for refugees, dismantling the migrant-

claimed spaces of the 'jungles' (this term will be explained later in the chapter), at times via seemingly mundane everyday acts of violence such as spraying all the tents with pepper spray so that they are uncomfortable to sleep in and have to be thrown away, other times in more explosive and performative ways with bulldozers, destroying the full village infrastructures of mosques, churches, shops, libraries and hairdressers. But the jungles are always rebuilt, just as the movement of people continues unabated (Calais Migrant Solidarity, 2013). 'Forever temporary' is what the French Red Cross officer Pierre Kremer called migrant arrangements in the area (Reinisch, 2015, p. 519).

During 2002, a series of new security measures were put in place: a double fence was built<sup>12</sup>, CCTV cameras were installed and more police instructed to patrol the area (Reinisch, 2015, p. 516). British and French governments eventually reached a 'burden-sharing agreement' to close the Sangatte camp and distribute its inhabitants between them. As a result, the UK was to take around 1,000 Iraqi Kurds and 200 Afghans, while France took responsibility for the remaining 300 residents and other foreign nationals in the immediate area. In November 2002, the camp was closed to new arrivals, and it was formally closed by the end of the year (Reinisch, 2015, p. 516). Along with the humanitarian centre being closed, the UK asylum processing office in Calais was also closed in 2002 (Evans, 2016) meaning that unless migrants wished to apply to stay in France, they needed to physically make it to England in order to apply to settle there.

According to the Calais Migrant Solidarity website, 'A fundamental component of the state's attack on daily life (from the closure of Sangatte onwards), has been the constant denial of shelter'. This is implemented through the refusal to provide

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<sup>12</sup> In September 2016 it was announced that a new wall to be built along both sides of the highway towards the Port of Calais. Critics argue that this will not dissuade people from attempting to cross the channel but will make it more unsafe and potentially fatal (<http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-37294187>).

sanctioned sleeping spaces alongside the 'invasion, eviction and destruction of any autonomous living places that people create. The ability to live in Calais has become a point of struggle for migrant communities, alongside the daily attempts to subvert the physical border'. As part of this struggle, people have made their homes all over the city in disused buildings, or squatted camps known as 'jungles' – from 'dzhangal', the Pashto word for forest - both inside and on the outskirts of the city. The jungles consist of tents and temporary housing made of pallets and other discarded materials and disused structures, 'nestled amongst sand-dunes, scattered across waste-lands, or lodged in abandoned industrial zones in and around Calais' (Kirkby, in Rigby and Schlembach, 2013). Whilst intended as temporary residences, the intensification of Franco-British border control in the port made the camps into more permanent habitations, with stays of 6 months or more not uncommon. A United Nations spokesperson who visited the area in 2009 is quoted as saying that he had never visited a refugee camp anywhere in the world with such 'impossibly insanitary conditions' as some of the Calais jungles (Kirby, in Rigby and Schlembach, 2013).

The jungles continued to be built and destroyed routinely - albeit in a piecemeal fashion and on a small scale - until 2009, when the public focus on the jungle became particularly strong, arguably following the media coverage of the No Border Camp in June 2009. The French Minister of Immigration, Integration and National Identity, Eric Besson, stated that the French government intended to make Calais and the borderlands an 'exclusion zone' for migrants (Schwenken, 2014, p. 175). Meanwhile, the mayor of Calais, Natacha Bouchart, stated that the Prefecture intended to do everything possible to make the town a 'migrant-free zone' by the end of 2010. On 22 September 2009 the jungle shelters, a grocery store and makeshift mosque were destroyed. 278 Pashtun Afghans, around half of them minors, were arrested and brought to Coquelles detention centre or Vitry-sur-Orne in Moselle (Schwenken, 2014, p. 176). But the movement of people to Calais did not stop; rather, it was a momentary pause in a process that immediately recommenced

in the days that followed. Since then, the state has provided various short-term accommodation projects when the pressure from local people or the UN or other international human rights organisations such as Amnesty forced it to do so. The Jules Ferry day centre (a former children's holiday camp) was opened in January 2015 to provide migrants with water, electricity and basic meals. It had space for 600 women and children (no men - although they could access minimal food and water there). Pas-de-Calais Council also operated a 'night shelter' for vulnerable people sleeping out in the freezing winter cold—in practice, little more than a community hall with cardboard boxes as bedding (Reinisch, 2015, p. 517). Doctors of the World run a free medical clinic in Calais, but they keep medical records and they take people's names. It doesn't feel safe for some migrants, so their wounds go untended and their illnesses undiagnosed (Evans, 2016).

Despite the clearance of the jungle in September 2009 and several large-scale attempts to clear the jungles and squats since, the numbers of migrants in Calais at September 2015 were larger than at any other time, around 5000 men, women and children (Khomami, 2015), and since this time a 'census' carried out by one of the charities, L'Auberge des Migrants International (2016), has put the number at more than 7000. They accurately predicted that there would be 10,000 migrants in Calais by the end of September 2016. Following the most recent clearance on 24 October 2016, there are over 700 children. More than half of those are 'unaccompanied' minors and harrowing reports about their inability to access clean drinking water or adequate protection continue to be reported (Khomami, 2015).

The closure of the Sangatte camp in 2002; the destruction of the Jungle village in 2009; squats and encampments in Calais in the winter of 2015; the recent closure of the Jungle in October 2016; in all these instances the French and British governments tried to persuade the public that police operations will resolve the migration situation:

Each of these operations has sent people away from the Calais area, to other French regions, other EU member states or even back to their home countries – so temporarily reducing migration pressure. But the Calais area remains a transit zone, where people trying to find better living conditions face obsessively increasing migration controls.

(Crawley and Crochard, 2016)

These are the factors that contribute to the constantly changing environment in Calais - the sense that no infrastructures of care can be relied upon and thus that any activist contribution must be a mobile, adept one capable of constant transformation.

## **2.1 Feeling Safe in Calais- Challenges to Grassroots Solidarity**

The situation in Calais has been especially difficult for local residents since the financial crisis of 2008. Many industrial warehouses have closed down, leaving the town with 20% unemployment, the second highest rate in metropolitan France. The town's population is also younger than the rest of France, resulting in large populations of people dubbed 'disenfranchised' (La Marmite aux Idées, 2012). This everyday precarity of migrants and local people alike is strongly evident in Calais. There is a feeling of temporariness: local young people preparing to move elsewhere to find work; migrants preparing to move to UK; activists visiting in short bursts; volunteers running on limited energy. This feeling of precarity is no doubt connected with the financial crisis of 2007-8 and the subsequent rise of far right organising in Calais and across Europe.

'In recent years far right parties have ceased being thought of as somehow pathological or even parasitical. They have a significant number of loyal voters; they seem better able to survive institutionalisation than was previously assumed; and

xenophobia and welfare chauvinism are endemic in every European electorate' (Bale, 2003, p. 67). Far-right protest parties standing on anti-immigration platforms have significantly increased their share of the votes across the continent (Reinsch, 2015, p. 578). The English Defence League and other far-right groupings such as the British National Party (BNP) and UK Independence Party (UKIP) have attempted to use a sense of insecurity and fear that has characterised the post-September 11 era to bolster their views on securitisation. The BNP have staged demonstrations in Calais, hanging banners in public streets and roundabouts with messages to migrants and the press including, 'Britain's Full Up' and 'Asylum Seekers, don't unpack, you're going home' (Lewis, 2009). Using deep-rooted symbols of wartime British patriotism like the white cliffs of Dover as locations for their election broadcasts<sup>13</sup>, a call to arms has been mounted at the borderlands, insisting upon a return to a monocultural past that never was. In spite of rising nationalist sentiment, EU nation states' immigration policies have not changed significantly as a result. 'Much more significant for immigration into Europe has been the 'collapse of governance' and subsequent political instability in North Africa, which created new routes for both people-traffickers and migrants taking their own chances to reach Europe' (Reinisch, 2015, p. 518).

For activists and charity workers in particular, the question of the legality of solidarity work is of interest. Since February 2004, the British and French governments have agreed to a reciprocal exchange of border control points explicitly to curb 'illegal immigration'. This agreement has physical aspects such as building walls and fences, but also social components aimed at merging discourses of solidarity with aiding and abetting people trafficking. As part of this, numerous laws have been passed, including:

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<sup>13</sup> For an example of this see <http://www.bnp.org.uk/news/national/nationalists-working-together-nick-griffin-and-filip-dewinter-dover>

L. 622-1 of the French Code of Entry and Sojourn of Foreigners and of Right to Asylum (CESEDA), a statute that criminalised any kind of assistance or aid to irregular immigrants (not excluding humanitarian aid). The article was popularly – and infamously – called ‘hospitality as criminal offence’ (délit de hospitalité) or ‘solidarity as criminal offence’ (délit de solidarité)

(Dahlberg, 2013, p. 50).

By potentially criminalising everyday activities such as eating together in public at the charity food distribution, or agreeing to charge up a stranger’s mobile phone, or inviting them in to shower in your apartment (Galliot, 2009) this law has undoubtedly shaped the narrative of safety in Calais. There was a legal case brought against one of the organisers of the charity Salam in 2008 (Galliot, 2009). The volunteer-run charity provides one meal daily to the migrants in Calais from a disused carpark near the port. It is one of the few locations where migrants gather in their hundreds to socialise and eat together. After police monitoring of the activities of Salam, the police went to one of the organisers’ homes and arrested her. It was claimed that the provision of free food encouraged illegal immigration and could be an offence under legislation pertaining to people trafficking<sup>14</sup>. The uncertainty around what exactly constitutes ‘people trafficking’ has created a situation increasingly difficult to navigate for activists, charity workers and local people who wish to offer assistance to migrants in Calais (Galliot 2009). Along with the idea that providing meals could lead to you being charged under people trafficking legislation, there was also a case in 2008 where a local woman was arrested and questioned for 3 hours under the Article of legislation L622-1 because she allowed a migrant to

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<sup>14</sup> ‘People trafficking’ is a concept mired in controversy. According to Laura Augustin, the term ‘trafficking’ ‘is...incapable of describing so many realities, and it does not help to reduce them all to two possibilities – the Free vs the Enslaved, the Autonomous vs the Coerced. Behind this oversimplification lies real social inequalities and oppressions: migration policies that favour middle- and upper-class jobs; out-of-date notions of the formal economy and productive labour; young people who want to get away from home; job-seekers willing to take risks to make more money; laws that make commercial sex illegal; laws that make sweatshops illegal among other issues. To lump all this under a single term disappears the array of different situations, and can feed into a moralistic agenda... (Augustin, 2015)

charge up his mobile phone in her home (Gupta, 2010), which could have resulted in a fine of €2000. The idea that the safety of the nation is compromised by allowing someone to come in to their house and charge up their mobile phone is something that Calaisians are regularly reminded of by local police officials and the press. The generosity of sharing your electricity, along with mobile phone as potential organising tool, have become signs of potential danger.

Despite the ongoing threat that offering solidarity could lead to arrest, Calais Migrant Solidarity has attempted to offer stable places to check email, socialise and organise in Calais including privately renting a space known as The Hangar (Gupta, 2010; King, 2016). The Hangar was known as a 'self-organising' space to provide practical support, solidarity and information sharing for asylum seekers. It was eventually closed after the local authority deemed that the space was being used for a 'different purpose than the one outlined on the lease'. The stability of these places and the standard of living possible in these spaces varied dramatically. The longevity of these spaces appeared to be decided upon by the local authority depending on political expediency. At times police would be invading and evicting organisational spaces or even sleeping shelters every day, or multiple times a day; and sometimes there would be squats in the legal process that would last months and months, with the police unable to gain entry. But eventually they were always closed, often ending in mass arrest and violence (King, 2016 p.102).

The invasion and destruction of these spaces appears to be both a message about how able migrants and activists ought to be to materially reproduce the necessities of everyday life, and also symbolic, through acts such as spraying pepper spray on tents and blankets, making them unusable, and destroying copies of the Koran and Bibles (Calais Migrant Solidarity 2016). The fact that solidarity can be offered but never safety is a key concern for activists. 'The train stations, food distribution,

parks and the street are places where people have been repeatedly targeted for ID checks ('controls'), violence and arrests' (Calais Migrant Solidarity, 2016). There is nowhere in Calais where it is safe to let your guard down; the environment of precarity is such that it permeates forms of sociality and organisation, as will be discussed further in chapter four on issues of safety.

## **2.2 Feeling Safe in Calais- The state response to national insecurity**

Political factors have impacted upon the lives of activists, locals, migrants and charity workers in Calais in various different ways. The EU is now significantly larger than it was in 2002 and its legislative and administrative responsibilities have grown a lot more complex, bringing new agencies and cross-border agreements. For example, the EU Declaration on Combatting Terrorism, published in March 2004, stresses that the 'solidarity' of the EU goes 'hand in hand with the need to strengthen border controls' (Vaughn-Williams, 2008, p. 66), setting the stage for the creation of Frontex, which came into existence in May 2005. Frontex, the EU's joint border agency, was designed to keep European borders secure, and control illegal immigration, human trafficking and terrorist infiltration (Reinsch, 2015, p. 515). The European Parliament has since increased the agency's budget every year and its mandate has been gradually expanding (Kopp, 2012). This increasing budget and powers were given to Frontex to 'complement and provide added value to the national border management systems of member states and to promote the freedom and security of their citizens' (Vaughan-Williams, 2008, p. 66). This does not seem to have translated in to any further freedom or security for the migrants at their borders. The building up of the EU as an 'us' that needs protection from 'them' in the context of a post-September 11 fixation on terrorism has led to increasingly harsh conditions for migrants in Calais. Once again, official responses to date have focused on new rounds of additional security measures: new detection technology, more dog searches, more security guards, an extended 'secure zone', a joint UK-French fund

for security, and plans for the creation of a new UK–France ‘control and command centre’ (Reinsch, 2015 p.516).

One of the many reasons that migrants choose to travel by ‘irregular’ methods into the UK is because of the laws set out in 2013 under the Dublin III convention. According to this EU convention, someone seeking asylum is required to apply in the first EU member state entered. Therefore even if someone has family ties in the UK or has been displaced from war zones such as Iraqi Kurdistan, Iraq, Afghanistan, or Sudan, there is no right to claim asylum in the UK (DIASP Project, 2013). When fingerprinted in France, checks will be made to see if their prints are already present in the Eurodac files of another EU country, and depending on which country it is, applicants may be returned there, often resulting in a circular process of removal by immigration authorities followed by a return to Calais by migrants who intend to make the UK their home. Thus, the logic of the Dublin system means that the burden of responsibility shifts towards states where migrants first entered Europe, despite the relative incapacity of some states. For example, at various points governments have agreed to suspend returns to Greece as the process was found to be unfair and not adhering to international law. In 2015 the French government promised that it would not apply the EU’s Dublin regulations to the Calais migrants. This promise was made to persuade people to start leaving the camp and to claim asylum in France – but this promise has not been respected and associations have reported a number of examples of people who have been deported citing Dublin regulations (Crawley and Crochard, 2016).

Whilst France and the UK are signatories of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, which defines who is a refugee and the kind of legal, political and social protection refugees are entitled to (Reinsch, 2015, p.580), confusion remains about the responsibilities of states towards migrants and refugees. States are able to mobilise different readings of terms used in the conventions to argue that they do

not have a responsibility to offer safety to some those who apply for asylum. For example, France and the UK insist upon different readings of the 'subjective' term 'well-founded fear of persecution'. As the Convention did not define 'persecution', governments argue that it is open to interpretation. In France, only individuals at risk from persecution administered by governments are considered to fall within the remits of the Convention, whereas in the UK persecution can also be the result of non-governmental agents and forces (Reinsch, 2015, p. 580). This is an example of what the UK Refugee Council refers to as the 'real or perceived differences between the French and British asylum systems' that makes the asylum application process and subsequent settlement impossibly difficult to understand or administer fairly (2001). It is for this and many other reasons that Calais is an uneven landscape characterised by changing and often draconian authorities motivated by a sense of national panic. This is the implication of a local government official in Calais, who declared: 'I feel the whole world and his wife have twigged that ... the port is as full of holes as a piece of Gruyère cheese' (in Varada-Raj, 2006, p. 518), illustrating the sentiment that the state must undertake 'whatever is necessary' to protect 'our' borders.

### **2.3 Charities, Local People and Other Borderworkers**

This section will outline some of the groups that featured in my fieldwork as actors looking at and thinking about different responses to the migrant crisis in Calais. First I will summarise some of the opinions and fears of the local people living and working in Calais, followed by the response of the charities and associations in Calais, then the way that migrant self-organisation has developed in response to the crisis and finally the way that Calais Migrant Solidarity emerged as both a similar and radically different kind of group, and the strengths and weaknesses of this response. In the lead-up to the Calais No Border Camp in 2009, an effort was made

by organisers to engage local people about their fears around what kind of place Calais had become since the closure of Sangatte, a situation that had left hundreds of migrants sleeping rough around the streets and parks of Calais. It is important to note that the local response to the influx of homeless migrants has been far from uniform; Local people, via charities and community groups, have launched various successful projects to encourage integration and even solidarity with migrants, such as the weekly football matches between locals, migrants and solidarity activists (I observed a match during my fieldwork in Calais in March 2013). These have provided an important base to counter misinformation and fears about changing populations.

Conversations during the No Border Camp with local people demonstrated a mixture of concerns, from fears for the safety of the migrants themselves, to pressing for what they perceived as the protection of 'local' families, by which they seemingly meant French families with papers. One person claimed that her daughter was hassled on her way home by the migrant men who hang about in the park near her school; that local services for the working poor of Calais were being misdirected towards 'foreigners'; and even that the influx of Afghan people could lead to terrorist offences at the Ferry Port. She also worried that increased policing and surveillance were indicative of the existence of unknown threats, the exact nature of which was could not be passed on to local people as a matter of national security. She wondered if the situation could be changed by amending the law, so that places like Coquelles Detention Centre could hold migrants for longer than the current maximum period of 48 hours so that they could find out more about 'who these migrants were'.

There are of course many grassroots projects that exist in order to find out more about who these migrants are, what their needs are and what stories they have to tell. Some of this work is undertaken by the charities described below.

## **2.4 NGOs, Charities, Borderworkers**

This section will outline some of the non-state organisations that work at the border in Calais, whether they provide services, solidarity or aid to migrants. These organisations shape the environment in which activists organise, indeed many activists also volunteer with the charities and some charity workers take part in CMS-organised political events. As the activities and attitudes of the charities are not the object of study in this thesis, this section will not go into detail about the sorts of work and actions that these groups organise, but will attempt to give context to the attitude and types of activity that the activist collectives undertake. According to Chris Rumford, these groups operating at the border can be described as non-state 'borderworkers' (migrant advocacy groups, NGOs, individual companies that run haulage and transport links and the media that reports there) doing the kind of 'borderwork' that shows

the ability of citizens and ordinary people to participate in the making of borders and the empowerment that can result from this bordering activity.. (it) has important and intrinsic implications for borders and the study of them.

(Rumford, 2012)

This category can be controversial in terms of which groups it lumps together, as it claims that whether the borderworkers wish to abolish borders or fortify them, simply by acting at the border they strengthen the discourse of national borders in the locations where they work (Mignolo and Tlostanova, 2006). Whilst this is not a way of categorising those at the border that Calais Migrant Solidarity would

subscribe to (there will be more about CMS organisational principles later in this chapter), it is a term that may help to set the scene in Calais.

All groups being discussed here have increased their presence in Calais in the aftermath of both the Sangatte closure and the destructions of the Jungle village in September 2009 and October 2016. The law L622-1 (known amongst charities like Salam, La Belle Etoile and activist groups as the law against solidarity, outlawing the provision of overnight shelter, accommodation, money or food to immigrants) has in different ways given a sense of militancy to volunteers who otherwise claim to be apolitical. There are three associations that have historically provided free warm meals in Calais: Association Salam serves dinner every day at 6pm (this is only problematic during religious holidays when people cannot eat before darkness); La Belle Etoile serves lunch during the week at midday; and l’Auberge des Migrants serves lunch on the weekends.<sup>15</sup>

Association Salam (known as Salam) is a Christian organisation with more than 200 members, whose resources come from dues, donations and grants (Salam website, 2017). They are a humanitarian and advocacy organisation providing food, clothing, care and administrative help those requesting asylum in France. They consider themselves part of a ‘fight against all forms of racism and discrimination’ and claim that they will ‘take action in favour of those whose country of origin is in difficulty’ (Salam website). The other associations do not have websites, but La Belle Etoile features on a French website with the following history:

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<sup>15</sup> There was a massive surge in the number of charities and volunteers on the ground in Calais following the Summer 2015. In this period the number of migrants rapidly increased from around 500 to around 5000 (Khomami, 2015), and so the need also increased. As this took place after my research period I will only reference this briefly. Any further project of this kind would need to relate to the changes that have taken place from 2014 onwards.

In 1994, a small group called 'La Belle Etoile' founded in Calais by an Amnesty International campaigner, became one of the first to call attention to these 'refugees,' especially the Poles, who were being turned back by the British authorities even though they did not need a visa.

(Le Gisti, 2016)

Along with the charities that provide food, there is also the UNHCR (United Nations Refugee Agency) and the association that they work with in Calais 'France Terre d'Asile' who state that they explain asylum in France and how to apply for it, and outline asylum policies in the UK to migrants who show an interest, (La Marmite aux Idées, 2012) but have been known to push people toward accepting a payment from the International Organisation of Migration in exchange for agreeing to return to their country of origin (informal discussion, fieldwork, 2013). There are also various different services that migrants can access including 'the PASS', a local medical centre, but as they ask for people's names, a great deterrent to undocumented people accessing services, such services do not make a particularly big impact on the everyday organising environment.

The ways in which these 'associations' interact with migrants are sometimes at odds with the CMS-led projects, which argue for migrant self-organisation and the elimination of border controls (as will be explored further in the chapter on Otherness, but there are also important links between CMS and the charities, in particular Salam. In 2015, after the media in both France and the UK became focused on No Borders as a group that 'used migrants for their own purposes', The Daily Express including quotes from French Interior Ministry spokesman Pierre-Henry Brandet who said "it is No Borders" who "take advantage of the disarray of the migrants and push them into rioting" (Allen, 2015). This press attention led to an increasing number of raids on No Borders/Calais Migrant Solidarity organising premises. A unity statement from 27 different French charities and associations

resulted in a media release entitled ‘No, The No Borders Movement is Not Responsible for Raising Tensions in Calais’<sup>16</sup> in what was at the time an unprecedented show of solidarity towards the activist collective.

The tensions around race, safety and Otherness in the charities and associations would be a rich extension of the kind of work that this thesis has undertaken. The fixation on relationships between migrants and volunteers and whether or not these sexual relationships between consenting adults are exploitative has been widely reported on since the summer of 2016, including a long exposé in the Independent (Bulman, 2016). Volunteers have written their responses too<sup>17</sup>, but as this is an area not directly related to the production of cultures of otherness in activist organising I will not cover it in further detail in this thesis, though I am likely to consider it for future research.

In conclusion, Calais is dotted with borderworkers of many kinds, making it a fertile ground to research questions of how borders are constructed through the politics of the everyday. Next, this chapter will locate the migrants of Calais in their daily experiences, in order to identify processes of othering and the ways in which the interaction between charities and activists could be problematised and transformed.

### **Calais Borderworkers: Groups and Number Break down, from 2011-2014**

Calais Migrant Solidarity	From 8-30 on average. Mostly young women, sometimes closer to an even gender balance. Sporadic involvement of
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<sup>16</sup> English translation available at <https://calaismigrantsolidarity.wordpress.com/?s=associations>

<sup>17</sup> Glenys Newton’s widely shared blog entry explored on particular relationship, ‘A volunteer and a refugee, Sarah and Hamoud, fell in love and are going to be married. There was an article in the media about this and the response has meant that the level of hatred being aimed at them is making their lives a misery’ (<https://glenysnewt.wordpress.com/2016/09/28/sex>)

	people who identified outside the gender binary. Usually European and with immigration papers, but also some migrants who had status in France, no more than two at any given time during my research period.
Belle Etoile and SALAM	The organisations Salam and Belle Étoile are part of a network of Christian organisations connected to Secours Catholique that provide food for the migrants in Calais. I wasn't close enough to them to know the size or scope of these organisations but they had 5 people cooking food (usually women) and a couple more to drive it to food distribution (often men) twice daily. CMS Activists often volunteered to help with the cooking. Much of the discussions and political organising happened in small groups during or after meals, and thus the local council was intent on shutting it down.
Far Right Nationalist Movements	The group in Calais known as Pegida, periodically will call for demonstrations in Calais (usually around 150 people, men), will sometimes perform patrols where they get in to physical fights with migrants, but it is difficult to work out how big their numbers are. They are a security concern as they feed the feelings that the impoverished border town is impoverished by migrants, which can result in aggressiveness and injuries.
International Organisation of Migration (IOM)	An organisation that attempts to convince migrants to agree to a 'voluntary return' that usually results in an incredibly high debt to be paid back by the migrant in question upon their return. They sometimes attend food distribution and are generally considered to be agents of the state.
New Anti-Capitalist Party	The local left wing political party. They claim to want to 'build a new socialist, democratic perspective for the twenty-first century'. They have activists involved in CMS and often agree to rent 'office' properties in their name at great risk so that CMS have an organising space. There is around 5 of them heavily active in the day to day organising of CMS. There is an even gender balance of participants, though perhaps skewed towards women slightly.

## 2.5 Experiments in Migrant Autonomy

The jungles are the self-organised spaces run and occupied by migrants. Although since 2015 there have been charities coming into the jungles during the day to run schools, libraries and kitchens, at night these are spaces that are occupied almost entirely by migrants from different communities. There is much that could be written about migrant self-organisation in Calais, but that is not the purpose of this thesis. However, it is necessary to document these projects briefly so that it doesn't appear that the whole infrastructure of counterpower in Calais is run and organised by activists, even though this is the area that will be explored.

It was the organised nature of The Jungle Village in 2009 that brought the place to the attention not only of migrant solidarity activists, but also of mainstream international media (Allen, 2009; Daily Express, 2009; The Sun, 2009) and also of the then mayor of Calais, Natacha Bouchart, who stated:

It's not a camp, it's a village. The municipal workers cannot clean it up, they're not up to it. I've told the Prefect and I've asked him to look at a measure to wipe out this organised village... It needs an intervention by the Army.

(Bouchart in Allen, 2009)

The perceived 'threat' that the Jungle Village presented was not only in its potential as a recruitment zone for people traffickers, as was so frequently claimed in the press (Allen, 2009), but also as a place where the press and humanitarian organisations could go to witness the CRS' actions in destroying what were basic necessities for migrant life in Calais, necessities that the French local and national governments simply refused to provide. The negative press coverage of the migrants' situation in Calais that occurred during destruction of the Jungle Village in September 2009 highlights further how powerful the village had become. The

protest and disagreement from NGOs and civil society at the destruction of the village was significant and the criticism of the governments involved was international (Allen, 2009).

The self-organised activities of the migrants, including everything from collective meal provision through to organising funerals and memorials for those lost whilst trying to cross<sup>18</sup> to the UK, is simultaneously exciting and inspiring, banal and everyday. According to Schwenken, the dynamic can be summarised as follows: 'refugees and migrants come to the Channel tunnel in order to reach the UK; police and private security from transportation firms try to stop them; at the local level, the population is split between those supporting the undocumented migrants out of political or humanistic motivations and those fighting 'illegal migration'; and politicians and parties try to capitalise on the conflicts' (2015, p. 176). The situation is of course deeply complex.

## **2.6 Calais Migrant Solidarity and its activities**

CMS is an activist collective that was established at the end of the Calais No Border protest camp in 2009. Some of the solidarity work it does could be considered charitable, and there are ongoing arguments about how to locate the project alongside critiques of the Big Society<sup>19</sup> and its model citizens. The list of activities being carried out by CMS at the time of my research period include: free English classes; free basic legal advice; workshops running through the questions the UK

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<sup>18</sup> The memorial and demonstration about the death of Nouredin Mohammed is just one of many examples (No Borders London, 2012).

<sup>19</sup> According to Walker and Corbett (2013), 'The 'Big Society' draws on a mix of conservative communitarianism and libertarian paternalism. Together, they constitute a long-term vision of integrating the free market with a theory of social solidarity based on hierarchy and voluntarism'. The Conservative government initiative encourages citizen volunteers to run services that they believe are worthwhile, allowing the state to withdraw from providing basic services such as libraries and elder care, allowing 'market efficiency' to decide which public services continue to run.

Border Agency may ask during the asylum application process; sleeping in front of the squats and encampments (often referred to as the 'jungles') to prevent immigration raids; organising demonstrations; producing myth-busting leaflets about what the International Organisation of Migration (IOM) may actually provide to those agreeing to 'voluntarily' return to their countries of origin rather than attempting to cross the Channel; and organising large-scale meal provision when the charities take a summer hiatus. There are also informal activities such as buying ingredients to cook together with the migrants in the 'jungles' when invited to do so. The group is constantly revising what is 'too charitable' to be considered solidarity work, but this thesis will not examine this discussion beyond what is covered in the 'otherness' chapter in relation to the way in which the patronising tone of some charitable outreach programmes is unlikely to make anyone at the borders safer or better cared-for.

There are ongoing issues in CMS in finding ways to balance so-called 'political' work with the desire to co-create spaces for collectivised forms of social reproduction together with migrants and local Calaisians. When British and European activists provide free English classes and legal advice, is this solidarity (an act arising from shared interests in accordance with radical migrant solidarity theory), or a benevolent charitable act (using one's own power and influence to help the disempowered who cannot help themselves)? The argument for free language provision is that if it is possible to create a space where everyone learns something (language exchange, for example, allows activists to learn rudimentary Arabic or a number of other languages) then perhaps it is an environment where we gain the skills to thrive and endure together rather than simply administering assistance. Some knowledge of both the English language and immigration procedures is arguably necessary, if not in Calais, then certainly upon arrival in the United Kingdom – a point reiterated by the migrants themselves – but of course language exchange classes and legal information workshops alone do not construct the structures necessary to live in a borderless world, especially when one of the

languages exchanged is that of the colonial global North and the other is not.

There are a number of overlapping projects run by CMS activists and the charities in Calais, especially food provision, and the distribution of shoes and clothing donated to the group. It is when undertaking these more 'charitable' acts that it becomes clear that even when both kinds of organisations work at full capacity, the needs of irregular migrants in Calais can never be met. At the end of the Calais No Border Camp in 2009, the precursor to CMS, a solidarity activist asked if the migrants would like the makeshift bathroom facilities left in the camping area or donations of sleeping bags. The firm answer given by one young Afghan man was that they did not need bathrooms or blankets, they needed the activists to open the border!<sup>20</sup> This response begs questions about the potential of this kind of 'political' solidarity work to change the social fabric of society, challenge cultures of racism and break down the possibility of migrant destitution in Calais - questions frequently raised in CMS organising spaces (fieldwork notes, 2013).

An example of the kinds of political work the collective undertakes comes from my field work in August 2012 when migrants detained in the Coquelles detention facility complained of racial and religious insults from officers, as well as 'other forms of being undermined', such as denial of sugar for tea. In response activists called a small noise demonstration outside the detention centre, shouting messages back and forth with the detainees. Tennis balls filled with sweets and sugar were thrown over the fence in to the courtyard where people were waiting in the designated smoking area. The action was well-received and once the detainees were

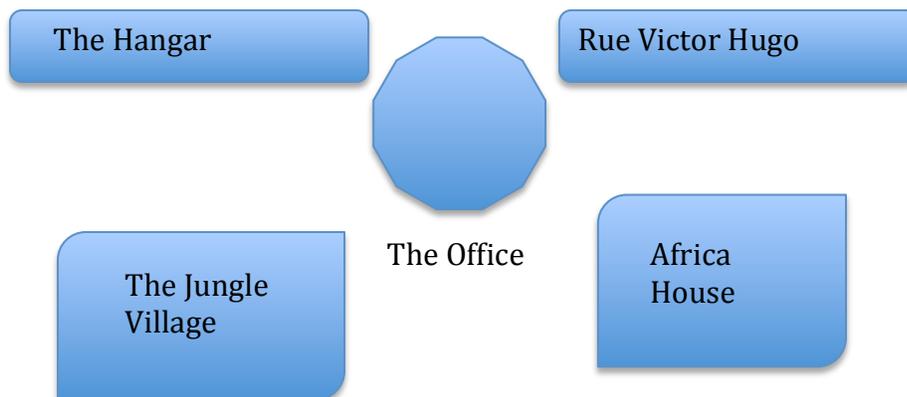
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<sup>20</sup> More about the No Border Camp in 2009 can be found in this interview by Joe Rigby (<https://libcom.org/library/interview-no-borders-calais>)

released it helped to foster a sense of community in the CMS office<sup>21</sup> (Calais Migrant Solidarity, 2012). On the same fieldwork trip it was Eid-al-Fitr, and No Borders and CMS activists marked the occasion by organising a party on the beach. A large generator and mobile speakers allowed for music to be amplified by anyone with a portable music player, meaning that music from all over the world was danced to by everyone involved. Food, drinking and dancing took place until the early hours, making for a memorable end to Ramadan (ibid). These examples are included to demonstrate that along with attempting to provide political solidarity and some welfare to migrants in Calais, the project has been undertaken as a political experiment in mutual aid, meaning that it tries to organise in democratic ways and with particular principles, which will now be explained.

### Figure 1: Infrastructures of Calais Migrant Solidarity

These were the kinds of spaces being used during my fieldwork period.



<sup>21</sup> CMS usually has a rented office space where activists sleep. Under the law L622-1 migrants are not allowed to sleep there overnight, but they come to the space during the day to use the computers, drink tea, share food and have meetings, language exchange etc. At one time the rented space was larger and was referred to as a 'hangar' but is usually called 'the office'. It is sometimes hard to get leases renewed as landlords are contacted by the police after renting to CMS and hassled, so the address changes frequently (fieldwork notes, 2013).

The office was the central organising space for CMS, and shifted depending on what kind of space could be rented, including a disused restaurant, an empty office, a suburban flat etc. Generally 5-30 people, usually European activists lived in these spaces temporarily.

Rue Victor Hugo, on Boulevard Victor Hugo was a place 'legally squatted' by Calais Migrant Solidarity under a loophole in French law on housing. This was squatted at different times during my fieldwork period and is one of the places I slept on a few separate occasions. There were computers and internet available to anyone who wanted to use it, meals were made here and tea and coffee always freely on offer. There was a similar space opened after my fieldwork period known as Squat Galloo and one before it known as The Hangar.

The Jungle Village was organised by the migrants themselves, and had a mosque, shop, library, make shift kitchen and temporary accommodation in tent shelters. It was destroyed by the authorities and rebuilt numerous times during my fieldwork.

Africa House, like the Tioxide Factory that opened later, is a squat opened and used by migrants from 2010-2012, being evicted during my fieldwork. It was lived in mostly by Sudanese people. It was a very large space that was frequently raided by police to the extent that it rarely felt secure, even when activists were sleeping out the front to try and deter illegal violence from police.

## **2.7 Calais Migrant Solidarity: Organisational Principles and Processes**

For those operating in alternative organisational structures including anarchist

and activist groupings such as Calais Migrant Solidarity, emphasis is placed on articulating their formation as one of a pre-figurative<sup>22</sup> or anticipatory model of organising that could continue to occur under a more equitable and democratic postcapitalist system (Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006, p. 738). If it is through anticipatory politics that it becomes possible to enact a world without borders, it is important to think about what kinds of spaces transnational migrant solidarity collectives create and what structures can be designed that enable a more collective, democratic and equitable way to organise and reproduce ourselves. Who does the work to make these spaces enjoyable? What role do migrants play in these spaces? Who feels comfortable and safe and is it ever the case that one person's comfort provokes another's alienation? According to King (2016, p.202), to the extent that the camps in Calais have been organised non-hierarchically and through mutual aid and direct action, they have also been an experiment in prefiguring societies based on these values (albeit temporarily).

Along with finding alternative ways to structure and organise activist spaces goes the idea that a particular solidaristic ethos will emerge from organising in this way, which will develop and promote non-hierarchical organising as a culture (Brown, 2011 p.202). The hope is that this will lead to individuals taking more responsibility for their own actions, social position or privileges and transform society both on a collective and individual basis. Calais Migrant Solidarity could be described as what Jenny Pickerill and Paul Chatterton refer to as an 'experiment in social autonomy, like social centres, convergence spaces and intentional communities'. These are spaces where people coalesce around a

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<sup>22</sup> Pickerill and Chatterton summarise prefigurative politics in the phrase 'be the change you want to see', and see change as possible through an accumulation of small changes, providing much-needed sense of hope. Part of this is the belief in 'doing it yourself' (see McKay, 1998) or creating workable alternatives outside the state. Many examples have flourished embracing ecological direct action, free parties and the rave scene, squatting and social centres, and open-source software and independent media. Resources are creatively reused, skills shared, and popular or participatory education techniques deployed, aiming to develop a critical consciousness, political and media literacy and clear ethical judgements (Freire, 1979 in Pickerill and Chatterton 2006).

desire to constitute non-capitalist, egalitarian and solidaristic forms of political, social and economic organisation alongside Others. These experiments are carried out through a combination of actively resisting certain forces, and creating alternatives to them (Pickerill and Chatterton 2006, p. 730). During the No Border Camp in Calais in 2010, many experiments in living together were carried out. In an online interview about the Calais No Border Camp, Joe Rigby, a migrant solidarity activist and scholar, says:

There are less geographical borders, which also need to be challenged and broken down, very intimate borders you carry round inside your head. In this I think the camp had more success... But not all borders are physical, and it is really the confluence of physical and social borders which people suffer from. In the camp some of the social borders which accompany physical ones were actively broken down. Some meetings and discussions were held in four or five languages, and discussions, exchanges and encounters occurred which disrupted the rhythms of everyday lives and the habituses of the activist, the citizen and the undocumented. In facilitating this, the camp helped undermine assumptions and preconceptions about different kinds of difference.

(Rigby, 2010)

The CMS collective often fails to 'hold on to' its organising spaces, due to constant police harassment (Calais Migrant Solidarity, 2010). As a result, the necessary collective experiments in making these kinds of spaces feel sustainable are routinely derailed, and at times CMS fails to attract larger numbers of migrants and activists due to their vulnerability to eviction. This is evident when examining the relevant 'social spatial forms of enclosure' (Gordon, 2010), such as the jungles, The No Borders Office, the squats, food distribution centre. What does it mean when the ability to build and sustain spaces to reproduce each other are at constant risk of having their 'assets stripped'? (Woods, 2009, p. 769).

Gavin Brown makes an interesting observation that the process of building prefigurative experiments has in some ways superseded previous foci of activist organising that were oriented primarily around targeting the state and symbols of the capitalist system (2011, p.201). In my participant observations of both Calais Migrant Solidarity activism and No Borders activism it was clear that the process of living together and acting together drew much larger numbers of activists than, for example, one-day demonstrations or ad hoc vigils outside of detention centres (fieldnotes, 2013). Brown suggest that this is because

in recent decades anarchist resistance has been generalised such that it no longer focuses prominently on the state and capital, but attempts to expose and undermine all forms of domination operating in society (including racism, patriarchy and heteronormativity). It is the redefinition of every aspect of social relations.

(Gordon, in Brown, 2010, p. 204)

It is in redefining social relations that it is possible to lose sight of the role of the state and capitalism in the (social) reproduction of life, and turn instead to the individual and to liberal notions of lifestyle politics, as will be explained below. Tangentially, it is, as Gordon notes, 'unsettling' to undertake an aim that may never be realised - even with a considerable change in social relations as they stand, new forms of domination and exclusion may emerge, leading to a cycle of internalised struggle. Ideally, within the process of building prefigurative experiments, the desires for personal liberation and social change motivate each other, which in turn promotes anarchism as a culture and follows Kropotkin's theories of mutual aid and anarchism on the basis of everyday, 'amateur practices' (Brown, 2010, p. 205). To achieve this our goals must be incorporated in to the way we organise. This is similar to an argument made by feminists about personal interactions shaping the political environments that activists and women work in, an argument that gained

salience in the civil rights and Anti-war movements of the 1960s and 70s in the phrase 'The personal is political'. The call for this kind of prefigurative politics of organising has always been disruptive, and for the early women's liberation movement it was necessary to attempt to craft egalitarian organisations of their own after the experience of sexism in new left groups, shaped by 'hierarchical and patriarchal leadership tendencies and structures'(Barrett, 1986 p.152).

The decision-making model used by both the large international No Border gatherings and smaller local groups tends to be based on a model of consensus or modified consensus, envisioned as trying to make decisions in a way that prefigures a better society. This is the case for Calais Migrant Solidarity as well. Consensus-based organising relies on the principle that eventually all members can come to agreement, or will at least opt out of a particular decision they do not agree with for the sake of the collective. The modified version of consensus sometimes relies on either a voting system or what is called 'taking the temperature' on an issue, which means people raise their hands to indicate if they are in agreement with the proposal or not, and the meeting proceeds accordingly. In Pickerill and Chatterton's reflections on a permaculture collective they observed (also a group that uses consensus models of organising), they noted that despite the fact that many activists had formal or informal training on the practicalities of running groups via consensus models, there was rarely enough time to make connections between these methods and the wider political orientation or goals of the group (Pickerill and Chatterton, 2010, p. 481). This is also true for CMS, and comes across as remiss given how much more time a consensus model takes, therefore relying on a high level of commitment from the group. This would be easier to garner if consensus decision-making was more explicitly part of the aims and culture of the organisation on principle, i.e. if the fact were highlighted that consensus organising is undertaken because under representative democracy it is harder to have your voice heard and respected. It is a form of decision-making that ought to feel more like living the

organisation's politics rather than appearing as a half-hearted and rarely-interrogated commitment to prefigurative politics.

In order to counteract long-standing criticisms of activist organisations for having 'hierarchical and patriarchal leadership structures' and what Frenkel and Shenhav (2006) refer to as 'Orientalist modes of organising within the west', numerous tactics have been devised with the aim of making access to knowledge and participation more equitable. These have included: consensus decision-making; particular kinds of 'sensitivity trainings'; teach-ins about the roots of structural oppression and subsequent associated behaviours; and autonomous self-organising for oppressed groupings, amongst many others. Since the 1980s many elements of left-wing organising have been institutionalised and consumed by capitalist 'equality training experts' and so forth (in my interview with Jack, he spoke about anti-fascist activists in the 1980s being offered 'anti-racism' officer positions in local councils) leading to particular kinds of resistances to 'sensitivity trainings' within the hard left and anarchist circles, who see these tactics as forms of Human Resource Management or as liberal models of fostering unity that require 'expertise' rather than a commitment to negotiating difference through practices of struggle. This resistance, although somewhat counterbalanced by the move towards reflexivity that is sometimes termed 'checking your privilege', (which will be explored further in the chapter four on Otherness), is an example of the different tensions within CMS regarding how otherness ought to be approached and negotiated.

The importance of simultaneously taking direct action, organising strategic campaigns and building alternative organisations which could serve to model the future society is sometimes termed 'lifestyle politics'. When building broad-based campaigns appeared to lead no closer to revolution, a member of the Movement for a New Society, a Quaker organisation that followed anarchistic principles, noted that 'individuals can seek to live the revolution now by giving up the characteristic

scatter of liberal activities which results in fragmented selves, soulless organisations, and substitute concentration and community' (Lahey, quoted in Cornell, 2009). This belief arguably led to a decrease in activist organising outside the group and more engagement in inward-focussed activities such as 'radical counselling' to root out the 'emotional blockages that lead to oppressive behaviours' and holding feminist men's meetings in the street so that people could see that 'real men cry'. The Movement for a New Society ceased to exist not long after this, as they could not negotiate the fundamental contradiction between their agreement to be a movement-building organisation and a deep belief that having influence on society is elitist and a misuse of power. Lifestylism is also a politics that has some sway in Calais Migrant Solidarity as it is easy to feel that one is participating less in capitalist forms of rent and work when the accommodation provided is accessed through funding applications made to trust funds and corporate donors. The way that the organisation is funded is no doubt also influential in the way that the organisation runs, and the culture of bureaucracy that surrounds funding applications.

Either annually or biennially, there is a broader meeting open to the entire No Borders Network held in Calais to discuss the future of the project. Similar meetings have taken place at convergences (like the ones held at Goldsmiths University in London in February 2012, August 2014 in Calais, and at the London Anarchist Bookfair in 2016) or No Border camps to assess the effectiveness of the network's presence in Calais and the political successes or failures in terms of challenging borders and border controls, along with calls for people to come to Calais, or provide funding or particular items/services for the project. It was interesting to spend time researching the way the organisation works and coming to understand how its success comes in some ways from the social networking and associated privileges of the members involved in its day to day running, and what this means for those Othered by these sorts of processes.

Looking at these issues together, we can see a complex set of processes at work, as participants in the Calais Migrant Solidarity project engage with trying to create resilient support mechanisms, retool themselves as political actors to prefigure a better world, and simultaneously materially resist various inequalities to actually improve their lives and those of others (Pickerill and Chatterton, 2010, p. 481). As discussed above, one form of prefigurative practice is consensus decision-making. This process will now be examined in more detail.

The decision-making model for Calais Migrant Solidarity, as noted in the previous section, is that of consensus or modified consensus, which can end up giving weight to the voices of those who are more active in Calais or have spent extensive periods of time there and have strong local connections and ties, as they are the ones most confident with the process. This is evident at the small meetings that happen in the hangar or office space in Calais, although input from the larger email list is accepted if a more serious decision is being made. As previously discussed, consensus decision-making relies on the idea that eventually everyone will come to agreement, or allow a decision through, which is not always easy. Decisions that need to be made in an on-going way include: practical matters such as deciding how many people it is necessary to have at the office in order to carry out agreed-upon tasks and activities (the list of CMS activities was listed at the beginning of this section); how much training individuals need to carry out legal advice sessions or, more recently, advice on what to say in interviews with the UKBA in order to claim asylum; how to reduce the frequency and excessiveness of alcohol consumption in the hangar, and connected to this, how to help each other with trauma support (more about this in Chapter five on Safety in Calais); how much time should be spent on direct actions targeting the town hall or the mayor or visiting government officials (the details of which cannot be discussed on the list or in public areas), as well as day-to-day financial decisions about which organisations to apply for funding from; whether it is wasteful to pay for fumigation to get rid of the bed bugs

or lice problems that recur so frequently in the communal sleeping spaces from sharing mattresses; whether it is ethical to use mousetraps in the shared kitchen.

Dozens of similar and varying decisions are made (and, due to the model of organising, remade), depending on who is in the organising space at any given time. These decisions relate not only to material factors, but also act as places where people discuss how they have been feeling in the spaces and what could be done to make them safer or more inviting. The ways that these spaces could be used to discuss vulnerabilities and how to navigate them will be outlined below.

## **2.8 Sharing Vulnerability in Calais**

It is frequently noted that if there were a stricter protocol about people reading the general handbook upon arrival in the Calais Migrant Solidarity office/hangar/current organising space, then many of these decision-making meetings could be avoided, as over the years many of these decisions have been made collectively on numerous occasions and then remade when new people arrived. Sometimes this is an annoyance to members who spend a lot of time there but is otherwise benign; at other times it is quite stressful, especially if a difficult set of decisions is having to be collectively made and remade, for example around the best way to keep women safe in collective sleeping spaces; how many people need to be in a group that goes out at night to visit minors; or who is not allowed in the office during the day due to accusations of harassment. There was an occasion when I was doing my fieldwork where a woman said that she had to have the same conversation about the same experience of harassment every time a new group of activists arrived in order to explain why the open door policy on socialising at night in the office was temporarily suspended and it was beginning to upset her, even though a note about it was in the handbook at the door of the office (fieldwork

notes, 2013). The specifics of these sorts of tensions and vulnerabilities, and the possibilities of collectivising them, will be explored further in chapter six on Vulnerability. In this section I will look at the different ways vulnerability is present in Calais Migrant Solidarity organising spaces, including how the experiences that the migrants have in Calais influence the space, and how the personal histories that each person brings with them affect the space.

When working in Calais with Others who are in a position of being always physically and sometimes emotionally precarious, it can be seen as 'navel-gazing' to spend time thinking through the different ways that everyone who accesses the shared organising spaces can be vulnerable. Calais Migrant Solidarity activists are constantly confronted by the appalling living conditions that migrants in Calais are forced to endure, and can feel that their own emotions should not take precedence in a more general conversation about safety and how to make spaces safer. Below I will outline the kinds of ways that migrants can be represented as vulnerable but also as agential and the struggles that activists feel around their ability to relate to Others' vulnerability.

According to a paper released by the Co-ordination Française pour le Droit D'Asile (CFDA)<sup>23</sup>, migrants in Calais are seen as outside of the laws that pertain to French citizens. The central government and local authorities are reluctant to grant what are defined under French law as 'universal social services', despite the fact that even those without a residence permit are in fact entitled to them under the law. This includes emergency accommodation, care for minors and information on how to apply for asylum and access medical advice, amongst many others. These laws are

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<sup>23</sup> Co-ordination Française pour le Droit D'Asile (CFDA) is an alliance of humanitarian groups including Amnesty International, Act-Up Paris, Secours Catholique and others, who release reports on humanitarian issues for migrants in France. The report 'The Law of the Jungles: The situation of exiles on the shore of the Channel and the North Sea' is available via their website: <http://cfda.rezo.net>

never enforced in Calais, partly because some migrants want to remain under the radar and thus may refuse the administrative requirements to join a housing list, and partly because there is not the necessary pressure from the public to house migrants when emergency housing is already overburdened and underfunded in France. No level of government - local, national or international - seems willing to take responsibility for these migrants (Co-ordination Francaise pour le Droit D'Asile, 2008, p. 3) which makes reporting human rights violations such as the raid described below to any kind of authority exceedingly difficult. This is an example from the website written by an activist from CMS:

At approximately 10am, scores of unknown individuals wearing gas masks and dressed in white uniforms, entered the Tajik/Hazara squat in Scrubland near the ferry port, tore apart their shelters and sprayed an irritant chemical over their belongings. They claimed to be disinfecting the area as part of a programme to treat scabies, despite the fact that the operation was officially cancelled by the French Government. Cooking utensils were contaminated, and the absence of running water in the camp made cleaning their equipment extremely difficult... The unknown individuals also seized essential materials such as clothing, and arrested six people, all under the gaze of several van loads of CRS police.

(Calais Migrant Solidarity, 2009)

These sorts of operations are routine in Calais and whilst activists attempt to blockade the squats to stop the raids, the activists are rarely completely successful. The desire to categorise the treatment of migrants in Calais as inhumane and their condition therefore 'abject' (Tyler, 2013, p. 4) is one that is elicits controversy and debate amongst the network. The desire to be clear about the violence of borders (often represented by 'killer Fortress Europe'), whilst not wanting to obscure the humanity of migrants or their strength as autonomous political actors by typecasting them as 'abject' or similar, makes for a difficult argument to negotiate; at which point is any person in control of what happens to them? In many ways the

jungles and squats of Calais could be described as,

those 'unliveable' and 'uninhabitable' zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject, but whose living under the sign of the 'unliveable' is required to circumscribe the defining limits of the subject's domain.

(Butler, 1993, p.3)

This said, activists in Calais are keen to present migrant action as independent and self-driven, moving 'the abject' away from their enforced 'purity that demands they become speechless victims, invisible and apolitical' (Nyers, 2003, p.1074). Partly this is because the actions of migrants and their autonomy are frequently ignored, leaving them apparently helpless and at the mercy of state asylum protocols, and partly it is because, whilst situated as the embodiment of exclusion, the abject are prime candidates for 'hidden, frightful or menacing subjectivities to define their condition' (Nyers, 2003, p.1074), which may encourage racism in the nation states where migrants make their claims.

Indeed it is against this projection of migrants as helpless or menacing that CMS organising spaces are articulated, and part of running these spaces is attempting to negotiate conflicts whilst taking into account the full spectrum of experiences the people in the spaces are shaped by. The construction of safer spaces in which to organise is part of anticipating the world in which activists want to live; as a result the collective has looked for ways to resolve interpersonal issues through community restorative justice practices.

### *Safety, Restorative Justice, Vulnerability*

For solidarity activists, proposals designed with the intent to make our projects and communities generally 'safer' for participants and Others are a high priority. There have been various attempts to foster an activist culture that does not re-inscribe the

structural and social norms of racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism and so on: norms which make marginalised people feel unsafe in society as it is currently configured. In this section the broader context in which activists are using transformative justice policies and practices to situate their antiracist work will be explored. This is in order to position Calais Migrant Solidarity as group that is part of a transnational move towards creating structures of justice outside of state jurisdictions, especially when Calais is already a highly-policed environment in so many ways. Organisations such as INCITE!<sup>24</sup> and projects such as Salvage (Downes et.al, 2016) seek to establish safety in the wider community by creating alternative approaches to the criminal justice system, so-called rehabilitation programmes and community sentencing. Briefly below (and to a fuller extent in Chapter Four, which concerns safety), I outline some transformative/ restorative approaches to safety, prefacing the later chapters that explore the possibilities of orienting activist praxis around a solidarity based on shared, differentiated and overlapping experiences of violence, anger, risk, and vulnerability.

In trying to find a vehicle for the move towards ‘safer communities’, both in activist scenes and organisations in wider society, there has been a cacophony of proposals, from those that seek to reform state structures to those that advocate a ‘violent’ reconfiguration of safety as it is commonly understood (Leonardo and Porter, 2010, p.149). According to some reformers, safety can be improved for minority communities by successfully campaigning to increase the accessibility and availability of state-provided services (Blakey, 2005). Some anti-racist organisations

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<sup>24</sup> ‘INCITE! Women, Gender Non-Conforming, and Trans people of Colour Against Violence is a US-based activist organisation of radical feminists of colour advancing a movement to end violence against women of colour and our communities through direct action, critical dialogue and grassroots organising... Some projects include... challenging the non-profitization of antiviolence and other social justice movements, organising rallies on street harassment... organising mothers on welfare, building and running a grassroots clinic, supporting communities to engage in community accountability strategies, and much more’ (2013). There are details of other organisations approaching these issues from a UK perspective such as Sheffield LaDIYfest and the Salvage Project (Downes, et.al 2016) in the first chapter of this thesis.

prioritise educational community campaigns featuring a respectable spokesperson that can represent the voice of the Others whilst still being able to relate to the mainstream (this approach is critiqued in Wang, 2012). In order to think through ways that migrant solidarity activists can create fruitful organising environments, this project looks to the critiques raised by critical race theorists Leonardo and Porter, who argue that for people of colour, 'safety' under modern capitalist relations is itself a form of violence and needs to be met with a dialectical violence, where individuals undertake a rapid revisiting of the ways in which colonial thinking and white supremacy have permeated every area of life (2010 p. 155).

One suggestion for countering colonial thinking in ways that allow for safety and solidarity to merge in praxis, according to INCITE! (2013), relies upon individuals and communities attempting to make feelings of vulnerability manageable. This means that, rather than seeking a straightforward resolution of an issue, collectives should attempt to reframe the problem through 'relationships of mutual recognition and developing our capacity to live with uncertainty' (INCITE! 2013).

There are processes for conflict resolution already present in Calais that sometimes work but have historically relied upon gendered labour and at times the over-commitment of particular individuals in terms of their time and energy at severe personal cost (this will be explored further in the section on activist burnout in Chapter Six, which addresses the subject of vulnerability). Following the insights of transformative justice collectives, there are certainly ways this could work in Calais through providing space for dialogue between the migrants, who are suffering routine attacks by police and border officials, and the locals, who are being barraged by information that providing any assistance or solidarity to migrants will encourage theft, violence and people trafficking (see section above on L622-1). Following the INCITE! model, activists and community members could mediate a communication based on values of 'safety, respect, self-determination, and

nurturing a culture of collective responsibility, connection, and liberation' (INCITE!, 2013). INCITE argue that this kind of dialogue is a form of community accountability which is not just a reaction to someone doing something that makes another person feel unsafe, but is also proactive, ongoing and negotiated among everyone in the community. This better prepares communities to address moments of contention and dispute if and when they occur.

The question then becomes whether or not it is possible to create these forums or spaces where people can come together and participate meaningfully, despite language barriers, precarious immigration status, and differentiated access to information and basic needs such as housing and food. Leonardo and Porter would argue that open community discussion could not be made safe for the people of colour as it exists as part of a hegemonic system of violence against marginalised people. From this perspective, safety discourses on race are a veiled form of violence and to counter this will require a 'humanising form of violence' to expose contradictions in the discourse of safety (2010, p. 140).

An element of 'differently distributed risk<sup>25</sup>' for all those involved must also be acknowledged. Within activist camps and activities in recent times, there have been attempts to provide space for these discussions in 'autonomous zones' known as 'safer spaces'.

### *Critical Articulation of Safer Spaces as Anticipatory Politics*

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<sup>25</sup> Fanonian scholars agree that removing all elements of risk and danger reinforces a politics of reformism that just reproduces the existing social order. Militancy is undermined by the politics of safety. It becomes impossible to do anything that involves risk when people habitually block such actions on the grounds that it makes them feel unsafe (Wang, 2012, p. 163).

Postcolonial scholars have contested the neutrality of *any* space given the ongoing legacies of colonialism (Puar, 2002, Leonardo and Porter, 2010, DiAngelo and Sensoy, 2012). Subsequently, any place where activists, migrants and local Calaisians<sup>26</sup> could meet is drenched with meaning and history. It makes sense, therefore, to look at the 'operation' of space as an entity. Weems defines space as 'material and symbolic networks of bodies in contact with particular boundaries that may or may not be 'visible' in the current geography of placement' (2005, p. 62). In other words, while the boundaries of the place may be concrete - such as the place called 'the office' where activists, migrants and locals come together to drink tea, talk and pass the time between journeys - according to Weems, the *network* of contact and control can permeate time, place and space. She argues for a method of 'bringing into view ordinary people on the move simultaneously framed within contested historical and geographical contexts as social and spatially situated subjects' (2005, p. 62).

The Roestone collective argue that the context of any space where dialogue takes place is of paramount importance (2014). Community issues around safety can only be resolved through dialogue if participants respect the fact that all people are affective beings with varying contexts, relationships and personal histories. This will be explained further in the section on 'Intersectional Inclusion' in Chapter Four (on Safety). Only through problematising our own social positions and powers as migrant solidarity activists will it be possible to work productively with the questions of 'embeddedness' and 'mobility' of socially and spatially-situated subjects (Weems, 2005, p. 62). In other words, appeals to 'safe space' must negotiate 'historical material and symbolic linkages ... with heteronormative, racialised and nationalist discontinuities and slippages within totalising narratives' (2005, p. 62). Additionally, as part of the need to confront issues collectively, this thesis explores

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<sup>26</sup> It is important to note that these are not three distinct categories. Someone could identify as all three (e.g. 'a local migrant activist'), or engage with the space as someone who identifies with none of these labels.

the way that people understand whether they themselves are responsible for addressing the harms that they witness, or witnesses are 'innocent' and what responsibility people have to respond to the Other's pain (INCITE! in Jackson and Meiners, 2011). This allows activists to work from a situated analysis of power whilst pursuing safety as something that comes from the ability to flourish, rather than working towards the creation of a mythical community with a total absence of negative values.

This chapter is designed to outline the context in which this thesis emerged. From the larger structural, spatial and economic factors that provoke particular ways of being through to the interpersonal relations of power that play out in Calais Migrant Solidarity as a grassroots organisation shaped by its environment. By outlining the prefigurative and anticipatory values that motivate the actions of Calais Migrant Solidarity, the ways in which actions that emphasise the Otherness experienced by minorities in the organisation is both embraced and eschewed has been clarified, allowing for an exploration of what a critical operation of safer spaces policies might do and look like. The final chapter of this thesis will bring together the ways that discussing and acting on individual and collective experiences of vulnerability can, far from 'navel-gazing', be taken on as a collaborative project as part of the social reproduction of CMS. In an attempt to keep my research methods in line with the values and ideas of feminist and migrant solidarity organisations that I participate in and drew my participants from, I engaged in a methodological approach known as Critical Ethnography, explained further in the next chapter, on methods.

### **Chapter Three: Conducting Research in Transnational Migrant Solidarity Groups**

This project emerges from participant observations and interviews drawing on the work of feminist and migrant solidarity activist collectives. Negotiating this methodological work was in some ways troubling and in other ways inspiring; indeed, sometimes I experienced these emotions simultaneously. I observed moments where individual experiences of ‘negative emotions’ such as fear, insecurity and vulnerability, have led to processes of exclusion along lines of gender and race rather than seeking out processes that might complicate much-critiqued discourses that produce an ‘us’ and ‘them’ arising from understandings of others’ individual subject positions (Moallem, 2011). The question of how to investigate safety, vulnerability and shared forms of social reproduction in ways that remained ‘true’ to the collectives I was a part of whilst finding ways to challenge entrenched behaviours was as challenging as it was rewarding. I conducted my research as a participant observer using qualitative methods that drew from Participatory Action Research as part of a critical ethnography (explained further below). My methodology attempted to generate outcomes and documentation that served the social group on whom the research is based that is of most use and interest to them. Whilst in many ways my thesis is an individual research process, it is also one that I

have attempted to conduct following questions and directions from the groups and individuals I interviewed.

This chapter will explore the methodological process I engaged in, including the fifteen interviews and fifteen participant observations, alongside a personalised and reflexive account of my research process. As a participant/ activist ethnographer my story (and my subjectivity and experiences) and my approach as with all participant/activist ethnography, is partial. In particular, engaging with the organising spaces and these activists as a researcher has both integrated me further into and excluded me further from producing a clear or objective analysis of the field.

The question of personal distance will be discussed below, along with the barriers I faced in my research, the ethical questions it raised, and the aspects of activist ethnography that I found helpful and unhelpful in understanding otherness in transnational migrant solidarity collectives. The first section will be about what methods I chose and the usefulness of these as well as the limitations of them, then a set of reflections about the ways that my positionality impacted upon the research I am conducting in Calais concerning gender, race and class, and some of the implications of this. I will then finish by outlining some ethical considerations I consider important to the project.

The outcomes of my research were communicated in a collective meeting in August 2014 when I conducted a troubleshooting workshop about gender, race and safety in the collective organising processes of Calais Migrant Solidarity. The workshop was with activist organisations, members of the two largest charities on the ground at the time, people who lived locally in Calais and representatives from several migrant groupings. I have also contributed to writing projects concerning how to create safe collaborative organising environments, documents that will be available in hard copy at the organising premises of Calais Migrant Solidarity from mid-2017. This research involved many considerations about how to engage ethically with these

groups, especially as each group had different access to power in terms of their ability to shape public perceptions. By allowing the research to be commented upon and directed by my interviewees and different collective members, I have attempted to make impactful and meaningful research that has been reportedly helpful in negotiating instances of sexism, racism and homophobia in organising spaces (personal correspondence with Anna, 2016).

This thesis is designed to focus on the activist borderworkers (Rumford, 2012) both in Calais and organising against migration controls in London (including the feminist and anti-racist groups listed at the end of the chapter) to determine their attitudes towards others that populate their organising environments, in the hopes of unpicking constructions of Otherness produced within the groupings. By creating a shared understanding of how the space is constructed, maintained and reproduced, it is hoped that a more reflexive and accountable culture can be collectively cultivated. Whilst the research will specifically focus on the attitudes of activists and their viewpoints, opinions and ideas, this is not an attempt to further universalise the experiences of those largely from the global North, but is rather an attempt to analyse the ways these opinions and ways of organising hold back organisations seeking to transform relationships in the clearly postcolonial context of Calais through a focus on acts of social reproduction that underpin social relations and the ability to of the collective to contribute to a different political culture. It is important to acknowledge the context that this research takes place in. Given that the projects of globalisation and white supremacy continue unabated, it is necessary that work such as this attend to the intersections of race, gender and nation, along with the interaction these have with migration status, sexuality, mental health, and other constructed categories of dominance and oppression (Sudbury, 2005, p. xiv). Through interviewing individuals involved within and in organisations connected to Calais Migrant Solidarity, this thesis will seek to connect the individual and personal

with broader systemic analyses whilst historicising in reference to projects of colonisation and nation-building (Sudbury, 2005:xvii).

In order to envision and work towards another world, one those I interviewed might call a 'world without borders', grassroots movements need a process of creating maps of these connections - personal experiences, with historical references and a current contextual analysis of both geopolitics and interpersonal interactions - that allow for visions of how things could become. This is supported by the statements made in the following section about 'activist culture', arguing that solidarity is made more difficult when a strict set of norms pervades what is supposed to be an open and welcoming space to organise, one that takes racism and other forms of oppression into account.

### **3.1 Militant Enquiry via Critical Ethnography**

I have used a combination of methods drawing on the tradition of critical ethnographic research (Madison, 2005) including the reflexive elements of critical autoethnography (Graeber, 2004; Land and King, 2014; Reedy, King, and Coupland, 2016) and activist ethnography (Graeber 2004, Tuhiwai Smith 1999). I used qualitative methods including semi-structured interviews (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000), and participant observation in open meetings (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2011), as a form of militant inquiry in to the production of otherness in migrant solidarity organisations. Interviews mainly took place with those who self-define as 'activists' within Calais Migrant Solidarity and the European 'No Borders' networks to which it is closely related and with which it shares many members. I have also sought to interview the 'spill-over' charity workers at the associations who are also engaged in activist work (see interviews with Kelly and Jean) in an attempt to compare and contrast their approaches to their work and ideas of solidarity with those of the activists. These are analysed in dialogue with data gathered through

participant observation carried out in forums in Calais and London in transnational migrant solidarity organisations, including feminist groups. I only use data that is gained from open, public-facing meetings, and open online forums and discussions, and individual interviews with people who have agreed that their contribution be published publicly under a pseudonym. I draw on information gathered through the participation of and collaboration with groups and organisations working for freedom of movement and against immigration controls and anti-racist and feminist groups for whom safety is a key concern, including; Calais Migrant Solidarity, Feminist Fightback, No One Is Illegal, London No Borders and detainee support groups such as Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group. These are also the organisations that my interview participants were drawn from. There are longer organisational profiles further on in this chapter.

I understand that this makes my research an example of purposive sampling, which is defined as 'judgemental sampling that involves the conscious selection by the researcher of certain subjects or elements to include in the study' (Crookes and Davis 1998), but given the personal and sometimes emotional content of the interviews, having a personal relationship of some kind with these people (at the very least mutual activist friends) made it possible to gather participants willing to talk in frank and at least seemingly-open ways. I was sure to check in with each person interviewed to make sure they were happy with what they had said and adapted their contributions according to any changes they wanted to make. There were moments when this caused changes in the data after the fact, such as following the interview with Kelly who felt she had 'given too much of herself as if talking with a friend' when discussing about what it was like to be a child raised in state care without consistent adult role models. She said that even though she could not have explained the importance of her work with unaccompanied migrant children without explaining why the environment was so personal to her, it was not necessarily a story she would tell anybody who asked. It was down to her trusting me and that I would look after the information she had shared. I have been very

Careful with the details of her story and she has made some adaptations to the quotations I have used.

### **3.2 Critical Ethnography, a political choice of methodology**

Critical Ethnography is said to begin with an 'ethical responsibility to address processes of unfairness or injustice within a particular lived domain' (Madison, 2005, p. 5). It is a form of ethnographic research that focuses on processes of unfairness, obscure and blatant operations of power and control, disrupting the status quo and moves from 'what is' to 'what could be' (Denzin in Madison, 2005, p. 5). Critical ethnographers aim to identify, name, question and act against injustice whilst focusing on the researchers' own impact on the field (Madison, 2005, p. 8). Critical Ethnography encompasses many methodologies, including auto-ethnography, insider/'native' anthropology and militant anthropology. It emerged from criticisms of anthropology's cultural reductionism, and its apparent failure to use insights to call for utopian imaginings; the possibilities, in other words, for ethnography to be used as a tool for social transformation.

According to David Graeber in his work 'Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology,' ethnography is an excellent way to carry out the aims of militant research as 'the practice of ethnography provides at least something of a model, if a very round, incipient model, of how non-vanguardist revolutionary intellectual practice might work' (2004, p. 10). For Graeber, the work of observing and analysing what people do in their hidden symbolism and moral or pragmatic logics that underlie their actions can be a purposeful activity for a radical intellectual. This is particularly true in the case of activists seeking to create alternative ways of relating and more equitable prefigurative organisational forms (such as Calais Migrant Solidarity) as the possibilities presented by these groups can then be extrapolated upon and offered back as reflections (2004, p. 12) and hopeful contributions.

Graeber suggests that projects about activism should be made up of two parts, one ethnographic and one utopian, and that those two parts must remain in constant dialogue with each other (2004, p. 12). It can be argued that ethical activist research 'moves our work off the shelf by becoming proficient translators of academic language' and disseminates findings in meaningful ways, which can be achieved by writing for and distributing findings to the community and working groups to stimulate discussions (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2011, p. 198). In short, critical ethnographies are designed to build counterpower, including, but not limited to; self-governing communities (one could argue that these are the kinds of spaces built by Calais Migrant Solidarity), radical labour unions, popular militias, and alternative forms of sociality and social institutions (2004, p. 24). And if this is the case, then the ability to reflect on the processes that activists undertake to build that counterpower, and to communicate in a way where the voice of the intellectual comes not from above but from within (Gordon, 2007, p. 280), is critically important. Specific details of what kinds of conversations and interviews might be necessary to do these things are discussed below in the examination of open-ended interviews as a form of praxis.

In the tradition of militant inquiry or militant research, this project aims to produce knowledge useful for activist endeavours. I have done this so far by contributing to the discussion on gender, safety and trauma during the internal network convergence in Calais in August 2014, and through contributing to the leaflet/zine project on the same topic that will be distributed both in the office in Calais and will be available during the Calais trainings across Europe this summer.

In 'Constituent Imagination: Militant Investigations, Collective Theorisations', militant research is defined as 'starting from understandings, experiences and relations generated through organising as both a method of political action and as a form of knowledge' (Biddle et al., 2007, p. 9). They emphasise that militant research

must be embedded in transformational practice. In this case, my involvement in Calais Migrant Solidarity is necessary to being the kind of 'witness to change and possibilities for change' that social movements need militant researchers for. This is in keeping with the stated purpose of militant research as being to develop tools, frameworks, concepts, techniques and strategies that resonate with campaigns, initiatives and organisations (Van Meter, 2008, p. 2).

According to the Colectivo Situaciones militant research, far from aiming for objectivity, is motivated towards progressive social change, and attempts to be practical, applicable and valuable to those engaged in struggles for social transformation and to redefine the ways we think and relate to each other, whilst seeking to construct 'alternative socialities and new values' (2011, p. 195). This kind of research fits with the core ethos of Calais Migrant Solidarity, in that it aims to be prefigurative, i.e. the manner in which knowledge is produced is as important as the content of the research. This speaks to the importance of creating respectful, egalitarian and sustainable ways of doing things in the present, ways that reflect the desires of the communities being studied. There have been various questions raised within Calais Migrant Solidarity about the usefulness of academic research to the activities and ethos of the collective and views on this remain divergent (for a discussion of this see King, 2016 p.173). An example of this was when I was told, somewhat strictly, by Kavita that the only reason she would agree to an interview with me was because I had 'put in the hours on the ground'. She said 'this problem comes from our struggle with the possibility of opening a conversation social movements need to have, otherwise I wouldn't be here' (interview with Kavita). This suggests that gaining interviews within these activist networks as 'an outsider' would have been considerably more difficult.

### 3.3 Methods: Using Open Ended Interviews

As a way of exploring what transnational migrant solidarity organisations and spaces feel like and what kind of environment exists in these spaces, I not only took note of the verbal answers provided but was also influenced by the non-verbal cues given in the interview such as eye contact, tone of voice and body language to understand which questions caused discomfort and which answers felt easy. This was partially undertaken through asking a set of straightforward and seemingly simple questions such as, 'Can you tell me about the everyday political activities you were involved in with CMS?' through to more complex questions about legacies of colonialism and whether individual attitudes impacted upon migrant solidarity as a in practice and as a concept.

The open-ended interviews that I held with people connected to the Calais Migrant Solidarity project are designed to be of use in order

to learn from and assemble the experiences and knowledge of variously situated people, and to build an understanding of how their work and consciousness are coordinated by social relations.

(DeVault and McCoy 2006)

It was for this reason that I returned to Calais in August 2014 to present my work on safety and safer spaces to the internal network gathering. Although my session was significantly shaped by the session immediately before it on trauma support, it was good to be able to discuss my findings and concerns with the group, whilst also attempting to be open and balanced in how I was presenting my findings given that people were very upset after (belatedly) collectively processing the moment when Nouredin Mohammed's body was found by activists floating in the nearby canal<sup>27</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup> For more details about the kinds of trauma that activist and others discuss and experience in organising spaces see 'Calais: Justice for Nouredin Mohamed' No Borders London (2012) .

Some activists from Berlin suggested the creation of a 'zine on gender issues in Calais as a follow-up to the session; I will seek to contribute to this also in order to continue the discussion about gender and productions of otherness within our network. I will discuss this in further detail in the section below about post-interview analysis.

As part of acknowledging my particular investments in my research, it is worth noting that the interviews were at times an emotional experience. Some of the stories women in particular told me about experiences in Calais were shocking, and though I have not included the details of these accounts, I have attempted to bring in some of the power in their stories to my empirical chapters on safety, otherness and vulnerability. According to Hoffman, 'when researchers act without awareness of their emotions and the emotional labour they perform in the field, they will be more influenced by their emotions, not less (2007, p. 322). Hoffman goes on to say that this is particularly the case for open-ended interviews, as the interviews can unexpectedly take a turn for the more emotionally-charged, since there are ideally no preconceived ideas for how the interview ought to run (2007, p.323).

Whether down to feminist principles or personal traits of my own, when I mention my research topic in conversation, people are often willing to tell quite emotional experiences of sexism and configurations of gender roles in Calais, and about how alienating it can feel to be sidelined in political environments. Sometimes it is a lot for me to deal with. The lack of forums to discuss this issue feels red hot in moments, to the extent that I had to take breaks from some events because the topics became too close to home. Additionally, the fairly solitary act of interviewing people, especially people I already knew, or someone I had a connection to, along with a commitment to protecting privacy, meant after a 'heavy' conversation I

needed to process the information alone, a particular form of emotional labour. I found that emotional dynamics and difficult feelings about my fieldwork were often negotiated and renegotiated throughout the process of interviewing (Blee in Hoffman, 2007, p.322).

The interviews were carried out from only a few questions, broad in scope, with an idea that the direction could be chosen by the interviewee depending on what they thought was important. I tried to carry out my interviews in a casual manner, ideally allowing for the interviewee to construct a conversation, as conversation is the 'common technique we all use to learn about phenomena in our world, which can of course be used for research too' (Kvale, 1996). The idea of having an open-ended structure is that the direction is decided by the interviewee and thus all fruitful leads can be followed in a natural fashion in which the conversation flows, rather than having to tick off lists of questions. This ideally increases the scope of data collected and can even heighten the study's validity (Denzin and Lincoln in Hoffman, 2007, p. 330). Additionally, the open structure can empower the interviewee to share information that might not have been directly solicited (2007, p.343).

It was necessary to do a certain amount of steering in some interviews, in particular the one with Sofia that lasted almost two hours, as she took the interview as a chance to process what she saw as oppressive attitudes within the No Border Network and chose to do so by profiling numerous individuals in great detail. I noticed that this was having an impact on not only the pace but also the tone of the interview and that she felt agitated. I noted that she was quite flat after she finished answering the questions on the first theme (the questions were divided in to two broad themes, explained below) and it took some time before she was able to switch between the themes as the second set is more about possibilities of changing things for the better and she was not in the headspace for that. By the end of the interview

she was more upbeat, but I reflected afterwards that my responsibility to steer the interview was greater than I had previously realised. Sofia was someone who was working two jobs and didn't have very much time for activism and I was conscious that by raising difficult questions with her I might be distancing her emotionally from the work of activism. I was interviewing both people who are more heavily involved in Calais than I am, and also people who keep a distance from the project these days for their own reasons and respecting their decision and privacy concerning this was important.

In attempting to understand the meanings participants attach to particular events or ideas, Irving Seidman suggests that there is 'an art to hearing data' that must be developed over time. 'Meaning is not just the facts, but rather the understandings one has that are specific to the individual (what was said) yet transcendent of the specific (what is the relation between what was said, how it was said, what the listener was attempting to ask or hear and what the speaker was attempting to convey or say)' (1998, p.4). The meanings individuals subscribe to things are changeable and not to be predicted. Rubin and Rubin suggest that qualitative research is not looking for principles that are true all the time and in all conditions, like laws of physics; rather, the goal is the understanding of specific circumstances, how and why things actually happen in a complex world according to the participants. Knowledge in qualitative interviewing is situational and conditional (1995, p.38-39).

Following Kvale, I found that what worked best when a participant was describing an event was to allow them to make a narrative, speak freely and then follow up with questions to clarify that they had been understood (1998, p. 189). This was particularly important in interviewing people with perspectives quite different to

my own, such as the women from the feminist security group and those who continue to defend it (such as Sofia at particular points, Rita and Jeremy). For these interviews especially, additional field notes to supplement recordings about the atmosphere between us, the interviewees' body language etc. were necessary to remember what information was said and how it was collected.

The research questions were organised across two themes. The questions in Section One are about the production of Otherness in transnational migrant solidarity organisations, enacted through particular sets of practices and behaviours. The participants were asked to reflect on who ends up feeling safe or who has a sense of belonging in migrant solidarity organising spaces and why they thought this was the case. The questions were in part about infrastructures, asking how they think the organisation they participate in operates, how it relates to 'resources' and where the democratic deficit was if there was one, by asking questions like 'How does power operate in your organisation?' The questions were also about what work the group they are involved in could be considered 'charitable' and who is most likely to undertake those sorts of tasks. I asked how complaints about how sexism, racism or homophobia are dealt with and whether they consider the use of policy documents such as 'safer spaces policies' in their groups.

The second theme related more to what other ways there could be to negotiate Otherness, and what it would mean to embrace otherness as a strategy. I asked if they thought they shared vulnerabilities with local French people, other activists or migrants and how that kind of 'solidarity' played out. I asked what sorts of historical contexts or struggles they believed impacted upon the activism they do and how this might be expanded upon so as not to repeat the problems of the past and to reshape current projects. And finally, I asked what experiences of navigating sexism, racism or homophobia in the hangar or in transnational activist spaces they have either

witnessed or experienced, and what they thought could be learned from these experiences.

### **3.4 Being an 'insider' and 'activist culture': challenges and benefits**

There are challenges in me wanting to research migrant solidarity activism, in that I am personally and politically invested in seeing them in some way 'succeed' as projects. There are critiques of activist or critical ethnographies for failing to be reflexive about the limits of both activist and researcher knowledge, perpetuating the status quo by describing problems instead of seeking to transform them, and failing to see our inability to explore other's understandings of the world (Hawkesworth 1989). Whilst some forms of critical ethnography have been accused of being insular and lacking in self-reflexivity (Allen, 1997) or offering naïve realism (Coghlan, 2007) I argue there is still a vital place in the academy for the investigation of experiences, understandings and practices of engaged political ethnography. There is a safety in exploring the work that you are part of, in that you feel an 'authentic' attachment and investment in it, but it can also be insular and lack impact more generally. Part of wanting to research a 'community' I am grounded in, namely that of migrant solidarity activist organisations, is an attempt at avoiding the potential othering that may occur when trying to analyse groups one is not a part of. This is evident in my writing. It feels like there is a silence at particular moments, or that the conversations being held between migrants themselves, or between local French people and migrants are rarely incorporated, but this is an attempt to keep focused, and an attempt not to depict a group that I cannot claim to represent or fully understand. It is methodologically imperfect, but the self-organisation of migrants is what is behind every mention of the jungles, squats and actions taken such as hunger strikes and demonstrations at the border. Their own forms of organising and caregiving are far from irrelevant, but again, this is a project about migrant solidarity activists and the kinds of spaces that are created with migrants in

mind and body and practice, and how to improve these spaces for all involved. There are some issues, as anticipated, that emerged in carrying out this project. Some of these will be outlined below. They include negotiating: 'activist culture', carrying out research with friends, issues of race and racism in research contexts, and researching a group that I am already a member of.

This project is an experiment in critical scholarship; the work engages politically with CMS' organisational practice as a reflective critical ethnography. I was conscious of the ethical and practical issues that arise when seeking to combine the role of organisational scholar and activist, working alongside organisations one sympathises with (Graeber, 2004; Land and King, 2014; Reedy, King, and Coupland, 2016; Sutherland, Land, & Böhm, 2014) but is also seeking to critically challenge (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999). Some of the difficulties in situating this kind of methodology are raised in Critical Management scholarship, outlined below. When looking at political auto-ethnography which is one element of activist ethnography:

...despite the so-called performative turn in critical organisational studies (Spicer, Alvesson, and Kärreman, 2009), which calls on critical scholars for greater engagement with and to attempts to transform organisational practice, there are few examples of critical organisation scholars working alongside alternative organisations, new social movements or even mainstream organisations. In particular there is little reflection on how their political perspectives (ranging from their methodological perspectives such as Participant Action Research; theoretical perspectives such as critical management studies or the nature of the groups studied, i.e. radical activists) shapes their experiences as researchers (King and Learmonth, 2015). Consequently, there is then little to guide the would-be critical scholar as to how they go about 'doing' engagement with the groups outlined above.

(Reedy and King, 2016)

This chapter will seek to explore the possibilities that critical ethnography may hold as a means of enquiry into the political, ethical and practical issues that arise through engaged forms of work. The next section will be an exploration of activist culture and the ways I negotiated my engagement with the culture of Calais Migrant Solidarity, as well as the way my engagement was shaped by my gender and other aspects of my subject position.

A common concern amongst activists is that if organisations wish to avoid creating 'privileged enclaves making grand declarations about the ills of global capitalism' but instead want to make 'serious commitments to work with communities who are actually bearing the brunt of capitalist globalisation' (Graeber, 2009, p. 240) then a balance must be struck between forming community based on activists' own feelings of alienation and building a solidarity that stretches to incorporate all kinds of different pasts and ambitions upon reaching the other side of the border.

The problem is that [activists] developed their own styles of dress, mannerisms, ways of talking, tastes in food and music - a kind of hybrid mish-mash of hippie, punk, and mainstream middle-class white culture, with incorporated chunks of more exotic revolutionary traditions - and this made it almost impossible for them to communicate with anyone outside their own little charmed circle.

(Ranjanit in Graeber, 2009, p. 239)

In the passage above, a member of a community organisation that had been working with activists from an anarchist milieu critiqued the culture that they felt made the alliance particularly difficult to form. The ways that activist cultures promote their own forms of otherness and inclusion ahead of wider accessibility will be explored

further in Chapter Four on Otherness). The concerns activists hold about who should be on the inside and who should not is shaped at least in part by experiences of police infiltration, giving weight to paranoia around what should be said and put into print. This affected the ways that my interviewees related to me and the stories they were willing to contribute to this thesis. Whilst this research in many ways relied upon me being a trusted 'insider' I was also acutely aware of the ways in which I was outside of what other activists were doing in Calais. I found out how quickly one can move from being an 'insider' in Calais Migrant Solidarity when I went to Calais to complete my fieldwork and deliver donations in February 2013 whilst heavily pregnant, which meant I had to stay in a hotel. I immediately felt like an outsider as I didn't have to find a squat to sleep in and the younger activists really struggled to know how to engage with me, knowing that in principle they wanted different kinds of activists to come to Calais, but in practice when they did it wasn't clear how to relate to someone who couldn't defend squats against police aggression and instead had lots of energy and experience in talking about activist burnout in Calais (this will be explored further in Chapter Six, on vulnerability), something that was equally necessary in their minds but less urgent.

The way that class operates in Calais also shapes the data I collected and the environment in which migrant solidarity organising in takes place there in many obvious and less obvious ways. As mentioned in the second chapter, which concerns the context of Calais, the rented activist spaces are frequently in working class areas of the already highly-impooverished city. It is yet another dynamic of Otherness that exists in the organising practices of CMS as not only are activists 'not local' and 'not migrant' but they often (but not always) have a different experience of class mobility to the local French people who frequent the organising spaces. Many activists in Calais subscribe to the 'live for free' lifestyle or ideology, which seems to involve paying no rent to live at the No Borders House, eating food from bins and collecting up the bread that is thrown away by the bakeries each day, and hitch-hiking or riding the CMS collective bikes as their mode of transport. Some who

choose this lifestyle also argue that it complicates what might otherwise be a middle class position, as they aim to operate outside of the economy as much as possible. Most accept that factors like their skin colour, middle class socialisation and gender privileges are what make them more easily able to hitch-hike, get away with stealing food out of bins and access the kinds of places where you are not required to pay rent, though there is a certain air of superiority over 'normal people'<sup>28</sup> that came through in my interviews at times. Additionally, as Duneier suggests, where possible, it was necessary to play on my 'insider' knowledge and experiences to get people's attention and time (2004, p. 96).

I had expected it to be difficult to engage activists about questions of gender and sexuality and the way that issues of race and anti-migrant racism interact with ideas of safety in Calais, including in the office and other organising spaces, but I also knew that a conversation about this had already entered the Calais Migrant Solidarity discourse, and that there are a lot of activists with stories to tell around the issue of gender and how feminist ideas are negotiated in collective organising spaces. The desire to speak about representations of race and racism is also something that had come up in wider network meetings. Some of the difficulties associated with this will be outlined below.

### **3.5 Researching Discomfort and Preparing to be Surprised**

To prepare activists for going to Calais there are full weekend trainings provided by Calais Migrant Solidarity that people are encouraged to attend so as to understand the political environment and what might be expected of them. One of my participant observations was the training in Nottingham in March 2013, a full day of

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<sup>28</sup> For more about the 'live for free' lifestyle and ideology, see the CrimethInc Ex-workers' Collective: (Crimethinc, 2000).

discussion designed to prepare activists for going to Calais, covering everything from the role of the charities to the role of the border officials and included a section about 'Gender and Exhaustion' which I was personally excited about having just returned from Calais myself; I also felt it would help me understand how others saw the trials and tribulations of our deeply gendered daily experiences in Calais.

The session started by one of the trainers saying that everyone in CMS agreed that questions of gender were amongst the most important things that needed to be addressed about the experience of Calais, but acknowledged that no-one in the collective wanted to chair this session (This was later reported to me by Rita in her interviews who had attended another Calais Training in London in November 2012 where no-one wanted to chair facilitate the very same discussion). The trainer spoke more quietly and cautiously than in any other session, she was visibly nervous. The trainer told the room that women going to Calais ought to dress modestly if they don't want to get hassled at food distribution. I could tell she felt really uncomfortable saying this, but it was an interesting thing to say. Someone in the audience told her that the group shouldn't tell people going to Calais how to dress, that men shouldn't dictate what women wear, and fear about men should not change the way one presents themselves. The trainer looked panicked and suggested that there were 'no right answers' and that people should see for themselves when they get to Calais.

(fieldnotes, Calais Training, March 2013)

I witnessed various instances of this kind of gendered discomfort during my fieldwork. There were times when I felt desperate to defend the politics of Calais Migrant Solidarity as I saw them and to refute representations of how serious issues such as sexual assault are dealt with in Calais and perhaps how they ought to be dealt with, to tell women that they were in fact not 'discouraged' from sleeping with migrant men and that they should sleep with whomever they desired, that safety

was not a question for each individual to weigh up every time they left the office, but that it was a collective question and raised a set of collective problems that was brought up by individual experiences of sexism. I was conscious that I needed to continue to participate in order to be a participant, but that through my participation I was shaping the kinds of answers people wanted to give me in my interviews (this is explored further below in the section on researching friends, which provokes similar tensions). I tried to follow the advice of Duniere, a researcher on race and racism:

Begin Research with a humble commitment to being surprised by the things you learn in the field, and a constant awareness that your social position likely makes you blind to the very phenomena that might be useful to explain.

(Duniere, 2004, p.100)

In terms of my awareness of my positionality not as simply a 'ready-to-wear' product of identity politics, (Robertson 2002 p.790) but seeing positionality as only useful if one's position is reflected upon and articulated with respect to how the various positions one inhabits (personal history, ethnicity, sexuality, disability, and religion, social power amongst other distinctions) influence the practice of fieldwork and analysis. Part of this is the necessity to reflect on the fact that positionality is relational and constantly shifting. I certainly felt that my position in the collective shifted partly due to becoming a researcher and being open about this and partly because I became a parent during my research period. Donna Haraway (1991) calls for a politics and epistemology of locations, not fixed identity positions, which acknowledges that we all inhabit multiple and varying locations and urges us to consider how these dynamics affect our viewpoint without privileging certain positions over others.

I was constantly reviewing my relationships to my participants, and also those I encountered frequently who had declined to be part of my research. I had difficulty knowing exactly how to interact with activists who had refused to be interviewed on the basis that they resented the academy rather than that they thought the project was a waste of time; in fact three of them told me how desperately lacking they thought CMS' work around the intersection of gender and race had been. Luckily over time these tensions seemed to just smooth as it was clear that their feelings about the academy weren't personal to me or a critique of my project, but I knew that the project was less without their contributions. This kind of thesis involves a negotiation of both my insider status in terms of my activism but also my outsider status as a woman. Another consideration when navigating my investigation of migrant solidarity and the production of otherness is the way in which race is approached, which will be explored below.

In the work I am doing on the way that safety is conceptualised by migrant solidarity groups, and the use of safer spaces to maintain a sense that both personal boundaries and oppressive acts are taken seriously, a number of problematic and racialised assumptions have arisen that I will detail in the Chapter Two, the empirical chapter on safety. Besides these challenges, when raising the issues that occur within groups it is important to be aware of my personal investment in their existence. I am anxious therefore not to reproduce the actions critiqued by indigenous scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith, who observed of the academic work produced out of engagement with indigenous struggle:

At a common sense level research was talked about both in terms of its absolute worthlessness to us (indigenous activists) and its absolute usefulness to those who wielded it as an instrument. It told us things already known, suggested things that would not work, and made careers for people who already had jobs.

(1999 p. 3)

Additionally, though an extended discussion lies beyond the scope of this chapter, it is only by understanding (or perhaps participating in) the very real and necessary solidarity work that is undertaken by Calais Migrant Solidarity and the No Border Network that the context and thus the weight of these critiques can properly be understood, and as a result a different way of organising may be ascertained.

### **3.6 Ethical Considerations when Researching Friends and Allies**

There are and were risks associated with being a researcher who is firmly embedded in the organisations that are my object of study, and where my ability to access these spaces was and continues to be mediated by my friendships or working relationships with those I interviewed and observed. This is sometimes mediated by taking a more Participatory Action Research approach to methodology, where all the research questions are generated for the project by the collective in question. For reasons of scale (both in terms of the size of the group and the size of the PhD project) and because the collective is profoundly split in terms of what would be useful in terms of safety and Otherness, I chose the research questions myself but attempted to work in questions and points of views of those I interviewed. In the literature about interviewing friends, Kath Browne has argued that whilst fieldwork does not need to be undertaken with those 'out there' or 'other to ourselves', acknowledging situated identities is important, researchers need to engage with the 'messy dynamics of power' (2003, p. 138) We need to ask ourselves about the challenges that are faced when seeking to work collaboratively alongside community groups and activists (Chatterton, Hodkinson and Pickerill, 2010) and interrogate ourselves about the issues of power that arise when negotiating such encounters (Reedy and King, 2016).

My desire to protect the identities of my friends and those I carry out political work with is particularly important given that people undertake this kind of activism knowing it can carry personal risks, and given the recent headlines about the man known as Marco Jacobs who was in fact an undercover police officer who infiltrated the No Borders Wales collective<sup>29</sup>, activists are understandably nervous about giving out personal information for fear it could be used against them in a court of law or in some other untoward way. For this reason, along with the fact that it is important that personal criticisms of the group and its dynamics are kept anonymous from other members of the group, has led me to focus on anonymity and vulnerability of the activists I interview in relation to the state as well as to each other. As Brewis suggests, '[t]his is a common problem in qualitative studies where sample sizes are small and data is rich in context', meaning that maintaining anonymity can mean changing not only names but also ages, genders, ethnicities, educational level, spoken languages, and so on (2014). It also means asking if there is any information that has been shared that interviewees would like to be protected and what that means for them.

According to Barton this also requires confronting the issues of what she calls 'co-mingled data' where information about individuals is inextricably bound to information about another (2011, p, 432-433) and 'internal confidentiality' where research subjects 'do not mention that they've identified anyone else in the case that it is obvious to them in the final publication' cannot be relied upon. I found that this was best remedied by checking over the transcripts with interviewees and allowing them to identify any information they did not feel comfortable being published, or wanted to protect in a particular way, despite this meaning that some of the material I hoped to use was removed. This presented some difficulties, such as in my interview with Fatima where she situated her personal background by telling me about the precariously legal anti-state groups her family had connections to in parts

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<sup>29</sup> More details can be found here: <https://www.channel4.com/news/undercover-police-in-welsh-anarchist-group>

of Asia as a way of explaining that she and her family were always 'outsiders', which she believed led to them being so accepting of her queerness. Having removed all details about her family from the empirical data to preserve anonymity as she requested, some depth was lacking from her very beautiful and insightful comments about race and Otherness (interview with Fatima, 2013).

Brewis (2014) also points out that in her research on the lives of female friends, chasing people up for interviews they agreed to can be awkward, and at times it's best to just let them go as participants than rather than be perceived to be 'hassling' them, as it's possible that they don't want to be interviewed but simply don't know how to explain this to you. A certain level of carefulness is necessary with friends and colleagues that might not be so necessary with strangers. It is for this reason that I did not continue to pressure people who I had emailed about my project and accepted that those that did not reply did not want to be part of the research even though their contributions would have provided a useful influence on the project. At some points I wondered if I should 'seek out' particular kinds of people after noting that the first four people to agree to the interviews identified as 'non-white queer feminists' but I think that there is a reason that people are drawn to particular topics, and partly this is because they feel they have something to contribute. By the end of my interviewing process the subjectivities of participants had broadened significantly due to word of mouth.

Puwar and Fraser raise the concerns of collecting intimate stories from friends and then attempting to turn them in to a 'systematic analysis' which appears more like a 'voyeuristic gaze' than a representation of the feelings of someone close to them (2008, p.5). I thought about this a lot, as my interviews with women of colour were at times similar but also very different and I wanted to attempt to show the variations in approaches to dealing with otherness whilst also demonstrating that the way activists respond to systemic racism was a key problem for the collective. I

also worried about the vulnerability of my interviewees, as asking questions that could provoke emotional responses that they might share with a friend, but not necessarily a researcher. I was sure to check in with them following the interviews to ensure that they were comfortable with the information I was using. Most of them understood that research like this needs the difficult stories that represent the ongoing challenges of racism, sexism and forms of Othering that need to be countered in migrant solidarity organising. There were other difficult moments, such as in my interview with Jozey where I reflected back to her that her feminist group had no safer spaces policy or process for dealing with conflict within the group. This made her feel 'stressed out' and I could see that she was wondering if I was asking that question to use them as a 'bad example'. I had to remind her that I was just repeating what she had said and that informal processes could easily be more effective if that is what the collective had decided.

At some stage I decided that challenging my interviewees if I didn't agree with them was part of respecting them as comrades or people I was interested in working with politically. I initially wondered if that would compromise my data in some way in the way that 'leading questions' can prompt particular answers, but I decided that this thesis was a chance to be honest about the problems I experienced in my activist life and try and shape the culture around me in productive ways. This happened in one interview when someone suggested that they had never experienced gender disparity in terms of numbers in their time in anarchist spaces. I pushed them to describe these spaces in more detail and they eventually agreed that it was less balanced than they immediately thought. I feel confident that this the way to do research that is honest and uncompromising even if it is sometimes fraught or uncomfortable.

Another interesting point, is that when one shares experiences and membership with those one researches it is possible to be in fact just telling one's own stories, meaning that the interpretations of the researcher say more about themselves than

about the respondents. This can turn a PhD into a navel-gazing form of self-indulgence (Brewis 2014, p. 119). I attempted to carry out the research with a commitment to be surprised and follow unexpected avenues in my interviews in the hopes of counteracting this. The importance of reflexivity in research is an ethical question which will be explored further in the next section.

### **3.7 Ethics: Problems, Possible Remedies, Possible Gaps**

If ethnographers 'cannot presume to speak on behalf of the world's socially excluded' is it possible instead to write 'against inequality' in a way that is meaningful? It was not my intention to make Calais Migrant Solidarity an object that I could put on show to others outside of the network, but instead to gain insights and ideas as to why we have experienced problems in negotiating safety and intersectional inclusion (Roestone Collective, 2014) and to think through with others in the field about how we could engage with these thorny issues. Writing against equality is not just possible but necessary.

Denouncing injustice is not a naïve, old fashioned, anti-intellectual concern, or a superannuated, totalising vision of Marxism... ethnography instead shows that solidarity is emergent through engagement with difference, and is never guaranteed. This necessitates an engaged but not expectant mode of research.

(Chari and Donner, 2010)

This kind of research borrows from feminist and postcolonial research traditions which maintain that it is important to acknowledge that strategic decisions about whose voices to highlight inevitably make ethnographic accounts partial - and that there is a responsibility to acknowledge this. This reflexive approach prompts researchers to ask themselves whether their research raises ethical issues concerning not only individuals but also the whole organisation or community they are working in (Coghlan and Brannick 2012, p. 133). It becomes important to ask, what could the unintended consequences be?

In terms of ethics, I did wonder prior to my research what impact raising questions about gender and race in the collective space might have on solidarity politics and organising in Calais. I wondered what response could be appropriate if someone voiced gendered or racialised assumptions about others in that space when answering a provocation of mine. I knew I would need a response that would be neither directive nor disciplining, whilst not appearing to tacitly agree. I noticed that when I ran the workshop in Calais about gender and safety, people would gently deflect ideas they didn't agree with within the workshop environment. This was considerably better than the way that problematic statements about 'what women should wear and do in Calais' were raised in the Calais training, where people felt that, as the 'audience', they were less able to contribute to the discussion being had. This is yet more evidence that collective discussions can generate better data than 'presentation'-style formats. It also demonstrates the importance of conducting interviews confidentially and in a location separate from organising spaces so that people can air their views without fears of 'getting it wrong' in front of others.

At times I wished I had managed to convince some of the other central activists in No Borders to agree to be interviewed, so that some aspects of the organisation could have been made clearer, or that I had been granted access to attend meetings about the charities/migrant associations who work in Calais (although I would then have needed a translator which would have added complexity). I have written a critical ethnography, in the tradition of militant research, to the best of my ability. I believe that I have gathered a detailed snapshot of the way that these organisations operate, some of the experiences in these collectives that are mediated by gender and race, and how these discussions and actions are interpolated by concepts of safety and personal vulnerability, which is my contribution to research in this area. The next chapter will further develop the concept of Otherness as it relates to the micro-politics of everyday life in migrant solidarity organising practices and the

ways that different forms of otherness prevent shared practices of social reproduction.

### **3.8 Organisational and Individual Briefs for Interviewees**

I interviewed the majority of respondents in London, including those who have recently returned from the Calais Migrant Solidarity hangar/office as well as those who participated in the No Border camp in 2009 who continue their involvement in the No Border Network or through feminist groups with a focus on anti-racist and migrant solidarity campaigns, including Feminist Fightback. I interviewed fifteen people. Six were from the No Border Network (Rita, Kavita, Anna, Jack, Kelly, Imelda) as well as two individuals involved primarily with Calais Migrant Solidarity (Jean, Jeremy) and brief informal interview with Koshka. Four were from detainee support groups (Fatima, Mia, Sofia, Frank) and two were from Feminist Fightback (Virginia and Jozey). I will now give some background to the organisations that my interviewees were connected to so as to explain their connection to my project.

#### **Salam and Belle Étoile**

The organisations Salam and Belle Étoile are part of a network of Christian organisations connected to Secours Catholique that provide food for the migrants in Calais. One organisation does lunch, and the other dinner, and the timings rotate periodically. They also run a free clothes and shoes market once a month on a Saturday; tickets must be obtained in advance to keep the numbers manageable, but the entrance, like the meals, are free. These organisations have a working relationship with activists from No Borders and Calais Migrant Solidarity, but rarely

work on combined projects as an organisation, even if individuals attend the hangar regularly. I interviewed Jean Le Roy from Salam as he is also an activist from a small offshoot group of French Christians called La Marmite aux Idées, who advocate for greater state assistance for migrants in Calais, and is a frequent visitor to the various No Borders spaces such as the office and the hangar. He identifies as a CMS activist though he is primarily involved in the charities as he is a full time volunteer.

## **Feminist Fightback**

Feminist Fightback is an anticapitalist feminist collective that is inspired by the politics of a range of anti-capitalist feminist struggles, and works from the theoretical standpoint that no single oppression can be challenged in isolation from all other forms of exploitation that intersect with it<sup>30</sup>. They have been active in the migrant-led women's collective to save ESOL<sup>31</sup> (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classes in the London boroughs of Tower Hamlets and Hackney and have run various discussions in London and Manchester about the race and class politics of safety as they are manifested in contemporary feminist movements such as 'SlutWalk' and 'Reclaim the Night'<sup>32</sup>. A number of members of the collective have visited Calais and are, as a collective, particularly involved in the development of English classes both in Calais and in London at the Giuseppe Conlon House run by Catholic anarchist group 'Catholic Worker'<sup>33</sup>. Two of my interviewees, Virginia and Jozey, established the group in 2007 and have been active in it ever since. I would argue that Feminist Fightback fits within the remit of a transnational migrant solidarity group, as the work they have done supporting workplace organising of mainly women of colour, along with the focus on English classes for migrants in London means that they undertake various reproductive tasks alongside migrant

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<sup>30</sup> <http://www.feministfightback.org.uk/about/>

<sup>31</sup> <http://actionforesol.org/>

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.feministfightback.org.uk/the-politics-of-slutwalk/>

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.londoncatholicworker.org/gchouse.html>

communities.<sup>34</sup> It is also important to have an intersectional feminist perspective to ideas of safety and security in organising spaces, which Jozey and Virginia were able to add.

### **Feminist Security Group- Calais Camp 2009**

This temporary group was established during the Calais Camp in 2009 in response to claims that activist women were being followed into their tents by migrant men (English, 2015). The group existed only for the duration of the camp. The group organised a ‘feminist patrol’ of the sleeping areas during both the day and the night, causing controversy at the camp about what safety should look like for both women and migrants, and whether patrols of this kind could ever be feminism or anti-racism in action (for more details about this group see the Chapter Five on Safety). The legacy of this patrol was present in my interviews with Sofia and Anna, who were at the camp in Calais and partook in the mass discussions about this and were also party to the discussions that occurred in the aftermath of the camp such as the one at the London Anarchist Book Fair in 2010, which I facilitated in order to process the splintering that this had caused in the London No Borders collective in terms of feminist discussions of gender, safety and race.

### **Calais Migrant Solidarity**

This organisation was set up in the aftermath of the No Borders camp in 2009, and

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<sup>34</sup> For more about feminist fightback and tube workers struggles see- ‘Feminism and the Tube’ (Iossifidis, 2008).

is run by volunteer activists from all over Europe. The group claims to provide political rather than charitable support and has been involved in numerous campaigns and research projects about migrant life in Calais. I interviewed three people who are primarily active with CMS, though they are active in their local No Border Groups as well.

Sofia has been active since the group was established and speaks fluent French, amongst other languages, allowing her to translate documents and speak in person when campaigning in Calais. She is a migrant from the Basque country in Spain who volunteers for the Migrant English Project in Brighton and the Gatwick detainee support group and is very active in migrant justice issues from an anarchist perspective. Jeremy has been organising in Calais for several years. Since 2012 he has supported a multitude of different solidarity projects, to build networks of resistance against the border regime. Rita is a PhD student at Goldsmiths, University of London who writes about philanthropy and the charity sector, focussing on the trusts and organisations that fund militant migrant activity. She is a newer member of the No Borders collective and works for Amnesty International.

## **London No Borders**

London No Borders is a group that opposes all immigration controls and seeks to use direct action and No Border camps as a way of illuminating the 'inhumanity of border regimes'. No Borders is a large network that exists in more than 10 countries across the world and is associated with the anarchist/Autonomist/libertarian communist political milieu.

Kavita has been active in the London group for 3 years is particularly active around migrant participation in London No Borders and the necessity for an intersectional

analysis by the group. She told me that her political background had been a kind of journey through liberal feminism to a kind of identarian anti-racism via queer politics. Anna has been in the group for 6 years and is an artist of Nigerian descent. She is active in various feminist and antiracist projects in London including x:talk<sup>35</sup> English classes for migrant sex workers. She has made a number of short films about Calais. Kelly is a charity worker with British Red Cross and works with unaccompanied minors seeking asylum in the UK. She has been a member of No Borders in London and Brighton and is known as being particularly good with media and television interviews, as she is a convincing and engaging public speaker. Imelda is an artist and academic who has been involved in various refugee and anti-racist projects across Europe including in Vienna<sup>36</sup> and Barcelona.<sup>37</sup>

### **No One is Illegal**

This collective exists separately to the work of No Borders but has many cross-over members. It is a grouping that is particularly focused on migrant workers' struggles and prioritises building relationships with and within trade unions. They organise support for pickets and trade union interventions alongside LAWAS (the Latin American Workers Association - in the time since my research period this group has wound down its activities and is now a facet of the International Workers of Great Britain (IWGB). The membership is mostly in their late 40s or older.

Jack is a 'Community Organiser' for a charity in London working with marginalised communities, including Irish travellers and migrants without papers. He dedicates most of his spare time to migrant struggles and direct actions. He is an incredible source of the history of pro-migrant and anti-racist struggles and groups in the UK

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<sup>35</sup> <http://xtalkproject.net>

<sup>36</sup> <http://refugeecampvienna.noblogs.org/>

<sup>37</sup> <https://laelectrodomestica.wordpress.com/>

since detention centres were established in the 1970s. He is also active in the Jewish community.

### **Detainee Support Groups**

Detainee Support is working in solidarity with people in and outside immigration detention centres. These groups aim to reduce isolation through visits, support people to freedom and campaign for an end to the use of detention<sup>38</sup>.

Mia is an activist with a particular interest in the rights of queer refugees. She started her political involvement in the campaign to cancel third world debt, and now is aiming one day to run for local council as a socialist independent. She suffers with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and at times has found activism to be a draining experience, with varying levels of support for her need to drop out unexpectedly.

Frank is a seasoned activist, involved in socialist politics since the 1980s. He was quite torn about the best way proceed in terms of 'striking a balance' between spending his weekend racing around trying to find furniture for families that had finally won their asylum claim, and organising 'the kind of demonstrations that actually change the material conditions'.

Leigh has been involved in research and collective writing projects in Albania for nine years. She has a PhD in Genocide Studies and is interested in carrying out artistic projects with people who identify as survivors of torture and genocide. She has recently helped to set up life drawing classes in detention centres.

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<sup>38</sup> For an example of this see SOAS detainee support: <https://soasdetaineesupport.wordpress.com/>

Fatima is a long time anti-racist activist who has been very outspoken about issues pertaining to asylum seekers and people of colour in a white-dominated society. She stated clearly that the issue that made her most motivated to act politically was that of Islamophobia, which she believes is rife amongst the left.

### **3.9 Participant Observation**

I undertook participant observation in several organisations, public meetings, demonstrations and reading groups that relate to migrant solidarity, feminism and anti-racism, with a focus on meetings related to the ideas of safety and Otherness. These are detailed below:

#### **No Borders Convergence**

Feb 13, 2012

*Migrant workers: Organising Under the Radar*

Many kinds of workers use their bodies to labour - sex workers, cleaners, carers, nannies- often for low(er) pay and under precarious conditions. What solidarity work needs to be done, and what should it look like? Bringing together speakers from the x:talk project<sup>39</sup>, Crossroads women's centre<sup>40</sup>, the Latin American Workers Association (no longer in existence) and No Borders Wales<sup>41</sup> in order to build the solidarity necessary to transform society.

#### **London No Borders**

Monthly meetings - I attended these as part of my research on the first Thursday of February, March, April 2013.

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<sup>39</sup> <http://www.xtalkproject.net/>

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.crossroadswomen.net/index.htm>

<sup>41</sup> <http://noborderswales.org.uk/>

These meetings are open to the public in order to discuss a broader political issue such as 'Local attacks on Roma Gypsy groups and individuals and how to support them' (Feb), 'The discourse in the media around Bulgaria joining the EU and how to fight it' (March), 'Update on police brutality against migrants in Calais' (April) and organising events, fundraisers, protests and large public meetings on particular topics like 'Surveillance tools at the Border'. (3)

### **No One Is Illegal**

National gathering, 9th February, 2013 in Manchester.

These meetings are largely organisational, i.e. deciding who will speak at a particular trade union fringe conference, who will check the collective email address and so on, but also involved members of local migrant communities coming along to invite activists to become more involved the activities of self-organised migrant collectives such as Women Asylum Seekers Together.

### **Calais Migrant Solidarity**

There are weekly Calais Briefings held in the office/hangar for all those who want to know what is happening on the ground and what support is needed. I attended:

Friday 20 July 2012, Sat 23rd Feb 2013, and Sat 30 August 2014

I attended the public briefings as part of my research, but as a participant I also attended several internal briefings (any information I heard these was left out of the thesis and not recorded). I undertook my fieldwork in Calais on three different trips over two years between 2012 and 2014.

The public briefings discuss the numbers of raids on particular buildings or squats, which nationalities seemed to be being targeted for removal in immigration raids, any particular needs the migrants seemed to have (shoes, sim cards, black tea etc.) and also any internal issues between members.

I analysed both the [calaismigrantsolidarity.wordpress.com](http://calaismigrantsolidarity.wordpress.com) website as well as the Calais9 zine as part the context chapter. There is also a document that I analyse in chapter five on safety about activist burnout.

## **Feminist Fightback**

Monthly Meeting 21 February, 2013: *Showing Solidarity with the Arab Spring*

There was an update by an Egyptian feminist on what solidarity can be shown by UK feminists to struggles for women's rights there, particularly Tahir Square, and a more general discussion about what antiracist feminism and solidarity look like today. The Feminist Fightback website ([www.feministfightback.org](http://www.feministfightback.org)), including their piece on Slut Walk and their discussion paper on intersectionality helped inform my analysis on this group.

## **Calais Training**

23 and 24 February, 2013

The Calais trainings are open meetings for new people considering undertaking solidarity work with CMS in Calais, particularly those intending to spend several weeks or months there in the CMS house. I attended two sessions, one on 'Politics through daily solidarity' and the other on 'Gender and sexuality and exhaustion in Calais'. The training provided a booklet that had more details about the workings of Calais Migrant Solidarity, known as the 'Calais Training Handbook' that I analysed as part of my fieldwork analysis.

## **Radical Educators Forum**

31 March, 2014: *Fanonian concepts of 'Safety' and Working towards 'Braver' Activist Space*

Anti-racist and feminist activists were invited to attend a critical race studies reading group about Fanonian concepts of safety and violence that was run by a PhD

student writing about creating safe learning environments for children of colour in London.

The group opened with an explanation to the mostly white-identified group that the meeting was going to be run as a 'braver space' rather than a 'safer space' and if people said things that could be interpreted as racist then they would be asked to explain their position to the group and we would 'learn together' through the process. The meeting was attended by activists from No Borders and Feminist Fightback, amongst other activists from many different groups.

### **Southall Black Sisters and Gender Studies at SOAS**

11 May, 2014: *Gender, Fundamentalism and Racism, A conversation with Southall Black Sisters on Gender and East London's Migrant Communities*

The Gender Studies department at SOAS, along with Southall Black Sisters, put on a public meeting about Gender, Fundamentalism and Racism with anti-racist activists from East London. The discussion was on a series of case studies about East London's Bengali populations, including the way that some women felt their critiques of what they saw as religious 'fundamentalism' were being shut down and labelled as racist by the feminist left and others. Speakers included; Rita Chadha, RAMFEL ('Faith: the new Border Agent for Immigration: Perpetuating sexism and inter-community racism within faith based organisations—an East London case study'), Pragna Patel, Southall Black Sisters ('Excusing the inexcusable: Some reflections on the place of gender in the politics of race and religion in the UK, or, What does the Rotherham Child abuse scandal mean for us?')

### **Plan C: Fast Forward Convergence**

12-14 September, 2014

I conducted my participant research in three workshops about migration and gender and also about conceptions of safety and security in the European left. These meetings were all open to the public. The first was called 'Migration and Borders an Enquiry in to the Present' included a discussion of the mobile commons with Dr. Hywel Bishop. The second was a discussion entitled 'Is intersectionality just another form of identity politics?' by Gwyneth Lonergan and was based on the theoretical principles that Feminist Fightback operate from. The third was called 'For your Safety and Security' and was facilitated by Dr. Camille Barbagallo and Anonymous Refused<sup>42</sup>. This final meeting addressed the way that safer spaces are negotiated amongst radical groups and the Otherness and exclusion that they can produce through processes of exiling individuals who have wronged their communities.

### **3.10 Analysis Post-collection**

In the first stage of the analysis, all the data was imported into an integrated database, and qualitative analysis software, NVivo. NVivo was used to develop, refine and organise emerging codes from my interviews. I later used the program NVivo to code and recode my interviews . There were six categories or 'Nodes' and one sub-code that emerged when I was exploring the uploaded interview data. These nodes were derived partly from the very broad questions I was asking about otherness, safety, vulnerability, charity and organising. In the first half of the interview, these concerned interviewee experiences of migrant solidarity. I came to describe this section as 'The production of Otherness in our organising practices'.

The second half of the interview addressed the way respondents hoped things were developing and accounts of how they envisioned intersectional organising practices. I came to describe this section as 'Practices of Undoing Otherness'.

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<sup>42</sup> The article upon which their contribution was based can be seen here: <http://anonymousrefused.tumblr.com/post/99047385737/for-your-safety-and-security>

The insights around the production of Otherness could be partly understood through their accounts of; Perceptions of Charity work, Organisational Practices, and Experiences of Otherness (this had a sub-code marking the usage of the term 'Privilege'). The insights from the second half of the interview around 'Undoing Otherness' I grouped around the terms; Safety, Vulnerability, and Solidarity Work as Social Reproduction. These themes again were partly based on my interview questions - I asked them to reflect on the idea of collectivising vulnerability, for example - and partly based on the reflections they were making, unprompted by me.

As I was coding this data using the 'query, reflect and visualise' functions in NVivo, I started to highlight words or phrases that participants used frequently (both in my interviews and in the meetings that I observed) or the ones that seemed to elicit the most discussion, for example 'questions around safety' that had appeared to make people uncomfortable or 'experiences of racism' in migrant solidarity groups, or participants' struggles around 'activist mental health in Calais'. The fieldwork was ongoing throughout this stage of the analysis, and additional insights were used to revise the analysis. In time, after recoding the data twice more, I opted for three key themes for my empirical chapters; Safety, Otherness, and Vulnerability. In NVivo these were three 'sets' as a collection of Nodes. I made a document of the excerpts and quotation from my interviews for each of my empirical chapters (Kavita and Anna spoke mostly but not exclusively about otherness, Sofia and Rita mostly but not exclusively about safety, Jozey and Leigh about the relationship between personal and political vulnerability, and so forth) and then organised the coding of my participatory observations in to those three sections with the same cross-cutting themes. There were important thoughts and quotation that would not fit into these themes very clearly, so sometimes the same quotation was in all three documents, and at other times I collected up the quotations that seemed important but incongruous and checked over each chapter to see where/if they were relevant at the end of the writing process. There is of course plenty of additional data that did not make it into this thesis.

In my work in Calais, I attempted a critical ethnography that in some ways connects community and activist strategies in the hopes of reshaping the terms and processes of social domination (Chari and Donner 2010, p.83). I tried to do this not necessarily by attempting to create measurable concrete results, but by 'writing against inequality' and by producing an activist ethnographic account that reflects the kinds of ideas and practices that have currency within Calais Migrant Solidarity and attempting to place some of these within the current political moment, in order to help the individuals and communities involved in these projects reflect on strengths, weaknesses and possibilities for new kinds of more vulnerable solidarities.

## **Chapter Four: The distribution of Otherness: Race, Authentic Activists and their role in 'Migrant-led' Organising**

The complex ways otherness is constructed and negotiated in Calais permeates almost all aspects of everyday life and political activity. This chapter will look to the ways that seeking solidarity devoid of any conflict with migrants can flatten differences or ignore differentiated experiences at the cost of more inventive forms of being together in the everyday. It will examine different tensions around Otherness from those that wish it did not exist, to those finding ways to bring Otherness to the centre. It emerged through interviews and fieldwork (particularly the interviews with Anna, Kavita, and Fatima) that syncretic organising spaces and practices are more fruitful environments to do politics in, in other words it is important to embrace the qualities that make each of us 'other' or 'marginal' (Kaplan, 1987).

In this chapter I will approach what my interviewees saw as key to the production of Otherness as in terms of 'difference' and 'authenticity'. Including an exploration of what it means for a group's reflexive practice that those coming to Calais do so in the hopes of 'leaving their privilege behind'. The question of when and how difference can be mediated will be explored, specifically: what does experiencing police violence alongside migrants in Calais do to alter individual 'privilege', if anything? Is the kind of solidarity CMS is interested in about openly exploiting your systemic privilege to help others? Is this what shared vulnerability is about? This is important because much is at stake in terms of being able to construct spaces that work together organically with a sense of shared life-building. The construction of migrant Others as different from activists and unable to understand activist ways of analysing power or the state or gender can result in forms of communication that are paternalistic and belittling, undermining the supposed goals of seeking a world where all opinions can be engaged with respectfully.

One instance that kept cropping up was the ‘Critical Whiteness interventions’ that took place at No Border camps in Cologne, Berlin, and Schengen in 2012-2014. My participants discussed what happens when identity is placed at the centre of organising and what Otherness is produced by the search for ‘authentic activists’ and ‘authentic migrants’ (Karakayali and Tsianos et al., 2013). Lastly, the chapter analyses what migrant-led projects do in their organising practices to differentiate themselves from others. What negotiations take place in seeking to position activists as providing solidarity to projects that migrants lead? What can be done to enable the voice of the Other to be heard in migrant solidarity organising practices? Connected to this, who is othered in the search for ‘Authentic Activists’ and those who are ‘too soft’ for No Borders politics? What does it mean that no one feels at home or ‘good enough’ (interviews with Rita and Kelly) to take a leading role in organising and administrating migrant solidarity organisations in the ways they are currently configured? If everyone feels they are on the outside, then who is on the inside?

Looking at the ways that Otherness is present in migrant solidarity activist organising practices and ideas, I will outline the answer to my research question: What creates Otherness in our organising spaces? Processes of Othering reflected upon by my interviewees reveals some of the problems in the organising strategies of Calais Migrant Solidarity. The exploration of otherness will continue throughout the thesis and will lead in to the discussion in the following chapter about the gendered nature of discourses around safety and the way Otherness is deployed in terms of who and where is safe and unsafe.

#### **4.1 Disrupting Privilege and Otherness**

Basically I position myself as being a member of the migrant community even though I'm not, I commit to going to their events and I'm an outsider in a way but I go to the [food] distribution and collect stuff, and this is what provides me with a certain belief that for a short while I give up some of the privileges that I have... I'm not talking down to people or trying to include myself on the same level, just being in a certain place and time instead of trying to provide for people. It's taking my privilege and letting go of it (interview with Jeremy, Feb 2013).

Jeremy's words express a common sentiment in Calais Migrant Solidarity. There are particular investments in separating from one's perceived privileges in order to undo/mediate/separate from the Otherness that feels so stark (interview with Kavita in transnational migrant solidarity organising practices and spaces. I observed it not only during my participant observation at the Calais Training, but also in everyday parlance during my time in Calais and throughout my interviews. There is a belief that privilege is something that can, and ought to be, mediated or 'let go' through your political activity or level of 'commitment' (interview with Jeremy) rather than being a central component of one's personal history and sense of place in the world.

The data that emerged from my interviews indicated that there is a broadly-held belief that individuals need to bring 'all of themselves' to solidarity work and deal with their relationship to the functioning of power in activist projects through reflexive practice (interviews with Kavita, Anna, Leigh and Sofia), though there is an undercurrent that argues that solidarity work enables you for a short time to 'give up' that power (interviews with Jeremy and Mia, fieldwork at Calais Training, 2013). As activists that express solidarity by spending time at the food distribution (but will not go hungry without it), who use their bodies to protect the spaces migrants

sleep in (but know that we will have secure undercover spaces in which to sleep either way), who end up in physical fights with the border guards and are often arrested in the process (but will not be deported back to Afghanistan or anywhere else), there is a feeling of sameness but also difference in all the activities we understand as solidarity work in Calais (fieldwork notes, August 2014). The quote from Jeremy above is for me indicative of the relationship to ideas of privilege held by many members of CMS at this time; a development that has coincided with the emergence of Privilege Studies/Politics/Theory in Feminist and Queer studies as a way to understand the unequal power relationships in society (Smith, 2013). As someone with European citizenship, race privileges, class privilege and so on it is very intriguing to note that Jeremy feels he can position himself as a member of the migrant community whilst undertaking solidarity work in Calais. I tried to push Jeremy about what he meant by 'letting go' of privilege, and he responded:

...By being there you can give up some of that privilege, by acting in solidarity you can act more on the needs of the people there rather than providing them with something that you have. Adopting their position rather than subsuming them into yours. But always with this knowledge that you are privileged and you do have a different outlook on this...

Me: And maybe you'll get arrested and have to pay a fine but they might get deported back to Afghanistan.

Jeremy: Yeah, that's something that's really important – keeping that at the back of your head.

(interview with Jeremy, Feb 2013)

This quote shows the two conflicting reflexes apparent in the work of CMS, the feeling that you can become 'like the migrants' by adopting their position (sleeping rough, fighting the police), and that you are fundamentally unable to become like

them because you have citizenship rights (and access to legal representation, and a bed to go home to). Arguably, a more typical No Borders position on solidarity would call for the activists to act alongside migrants and create spaces and actions together (Rygiel, 2011, p.11) rather than seeking to 'adopt their position' as migrants, given how different the subject positions of each person involved tend to be. In my experience of these activist environments, most activists are would consider themselves to be against any idea of 'subsuming' 'their' position (the migrant position) 'into yours' (the activist with papers) which would be the opposite of solidarity politics, where you battle the same forces alongside one another (fieldwork notes, 2014).

In many ways, the idea that activists can 'do away' with their privileges ensured by citizenship and enforced through immigration controls is a way of positioning themselves in opposition to the charity workers that give items to those they possibly see as unable to care for themselves. Jean spoke with disappointment about the ways that charity volunteers like himself were encouraged to treat migrants who tried to get more than one serving of food at lunchtime, as will be explored further below (interview with Jean, 2013). The argument that activists give away their privileges while charities 're-inscribe' the sorts of privileges that citizenship and funding streams allow so as to 'do good', offers a limited view of the charities but not an uncommon one in activist environments. The activities and perceived ethos of the charity workers who volunteer in Calais are the example that activists use to demonstrate the difference between being 'privileged providers' and adopting the migrant position (interview with Jeremy).

In my fieldwork in Calais it was recounted to me by both activists (Anna, Jeremy, Sophie), and one of the volunteers from the charity La Belle Etoile (Jean), that the volunteers at the food distribution had a relationship to the migrants reliant upon

paternalism, pity and a sense of religious obligation (fieldwork, 2012 and interview with Jean, February 2013). Jean who is a member of one of the Christian charities 'La Belle Etoile' said himself that the way that the food distribution queue is organised is through 'shouting at the hundreds of men, women and children as though they are animals' but felt that it was considered the most efficient way to ensure that no one got twice the amount of food than anyone else, and with few volunteers and rarely enough food that this was the best that could be done. The way that the charities sometimes enforced Otherness through control led activists to reject the charitable model in principle, placing themselves 'on the same level' and 'fighting the same battle' as migrants wherever possible (interviews with Jean, Jeremy and Jack). This is one of the axes by which specific forms of otherness are created by activists in that there is an imagining of a triangle with 'migrants' at one point and 'charities' at another and activists as the meeting point in between. This form of division is too clean and misses the blending of tactics that float between the three, and denies the existence of migrants who are activists and also do charity work sometimes- despite that these people exist and are routinely claimed by one group and then another as part of claims to being 'migrant-led'.

I do not recall the word or ideas of 'privilege' being used as frequently in my early years of organising in Calais (2008-9)<sup>43</sup> and sense that the activist usage of this term is in some way tied to the emergence of privilege theory in academia. In this context, it worth noting that four out of my fifteen participants were educated to PhD level at the time of my interviews (Fatima, Jozey, Rita, and Leigh) and it is fair to say that some of the debates on the Calais Migrant Solidarity email lists reference debates in academia often as people interested in theorising the situation and political context they operate in. The term privilege was one used at the Calais Training, a session

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<sup>43</sup> Since my research period ended in 2014 the term seems to have fallen out of favor on the Calais Migrant Solidarity email list and possibly in the left more generally. The term is still worth analysing here as part of understanding the context of Otherness in this thesis.

attended by people intending to spend time in Calais as activists with Calais Migrant Solidarity,

There is something really powerful about being able to leave your privilege in England. Going to Calais is a commitment to sleep rough, be consistently harassed by the police, and be subject to frequent arrest. This is solidarity.

(Roger, leading the session 'What is Solidarity?' session at Calais Training, Feb 2013)

In this quote Roger suggests that how good it feels to be able to leave your privilege or just abandon the trappings of first world life, and that the act of 'leaving it in England' is a form of solidarity that activists should be aiming towards. This is in part confusion about what solidarity is and could be, and the ways in which structural power is embodied in each individual in ways that mean activism requires a consistently reflexive element towards it.

In her book about the politics of No Borders, Natasha King writes about the concept of privilege as something that can be used in a positive sense and something that can be usefully embraced to help migrants:

Sometimes privilege is used in fairly direct ways, as in the case of people carrying out asylum information workshops in the jungles, or in providing a point of contact and support to people who manage to cross once they are in the UK. Sometimes the use of privilege involves taking on tasks that are more/ too risky for people without papers... like shouldering the risk of arrest for opening squatted buildings...

(2016, p.114)

This reading of privilege as something that ought to be used to undertake activities that migrants cannot is different but connected to the idea that Roger and Jeremy invoked above where privilege is more about 'becoming migrant' and giving privilege up rather than using it as a tool. This process is part of a means of constructing the migrant as other as well as constructing charity workers as a specific kind of Other 'who we don't want to be' insofar as charities use privilege and do not appear to have any desire to 'give it up'. The issue that my participants seemed to have with King's use of the term 'privilege' (as a tool to be used) was that it resulted in re-inscribing the ways in which they had power (as people able to speak and teach English fluently, people with access to legal information, people with passports and luggage allowances), leading to feelings of guilt and the idea that each person as an individual was not 'doing enough' to make life in in Calais more manageable for migrants. Frank was particularly critical in relation to these feelings, saying that this guilt was time-wasting behaviour better spent on analysing institutionalised racism and the lack of freedom in society as a whole. The forms of collectivity of an anticipatory nature, previously discussed, are not those that rely on the privileged serving the 'unprivileged'; rather they rely on the mobilisation of each person's needs being conceived of and catered for collectively wherever possible. Solidarity in the everyday occurs when each person simply brings what they have (Chatterton and Pickerill 2010). In the legal workshops that King refers as part of the solidarity work undertaken in Calais, it is, in my opinion, that it is precisely the way that the migrants bring their stories to these interactions that vastly increases the knowledge and understanding of all who participate. Migrants are not 'privileged' to have intimate knowledge about the EU crossings and border points or the asylum policy of countries where their applications failed (fieldwork, 2013), it is just the knowledge they bring as people trying to understand where they have been and how they might get elsewhere. Is it privilege we mobilise when we give migrants our mobile phone numbers so that they can make contact when they arrive in the UK? Or is it just giving a new friend our phone number? An analysis that says privilege is down to having access to particular kinds of information seems to reify

the Otherness of those without papers rather than anticipating the practices of collectivity we may wish to inhabit (Chatterton and Pickerill 2010).

Following Smith (2013), another response to the discomfort activists may feel around examining their own privilege in organising spaces is to do what she sees as falsely attributing experiences of marginality and oppression to themselves in order to appear less 'privileged'. These sorts of dynamics of privilege politics will be explored in the next section on whiteness at the Cologne camp and the claims to marginality that were made when No Borders activists were accused of not having migrants in central organising roles.

Another use of 'privilege' that I wish to examine was mobilised in my fieldwork by asserting that the 'real' thinking about how to organise a different world is always done by activists, that as a result of individual privileges activists are the only ones with the time and inclination towards imagining better ways to organise. The anarchist collective Black Orchid<sup>44</sup> refers to this problem as seeing 'militancy and political sophistication as the domain of a privileged elite based on class, gender and racial privileges' (2012). This was made at least partly clear in the August 2014 CMS organising meeting I attended when someone said, "if you start talking about academic theory or lofty ideas I will just leave, there are migrants falling to their death on the highway and we need to be with them, not here." This was a particularly interesting moment, as there were many migrants in the room, but migrants who already had papers or long-term plans to seek asylum in France, so they weren't 'on the street' in the same way. There was an idea that making future plans was a waste of time; we were told by some present that 'they' don't need that.

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<sup>44</sup> For the full article, see: <https://blackorchidcollective.wordpress.com/2012/03/12/guest-post-privilege-politics/>

“[T]hey need our bodies on the ground”. These needs are not necessarily in conflict with each other, but certain judgments about what one ought to do with one’s privilege are contained here. This was reflected upon by associates of No Borders Leeds, who wrote about their experiences of the term ‘privilege’ being used in solidarity work:

We find an anti-intellectualism where both theorising and militancy are seen as a privilege in and of themselves, as if acting on the frontline as WELL as (conducting) analysis are only weapons of the oppressive rather than weapons of the oppressed. We find this dangerous because it evokes that the most oppressed are helpless and weak, encourages a lack of activity and analysis away from ‘make do and mend’ circles, and further rarefies the notion of resistance.

(Bast and McClure, 2012)

This brings us to the final critique of privilege politics as raised by both Bast and McClure and also in my interview with Kavita (2013). Critiques of Privilege theory argue that it seeks to address these issues (of systemic power imbalances) primarily through education, teach-ins and conversations, reducing one’s political capacity to that of changing oneself as an individual only. If activists are considering the power they hold to be something that they control, something that can be done away with through living ‘as a migrant in Calais’ or by ‘putting your body in the way of power’<sup>45</sup> or by virtue of being queer or a woman or disabled in some way, then according to Bast and McClure, this takes away from the overarching collective struggle (2012), in this case against borders. According to Haider (2017), privileges such as whiteness ‘cannot be explained by starting with an individual’s identity – the reduction of politics to the psychology of the self... The starting point will have to be the social structure and its constitutive relations, within which individuals are composed.’ The concept of ‘privilege’ and its uses in migrant solidarity projects are

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<sup>45</sup> There are examples where doing this on a mass scale would certainly have an impact; Cedric Herrou is a French olive farmer who was arrested for helping more than 250 migrants cross in to France from Italy- described as the ‘French Underground Railroad’: Agence France-Press (2017).

an attempt by activists to explain the discomfort that emerges when organising with people who have less access to structural power. The idea of being able to 'give up your privileges' when in Calais is attractive for this reason but may be acting as a distraction from unpicking racism as both something that surely needs to be reflected upon individually, but also (and crucially) fought collectively through shared projects and alongside one another in Calais.

#### **4.2 The Critical Whiteness Interventions at No Border Camps: Who can speak for freedom of movement?**

When probing for the impact of privilege politics on the No Borders Network, along with the conceptions of privilege as a motivation for undertaking solidarity work in Calais, the 'critical whiteness interventions' that occurred during the years 2012-14 were raised numerous times throughout my research period (during interviews with Anna, Imelda, Jeremy and Mia, and in the workshop at Edale (fieldwork, 2014)). It was discussed at length in the Calais Migrant Solidarity general meeting in August 2014 as part of a discussion about an account<sup>46</sup> of the 'March for Freedom' from Strasbourg to Brussels in 2014.

Discussions around the importance of one's identity and personal history in deciding who could organise and facilitate the No Border Camp in Cologne in 2013 and the March for Freedom through Schengen in 2014 showed up a set of tensions within the No Border Network at that time. The discomfort around the lack of migrants in organising positions and questions around what privileges could be extended to them in order 'balance' out structural inequalities present in the rest of

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<sup>46</sup> This is an account of the critical whiteness interventions at the No Borders camp in Rotterdam in 2013 and the March for Freedom in 2014 by Dhjana is available here <https://www.indymedia.nl/node/23743>

society led to something not unlike a 'quota system' as part of the organising process (explained below).

A generalised recognition of the lack people of colour at the centre of anti-racist struggle came through in my interviews and meeting observations (No One is Illegal meeting, fieldnotes 2013) and a feeling that, in London at least, migrants were treated as though they were occasional guests in No Borders meetings, rather than central organisers (interviews with Kavita, Jeremy, Mia, Fatima). One response to these issues in recent years has been the emergence of 'critical whiteness' collectives; These have begun to play a crucial role in the way that the No Borders network approaches questions around the participation of non-white people in organising practices (interviews with Anna and Imelda, workshop in Edale, fieldwork in Calais, 2014). The critical whiteness collectives and their impact were raised so consistently in the participatory observations and interviews that I undertook that I had to do extra research on them to fully understand the context of the conversations we were having. The discussion below arises from the discussions I had with activists in Calais, Barcelona and Edale and the blogs they had written as part of understanding/communicating their experiences, as well as the official website of the Cologne camp and the set of rules and expectations around race and exclusion that they outline in order to contextualise the accounts I was party to.

I first encountered critical whiteness collectives as a form of intervention in to the No Border Camp organising practices when hearing the report back about the No Border Camp in Cologne 2012 by Jo<sup>47</sup>, excerpts of which will be included below. But the Cologne camp was discussed extensively in Calais after one activist asked that Calais Migrant Solidarity to sign up to collectively be known as a critical whiteness zone (fieldwork, Feb 2013). Similar critical whiteness interventions were launched

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<sup>47</sup> This is one account of the No Borders Camp in Cologne in 2012 from Jo Magpie: <http://agirlandherthumb.wordpress.com/2012/08/24/borders-battles-and-bridges/>

at the No Borders camp in Rotterdam 2013 and March for Freedom in 2014 and the Migrant Solidarity Camp in Vienna in 2012 (informal interview with Imelda). The topic was raised by a No Borders UK activist, Jo, on her blog, who wrote of the camp in Cologne:

At this camp I was pleased to see a greater diversity than I have ever seen before at a No Border Camp. At Calais there were many people from Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq and North Africa, but they were there because 'we' went to 'their' space and made a camp happen. At Cologne there were people from all around the world who had come as activists, as part of the movement. Still, one of the most frequent criticisms I heard at the camp was that it was too white. Well, of course I hope we continue to grow in our diversity, however, let's not forget that the camp was actually held in Germany, which has a large white majority...

(Jo, 2012)

She then goes into more detail about the critiques around whiteness that she found destructive and to the detriment of the collective culture she hoped to experience at the camp:

What seems counter-productive to me is the finger-pointing and trigger-happy political-correctness-policing that I personally witnessed at the camp, most of which seemed to stem from white guilt... Somebody dropped a banner off the side of the bridge above the camp. It read 'No borders! No WHITE nation! Stop deportations!<sup>48</sup>' Later, the word

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<sup>48</sup> The camp organisers described the banner and the critical whiteness intervention in general as an important intervention into whiteness: 'As an antiracist/ racism-critical group we are committed to the vision of a world without *white* nations (we write *white* to highlight that 'nation' is a *white* concept) and borders. We perceive the No Border Movement as a potentially strong network to struggle against *white* supremacy/ racism. We see *white* awareness as a fundamental tool in order to engage in this struggle. The Cologne preparation itself pointed out its missing *white* awareness structures on the very first preparation meeting as well as the racist violence *whiteness* produced

'WHITE' was covered over with another word, but I wasn't able to read it.

She went on to speak about various messages that were pinned up around the camp including 'white female-ised' and 'white male-ised' people on the toilet doors (though presumably the toilets were not in fact racially segregated). She reported a different intervention later in the camp, purportedly from 'we the migrants' that was also stuck up on a toilet door, graffitied with 'I'm a migrant and I do not agree' (Jo, 2012). These attempts to place migrants at the centre of activist struggle are part of a complex web of on one hand being reflective about forms of activism that claim to be fighting for migrants' rights (but make it impossible for them to participate) and on the other rendering invisible the migrants that are already there, placing the knowledge of a generalisable category of 'migrants' as something that cannot be critiqued and as the 'authentic' voice of the movement as will be explored further below in section 4.3.

The attempts to run the camp in a way that was centred on the experience of oppressed people resulted in the critical whiteness collective at the Cologne camp, a group largely from Berlin<sup>49</sup>, setting out some rules for the camp, including encouraging oppressed people to hold up pieces of card with 'stop' and 'interrupt' written on them if they were 'retraumatised'. This is explained on the camp's website and appears as follows:

For people that are constantly negatively affected by racism, sexism [etc.] (...) throughout their life, communication within spaces that are shared with people privileged by racism sexism [etc.] (...), [presents] the danger of hurt and retraumatisation. In this process it is not crucial whether the speaker wants to hurt a person or not. We have to be conscious of the fact that we speak from very different positions and that structural

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within the preparation process'. (<http://reclaimsociety.files.wordpress.com/2012/08/eng-statement-rs1.pdf>, No Border Camp Cologne, 2012) emphasis in original)

<sup>49</sup> This is important because the tradition of critical whiteness studies has a particular (and relatively unexplored) trajectory in Berlin that is 'dissimilar from its counterparts in other countries from the Global North such as the US or UK' (Bush, 2013 and Karakayali and Tsianos et al 2013).

violence is often not noticed by people that are not directly affected by it. What is violent is hence *defined by the affected*. That's why we use the 'STOP'-sign and the 'interruption'-sign on the plenums [plenaries] during the No Border Camp. A person can use the 'STOP'-sign if what has just been said *means structural violence for herself/himself* – that means if the person sees herself/himself being hurt in a sexist, racist [etc.] (...) way. The [hurtful] speech is interrupted at this point. It is up to the person that used the sign whether she or he wants to explain himself or herself or not. If the person wants to, she or he can also let other people talk for herself or himself. The explanation should not be commented [on] but should be left standing like that, since defence mechanisms often take effect in such cases, which in turn prevent [people] from listening... the violation of people's limits can happen even if they are not intended. The .. signs are an attempt to handle violation [harm], to create a more protected space, to open a space for learning and thereby, in the best case, to reduce violations [harms] in future.

(No Border Camp Cologne, 2012<sup>50</sup> emphasis added).

The above account can be analysed in terms of a number of issues it raises. First, following critiques of the use of medicalised terminology by activist organisations mobilising the use of medical conditions to discuss responses to incidents of sexism, racism, homophobia or other structural oppressions<sup>51</sup> and whilst they come from a place of wanting to protect and care for people, the overuse of terms such 'retraumatisation', and suggestions for how to counter these incidences, have muddied the waters of what constitutes a medical condition and what is an incident of oppressive behaviour. Critical Race theorist Melanie Bush argues that this leads to

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<sup>50</sup> No Border Camp 2012 website: <http://noborder.antira.info/en/stop-zeichen/#more-1386>

<sup>51</sup> An example of the critiques of feminists and activists usage of trauma and trigger warnings when not necessarily relating to instances of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is anonymously posted here by 'Seven Humanities Professors' (2014): <https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2014/05/29/essay-faculty-members-about-why-they-will-not-use-trigger-warnings>

unhelpful expressions of identity and personal experience, which become fixed rather than the product of social structures that can be changed through collective action (2013, p.4).

Secondly, the statement implies that oppressed people are in constant danger of being traumatised, and that this can be mediated by having a chance to stop or interrupt meetings. These people do not need to explain anything to the group, and need not hear any comments from others on their decision to stop the meeting. It places an interesting emphasis on statements that are offensive to individuals on the basis of race or gender or sexuality *over* statements that cause offence when discussing any other intersecting marginalised identity or experience. It relates to trauma as something that is triggered by words or attitudes of individuals and is instinctively intertwined with individual experiences of a particular identity category.

According to the website that hosted the callout for the camp, these guidelines are to:

provide the framework during the camp to establish safe spaces to exchange with other PoCs (people of colour)/migrants/Slavic people/Sinti/Muslims/Roma and to network. We want to break isolation and test strategies to focus and to strengthen ourselves. In doing so, we will attach great importance to anti-authoritarian visions. Solidly united[,] we'd like to concentrate our experiences to direct them as strong energies against racism and any form of authority.

(No Border Camp Cologne, 2012)

The idea that the practices of the critical whiteness group led to an unnecessary

privileging of critiques of race over other forms of oppression was raised by Imelda, who stated:

So it (critical whiteness) looks intently at the power of skin colour. But... there are many other kinds of power. e.g., people dominate each other by using exclusive academic language; or by forming power cliques; or by using their familiarity with meetings, organising processes, and various political games and tactics; or indeed by using the very idea of 'critical whiteness' and other 'radical' language. What we need to be reflecting and working on is not just one 'dimension' of power, but how people dominate each other in all these many interlinking ways.

(interview with Imelda, 2014)

The need for an intersectional analysis of oppression(s) will be explored further in the section on organising and intersectional inclusion within the next chapter on safety, but the next section demonstrates the problems that can arise when there is an overt focus on the racial identity of participants and the formal and informal hierarchies that emerge as a result.

### **4.3 Migrants as Political Tokens**

A feeling of general complaint about the 'misuse of authority' is an ironic one given that the actions of the Critical Whiteness Collective were undertaken with the aim of remedying the misuse of authority present in previous forms of No Borders organising at the 'March for Freedom', 2014<sup>52</sup>. Generally acknowledged to be the same critical whiteness collective from Berlin (this was reiterated to me during my fieldwork in Calais 2014, Edale 2014, and interview with Imelda 2014), the group

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<sup>52</sup> The March for Freedom was: 250+ refugees and 'sans-papiers' (those without legal documentation of their migration status) based in various European countries together covering a distance of around 500 km, through France, Germany, Luxembourg and Belgium, arriving in Brussels on 20th June (March for Freedom 2014: <http://freedomnotfrontex.nl/?p=242>)

went on to make an intervention in the March for Freedom in the summer of 2014. Their intervention at this camp is a particularly good case study, as the critical whiteness bloc organised themselves and their interventions in a clear methodical way that can be outlined and analysed accordingly. The report from Dhjana (2014), summarising the whiteness interventions at the Cologne camp and the 'March for Freedom' has had various responses (including a group discussion in Calais in August 2014, fieldwork notes) as well as from the critical whiteness group itself<sup>53</sup>, which I will attempt to also bring into the discussion. The intervention was supposed to force the No Borders Network to completely re-examine the way that people of colour participate in No Borders politics and actions. The impact that the interventions from the critical whiteness collective had not only on the camps but also in groups across the European No Borders Network was considerable. Claims that the group initiated a breakdown in democratic processes not only at the camps in Cologne and Schengen but also in the network more generally reverberated across not only the network's email lists but also in meetings I attended in Calais in August 2014, in Edale in September 2014, and again by activists in Barcelona in October 2014, when the topic of Otherness and the role of migrants in leading struggle in antiracist settings was raised.

The article by Dhjana suggests that the critical whiteness group always put forward a moderator of their choice and as a result they prioritised other people from their own organisation first and were able to do so as they were often prioritising people of colour, a subject position that left them able to argue that they were part of a migrant community. The sense after the first meeting was that certain privileged voices were still dominating the meeting space.

A much better solution to the original problem of imbalance was proposed by the sub-community of the migrants within the March itself,

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<sup>53</sup> The response can be found here: (Reclaim Society, 2012: <http://reclaimsociety.files.wordpress.com/2012/08/eng-statement-rs1.pdf>)

as they as well were aware of the fact that white dominance was rising during the assemblies... At the start of the assembly of Wednesday, when one of the supporters wanted to open the assembly, one of the migrants said: 'We decided that from now on, the moderator of an assembly will be one of the migrants'.

(Dhjana 2014)

It was after this time that reports suggest that a nineteen-year-old migrant who had never attended a large meeting before was reluctantly tasked with facilitating a meeting of over 200 people and as a result the meeting took six hours to reach its conclusion (interview with Imelda, Barcelona, 2014), thus beginning a culture of meetings stretching late into the evening, making them undemocratic in other access-related ways, particularly for those with health problems or caring responsibilities - creating another set of excluded Others.

This resonates with my fieldwork at the 'No One is Illegal' gathering in 2012, in that by searching for 'authentic voices' of the 'migrant community', additional work such as facilitating meetings or even emotional labour such as revealing personal stories appears to be the responsibility of the migrants in order to make the discussion a platform for marginal voices. In this meeting of No One is Illegal, the role that migrants were playing or not playing in our collectives was raised and an attempt was made to put their experience at the centre of a discussion about the violence perpetrated by the private security company, G4S.

After two migrants arrived (T) from Cameroon and Esther from Nigeria was how they introduced themselves - name then place of origin) a conversation came up about how to ensure campaigns are led by members of oppressed groupings. The audience seemed to direct all questions on the subject towards the migrants in the room, including questions like "Do you feel too exposed to speak out about what G4S (a

private security firm) has done to you?” which resulted [in] silence, followed by nodding. These questions changed the atmosphere, and seemed to make the migrants nervous.

(Fieldwork notes, Feb 2013)

The clear necessity that migration as experienced by migrants themselves is brought to the centre of No Borders work is widely acknowledged, but there is a thin line between asking people about their experiences and trying to get them to tell the movement what it should be doing, or what the quote above refers to as ‘turning strangers of color in to your personal educational tool’ (ibid.). The desire to give the two migrants at the ‘No One is Illegal’ meeting the space to talk about their experiences of detention and the housing solutions delivered by G4S was understandable, but it was easy to tell that public speaking about personal events was difficult for TJ. He said he didn’t want to speak about the troubles he’d had with housing (he referred to it as victimisation) because as he reminded the group, ‘when you are a migrant, G4S can punish you’ (Fieldwork Feb 2013). The urge to avoid looking to an authentic migrant subject to be a representative of all migrants can result in a total refusal to take into account the differences that may need to be considered in order to run meetings and spaces that are accessible for different people.

Even when measures are put in place to prioritise the voices of migrants (such as chairing meetings, in the example of the critical whiteness group above) the malleable nature of identity as something that is self-designated and thus cannot be policed easily can be exploited by people with more structural power anyway. This was made clear through the actions of a member of the critical whiteness group the following day, when an activist from Berlin took on a facilitation role. A migrant immediately informed him about the decision made by the migrants and suggested he cede the role to a migrant,

this person just replied: “I have a migrant background. It is okay if I do it.” It wasn’t even a question, it was a ... statement. Several people of the dominant (critical whiteness) group rushed to express their agreement and then the assembly was opened, while ignoring the decision of the migrants and not taking into account the delay of the translation, so that the migrants didn’t even have the time to respond.

(Dhjana, 2014)

This example demonstrates the subjective nature of identity as the basis from which to organise. When a person claims an identity, it is not socially acceptable to question it; power can then be distributed in an uneven way, causing further tensions in the group. It is harder to say ‘migrants are finding this way of organising alienating’ if you are speaking to someone who identifies as a migrant. The critical whiteness group continued to make interventions in to the assemblies that took place during the ‘March for Freedom’.

Following the proposal that ‘refugees speak first’, several people [in] the critical whiteness group expressed that ‘supporters’ (activists who were not also migrants) should not bring ... ideas for actions. The explanation of above statement was that, after all, it is the struggle of the migrants (and the migrants only), so they should be the ones initiating actions.

(Ibid.)

Strategies such as banning non-migrants from proposing ideas for actions, chairing meetings, or speaking first in meetings, are what is often referred to in the organised left as ‘identity politics’. It comes from a desire to keep the actions of migrants at the centre of the struggle and relates to issues in the network to do with what tasks migrants can be delegated/relegated to in the lead-up to actions.

Just like the problem of white dominance during assemblies, there is actually a real and undeniable problem of white dominance during the

process of creating and organising actions. Without generalising, I often saw migrants speaking a lot about the necessity of actions but as soon as it comes up to concrete plans, mostly people I read as white, documented activists take over. They bring in ideas, list needed materials, mobilise and organise. Even worse, sometimes the migrants are just given paint and brushes and are asked to make the needed banners.

(Ibid.)

The problematic and even menial roles migrants are allocated or volunteered for was an issue raised by Kavita during her interview. She pointed out that in order to balance out the fact that there was a low level of migrant involvement in the London No Borders collective, migrants were given jobs similar to those in the above quote, painting banners, setting up tents etc. An example is below:

K: And I think it is worth doing things like having food in the meeting and being like, hey let's not skip the food, let's pay someone without papers who can't work legally ... to cook something that they might actually wanna eat at the meeting. Maybe not everyone wants to eat vegan stew.

Me: There was a massive falling-out about that stuff at one stage wasn't there? Cos there was a migrant kitchen collective set up which had people without papers cooking and we had it for one meeting at RampArts (a squatted social centre) and after they'd finished cooking they came back to the meeting and ate, so it actually did function in some way (to involve migrants in activist meetings) but then after there was this thing of like, we can't have brown people cooking our food and just staying in the kitchen and then going home, it looks too bad. And it was a bit like, until our meetings have more people of colour in them, we can't employ these people on the basis of cooking our food and going home and we can't force them to sit in on a meeting that they don't want to sit

in on so we'll just get the food from Tesco. And literally that's what happened at the next meeting. There were migrants working behind the counter there of course...

K: At Tesco yeah I don't doubt it! But if that's the migrant solidarity we're interested in... I dunno, I just feel like there's this weird sense of 'things can't be done perfectly so they will not be done'. I mean I'm sorry but we live in a racist society so certain things are gonna upset people's sensitivity and I feel like our own sensibility shouldn't necessarily be the number one concern here.

(Interview with Kavita, 2013)

The proposal that that direct actions should only be initiated by migrants, as pushed by the critical whiteness collective, is a clear strategy demanding that migrants should not have to accept being allocated symbolic or meaningless work that is not of interest to them. However, when the decision was made that only migrants could propose actions, it was noted that small groups of European activists were spotted having secret meetings of their own to plot actions that had not been discussed with the group because it had become too difficult to get the kinds of actions they wanted to do approved, and the meetings had been going so late in to the evening that they had become completely undemocratic. It functioned to inadvertently establish white-only organising splinter groups, where activists who were not migrants could propose and plan taking action.

In sum, the first stages of trying to prioritise the voices of migrants, give them more power to make decisions in meetings, lead the way in terms of any actions being planned and other similar approaches eventually led to a small group of non-migrant activists deciding what would be best for both migrants and the collective anyway. What was supposed to be an experiment in migrant ownership of the space

and organising mechanisms eventually gave way to what appeared to be a 'privileged' collective of 'gatekeepers' deciding what migrants could or could not handle (Djana, 2014). The collective even prevented a workshop from taking place that was to explain to migrants what might be best to do if arrested, because it was not run and organised by migrants (interview with Imelda, 2014). The migrants were seen to be above scrutiny, entirely efficient without the rest of the collective and yet protected from making their own decisions about what workshops to undertake.

The critical whiteness collective and their actions at Cologne No Border Camp and the 'March for Freedom' became a point of vehement debate during my fieldwork in Calais, precisely because their desire for migrants to be at the centre of solidarity work is what most activists really want for the No Borders network (fieldwork, 2014). But the 'critical whiteness' mode of operation was both reflexive in some ways - especially to do with racial inequalities - and unreflexive in others, for example in terms of how it used its power of veto. It did not allow for people to experiment with what was going well or badly, and became increasingly exclusive in its organising practices, with meetings where only migrants could propose actions which ran until late at night after most people had gone to bed.

As Imelda concluded, there is a need for more experimentation in countering the forms of domination such as whiteness that occur within these protest camps:

I agree that self-reflection is crucial for challenging domination... it can be really helpful to do this self-reflection together with others. But I think big open assemblies and camps where there are lots of political hierarchies and power dynamics at play are really bad places for it. In these big 'public' spaces, reflection so often seems to become debased and made into another tool for domination. I think often the best place to

work on these kinds of issues is with close friends and comrades who we know well and trust.

(Interview with Imelda, 2014)

It is difficult to achieve collective self-reflection in large-scale meetings for various reasons. The problems that unofficial hierarchies play in social movements were outlined in the 'Tyranny of Structurelessness' (Freeman, 1970). This piece described how the 'apparent lack of structure too often disguises an informal, unacknowledged and unaccountable leadership that was all the more pernicious because its very existence was denied' (ibid.). This raises the question: Can we build a reflexive movements that are migrant-centred if we cannot create the spaces for where we can be vulnerable with each other? This will be explored further in the third empirical chapter on vulnerability. The next section of the thesis will explore 'migrant-led' organising practices more deeply, looking at the approach of Crossroads women's centre, and the campaign to save a migrant worker, Clara, from losing her job for trade union organising.

#### **4.4 Shaping Political Movements around Migrant Demands**

My interviewees were also concerned about tokenism of individual migrants as spokespeople, escorted by a particular activist organisation from one event to another. Whilst a clear attempt to place migrants at the centre of struggle, it also showed migrants to be in need of protection from other activists; for example, the migrants sometimes did not even have conversations without their 'minder' present. This was raised in my interview with Virginia in her reflections about her feminist group working with Crossroads Women's Centre. Virginia felt that she was being 'gate-kept' from one migrant activist being escorted by Crossroads:

There was a project we had which was putting together a spoof version of *the Metro*; *the Metro* being a newspaper with an anti-migrant

sentiment that kind of runs through the paper. So the project was with other groups such as No Borders and it involved putting together a spoof version of that paper during a week of action against the racist press in 2010. But we wanted to make sure the work wasn't just analysis and we had voices of asylum seekers in the paper as well and we did a mock-up of the '60-Second Interview' which they have in the Metro and we interviewed someone who was claiming asylum. We approached Crossroads Women's Centre because of the work they do with women seeking asylum and carried out an interview but it was quite difficult to get that interview and the person we interviewed was kind of chaperoned by a paid member of Crossroads Women's Centre and I can see how in some situations you might feel that was necessary if it was a journalist from a (mainstream) paper or someone you hadn't had much contact with but it did feel quite strange when it was someone from a group they'd worked with politically in the past.

Me: Did they answer the questions for the person being interviewed?

Virginia: No, but they did step in on a couple of occasions, for example we asked the person being interviewed if they wanted to use their own name or go under a pseudonym and they wanted to go under a pseudonym so we asked them if they had one they wanted to use and the person from Crossroads Women's Centre changed the pseudonym because they didn't think it was 'Somali enough'.

(Interview with Virginia, 2013)

This chaperoning of migrant activists could be seen here as paternalistic, and also signposts what is 'expected behaviour' for migrants, and implies that this particular woman wasn't performing her role of the Other as her 'minder' hoped. The idea that she should present herself as more 'Somali' is particularly telling here about notions

activists hold around the importance of identity as it is commonly perceived, the lack of clarity over what is showing support and what is showing solidarity, and what it would mean to place the needs of migrants at the centre of situations like this. What part of helping migrants represent themselves is ensuring that they are at the centre of movements for change? And what ways of facilitating representation by migrants works to produce specific forms of otherness that reinforce existing racialised and gendered discourses? What would adapting the ways we organise to accommodate different experiences and ideas of ourselves be like?

Below is an example drawn from a London-based feminist collective and their relationship to the ways that activists and activist culture 'others' migrants. The examples look at the tactics and strategies being used by migrant activists and activists of colour involved in migrant solidarity organising. The chapter will look at the way that activists are embedded in a culture of Otherness and exclusion where none of my interview participants felt that they were participating 'properly' or 'enough' and were plagued with guilt about how much needed doing and how impossible that sometimes felt. The vulnerability felt by even the most committed activists to being 'not authentically' a No Borders activist is telling about the need for a more generous, less competitive and collectively supportive atmosphere in our organising practices.

Drawing on the experience of Jozey and Virginia and their feminist activism, Jozey told me that since 2008 they have been experimenting with 'different kinds of meetings and event formats to see what makes for an inclusive and productive environment'. Jozey told me that in their experience, if an event is run with a specific antiracist title, a more diverse milieu of people are likely to come. This was true for organising conferences such as 'Sex, Race, Class' that they put on in 2010, where 'at least one in three of the panels running simultaneously' were about issues of race.

She noted that the current focus of the group, one of sex education (in schools, amongst feminists etc.) doesn't appear to be drawing a particularly diverse crowd. She thought this might be because 'sexuality' when approached this way appears to be tied to 'whiteness' in feminist discourses. In the hopes of disrupting any intrinsic political 'whiteness' of the work done by the collective, migrant solidarity activism is also undertaken by this group. In terms of direct solidarity with migrants, the campaign to save the job of Clara Osagiede (discussed below) was, like the spoof version of the Metro mentioned above in the interview with Virginia, a similarly important joint project between an active feminist collective and London No Borders. This campaign was mentioned in my interviews with Jozey, Virginia and Jack, and also in the participatory observation I undertook in London No Borders in October 2012.

The plight of Clara Osagiede, the RMT (Rail, Maritime and Transport Trade union) cleaners grade secretary for the London Underground, is one that was well-known amongst migrant solidarity activists in the period 2008-09<sup>54</sup>. When striking cleaners working for the London Underground started facing immigration raids and deportation, a lot of interest was generated amongst London-based activists who wanted to show their support to the strikers. A way of showing solidarity with Clara, who was very much the public face of these strikes, along with her colleagues (who were mostly migrant workers), was a question that Jozey said her feminist collective were keen to answer:

A couple of comrades worked on the tube, and they got us in touch quite quickly with a woman called Clara who was leading the cleaners' strike, and ... asked what we could do to support it ... it was very much a solidarity action ... It started in response to a number of people involved

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<sup>54</sup> For background on this campaign, see:  
Osagiede (2008) <http://socialistreview.org.uk/328/tube-cleaners-strike-freedom>,  
Osagiede (2012) <http://socialistworker.co.uk/art.php?id=29160>  
RMT (2012) <http://www.rmt.org.uk/news/publications/defend-clara-osagiede/>

in the cleaners' campaign being raided and deported. We kept up different solidarity actions ... for quite a long time and we followed through with them by not just doing a one-off action, and we built a very good relationship with Clara, and we supported her when she was having arguments with the RMT, a union that was most concerned with white drivers and blatantly avoided giving resources to the cleaners.

(Interview with Jozey, 2013)

This is a different route to supporting migrant struggles than those that have been analysed in this chapter so far. Whilst it may seem artificial to contact someone that you do not know to see what you can do to support them, the relationship-building that occurred as part of this interaction made the interaction notably different. The action component to this campaign (showing up to a workplace as a big group distributing leaflets whilst chanting slogans) is perhaps not a unique approach, but the fact that it was in direct response to a migrant organiser's request could be seen as fitting in to a framework of 'migrant leadership' that is so sought-after in migrant solidarity activist networks. Virginia reflected:

I think to some extent the work we did with the tube cleaners on the London Underground ... brought together so clearly issues of gender, race and class. I think it both showed that the reason that this work was undervalued was because this was women's work but also the added dimension of race and class played in that. But I feel like where that worked well in the initial part of the struggle was the fact that we were approached to take part in particular actions as decided by the cleaners themselves rather than it coming the other way.

(Interview with Virginia, 2013)

For Virginia and Jozey, part of what became clear in these solidarity actions was that the cleaners needed people who were able to be arrested, or at least engage in

low-level property damage or engage in spectacular actions that would draw in the media to look at their cause and shame the London Underground in some way by turning the public against their harsh actions towards migrant staff.

What we came up with in these conversations with Clara was that what would help is getting stations closed, so we needed to get them closed, via ... well, making mess. This is an idea that was since debated and has since been criticised. But the idea was that the cleaners themselves can't be taking direct action because they are undocumented, so we can *leverage the privilege we have as a group of people who are documented* to get the strike in to the press and to close down the station. Which was less risky for us than people in a different position to us... So one action we did where we all went and spilt loads of McDonald's milkshakes in a variety of stations around London and stuff like that, and we did another direct action where we went and dumped bin bags outside of the London Underground headquarters, and another one where we went in and did guerilla cleaning at the London Underground headquarters ... and shouted out the demands of the cleaners strike as we did it all ... We interrupted a meeting at the town hall that Boris Johnson's Greater London Council, or whatever it's called, were having ... That was in response to a number of people involved in the cleaners' campaign being raided and deported.

(Interview with Jozey, 2013, emphasis added)

This use of 'leveraging privilege' as a tool is similar to what King advocates in the first section of this chapter when she claims that privilege can be used as a tool to help migrants navigate the immigration system. Whilst (comparatively) activists do have more access to institutional power than many undocumented migrants, I argue that the term is so tied to feelings of individual guilt in the left that it is fast

becoming conceptually destructive, leading activists to feel (and construct themselves) as Other to migrants. Instead, taking direct action as people with citizenship rights is a basic necessity in leveraging what minimal structural power the activist left has in the collective campaign against immigration controls alongside migrants and Others. The actions taken alongside Clara were seemingly successful but did not work out to be sustainable in the long term. My interviews revealed two problems, one was that they only managed to build an ongoing relationship with one activist, Clara, who was isolated as a troublemaker by both the employers and the trade union and who was eventually bullied out of her job.

So we supported the cleaners in their negotiations with the RMT offices, but ultimately, Clara's relationship with the union broke down, and because we didn't have links with other people really, we'd communicated everything through Clara, that left us not sure how to continue to build solidarity. We thought about doing some kind of militant inquiry where we did questionnaires that we could take to workers at work and try to talk to people ... but there wasn't really the energy for it by the end...

(Interview with Jozey, 2013)

The second problem was that because the activists involved in the stunts weren't part of the workplace or the internal workings of the campaign, it started to feel like they were only valuable as people who could be arrested.

I think in being asked to do particular things the cleaners who were on strike felt that they couldn't do in terms of actions and demonstrations at London Underground and things like that, on the one hand that felt useful but on the other hand it very much divided the roles up and I think after that we didn't want to be in the situation where you're just sort of rent-a-demonstration...

(Interview with Virginia, 2013)

This discomfort is an interesting one, in that being delegated a task by a collective of migrants that can be carried out efficiently by supporters/ activists is the kind of solidarity that many in the Critical Whiteness Collective were striving towards for the entirety of their interventions in to No Border Camps. And yet Virginia felt quite separate from the workings of the campaign in a way that made her feel like an outsider; she felt othered and dispensable as just one body willing to be put into place by others. She wished the campaign could have organised the actions more collectively. Despite these flaws, for Jozey it was a very important set of actions:

it felt like one of best actions we have done, seeing as it was led by the cleaners which was something we really wanted to support, and we succeeded in what we set out to do, like there was a lot of press at our actions, it was quite defining for us as a collective. I'm not sure why, but it felt like it really brought us together to do something so important, and we grew and continued.

(Interview with Jozey, 2013)

Despite the good feeling it generated for the collective, Jozey admitted that the group did not go on to do any more solidarity actions with cleaners or those working on the London Underground, as when Clara lost her job, they didn't have the connections to what was happening with the campaign anymore, and there was a resistance to this kind of organising where activists felt they had no ability to influence the kinds of actions or direction of the campaign. Instead they moved on to other issues such as defending the London borough of Hackney's nurseries from austerity measures (interview with Jozey 2013). This problem of there not 'being enough energy' to continue organising when a campaign has lost its momentum is an ongoing issue when new struggles emerge constantly, all of which seem equally worth supporting. The key issue is that they did not continue to follow the method of getting in touch with migrants who were in need of solidarity and then carrying out their antiracist work in fitting with those demands. This is an indication that

when a project or campaign is felt to be collectively run with investments from both those in the workplace and those supporting from direct action frameworks are more likely to be sustainable than those that are either entirely 'migrant-led' and organised or entirely activist-led with minimal direction from migrants. It also indicates that whilst activists are keen to 'leverage their privilege' (interview with Jozey 2013), they do not want to feel disconnected from the gains of those actions or campaigns, or simply a crowd designated as more 'arrestable' than the migrant participants.

#### **4.5 Migrant-led Movements**

The campaign to save Clara and stop the immigration raids on London Underground staff is an example of migrants participating in a workers' struggle as it is normatively understood. It is important not to romanticise the political motivations of migrants in their struggles to overcome the material impact of migration controls; Bishop reminds us that we mustn't figure 'migrants who have successfully crossed national borders as a new historical subject; as the new working class, and hence as the new central protagonist in the long struggle between labour and capital (Papadopolous and Tsianos 2013 in Bishop, unpublished thesis 2012). But similarly, the way that migrants are sometimes positioned as 'not political' in any comparable sense is a way that we construct otherness when thinking through our insiders and outsiders in migrant solidarity organising. There are many barriers to participating in public-facing campaigns, as Frank pointed out in his interview:

I don't really encourage them (migrants) to come along to the rallies... I don't want to put pressure on them in that way because they feel like 'If I get involved in the rallies that will be a mark against me when it comes to my claim being heard' and I ... there's no pressure coming from me ... We

do this (demonstrate) and it's on, but you know I wouldn't blame you if you didn't come.

(interview with Frank, 2014)

There is a difference between 'not blaming' migrants for refusing to attend a demonstration and thinking that they are 'not interested in our kind of politics' which was the kind of thinking that emerged in my interviews with Frank and Mia, where they suggested to me that migrants who got out of detention were 'not doing politics' and were not in a situation to be encouraged to join the campaigns that the two of them were involved with.

Frank was quite clear about what he thought 'doing politics' was about, as will be shown in the quotation below, but he understandably didn't want to jeopardise the asylum claims migrants were making. Rather than viewing politics through the lens of collectivising social reproduction, as will be explored in the final empirical chapter on Vulnerability, for Frank, being politically active was quite straightforward:

I think for me at least you know, I'm very clear about you know what has to change and so... I allocate my time the right kind of way. If I'm organising a protest that's my priority, I don't go running around with my trailer trying to get a fridge for somebody (this is a reference to a previous story he told about getting supplies for a Tamil family's flat)... I'm very clear about that... yeah, and generally you find, I think it would be fair to say, that some of the more established migrant community organisations, the politics that tends to dominate them is 'we need to prove ourselves to be very good citizens... doing the right thing, and if we show ourselves to be very good citizens the governments will just change

their policies and allow us to be part of the community' ... I think that's a mistaken view, we need to overthrow the government! But I think that's kind of the politics that tend to dominate some of the migrant community-based groups.

(Interview with Frank, 2013)

There is a homogenisation of the entire population of 'migrants' in this quote, which could be seen as a demonstration of producing otherness through universalising the category and experience of migrants. Not only does Frank not outline which particular migrant community organisations are focused around citizenship rights (though most of his work seemed to be with Tamil migrants) but he isn't interested in designating the other community-building activities that migrants might be involved with as 'political' or as of equal importance to organising a protest. A similar view was put forward by Mia, who simply did not expect to see migrants involved in 'her kind of politics' after their asylum claim had been heard:

A lot of the refugees, unless they are very overtly political, they get out and they have been very traumatised and they just want to hide and they get a little bit of a slice of the global North dream, and that's becoming harder and harder to get, so their outside experiences are in some cases radicalising them, but they have been traumatised, so unless they are pretty political then it's hard to keep them in the movement. I can name on my one hand, unfortunately, the refugees who have come out and are still publically politically active, still around in the movement, ah no two hands, so yeah that just gives you a bit of a feel of things as I've been involved for 15 years... but that's the aim long-term sure, to keep them in the movement.

(Interview with Mia, Jan 2014)

Mia appears to be indicating here that the aim is for migrants to participate politically 'publicly and around the movement' that she is already involved in. Her

experience of visiting migrants in detention led her to believe that most migrants are traumatised and thus might not want to be active once they gain asylum (interview with Mia). Irregardless of whether this is the case, the way that politics figures in this discussion is indicative of a narrow understanding of 'politics' and political change that I think needs to be challenged in the activist milieu through an expansion upon ideas of imperceptible politics (Papadopoulos & Tsianos, 2007) and politics as an everyday practice that exceeds 'representative' frameworks. What emerged through my interviews was that in order for political movements to be sustainable, both for migrants, activists and Others, we must conceptualise the vulnerabilities we all share as part of a collective wound that can be in part healed through the shared work of living and being together in the everyday (including *both* the work that Frank described as 'driving fridges around' and 'organising protests') as well as assisting those that Mia describes as 'traumatised' in the daily resistances and struggles that go along with these experiences. These actions together may lead to more fruitful understandings of what is political and what is leaving 'the movement' (interviews with Frank and Mia).

#### **4.6 'Authentic' No Borders Activists**

In this final section of the chapter there will be an examination of the way that both migrants and activists could be made to feel like Others or outsiders throughout their participation in solidarity movements, due to encounters with a number of issues. Firstly, there can be assumptions made by long-term activists about what to expect from migrants in terms of political and social involvement in white-dominated activist circles. Secondly, there was a suggestion that activists' resistance to employing methods that could be seen as 'culturally sensitive' because they feel tokenistic is in fact just another way of avoiding confronting the homogeneity of activist collectives as they are currently formed. Thirdly, the chapter will finish by looking at the 'insider culture' of No Borders activism that relies upon people either

dedicating enormous amounts of personal effort and time, essentially assuming unelected leadership positions, or feeling like they are not important to the collective as 'real activists' and what kind of culture this idea fosters in migrant solidarity networks. This continues the line of argument about No Borders producing (through constructions of set identities) activism as a specific activity that only some people are able to do, whether it be along the lines of occupying the subject position of someone who is 'time-rich, obligation-poor', a 'movement martyr' or 'activism expert' critiqued in the pamphlet 'Give up Activism' (Andrew, 1999).

The idea that groups ought to appear more diverse than they actually are in order avoid putting people off attending their meetings is a belief that that was very visible in all the groups that I interviewed, both feminist and anti-racist. As groups pointed out, this clashed somewhat with groups that were also made up of people adhering to a particular kind personal style and appearance that is in keeping with what Kavita and Anna referred to as 'activist culture', which may include 'punk' haircuts or wearing torn black jeans, an aversion to wearing leather or other animal products or mass-produced brand names such as Nike. Appearance is in some ways quite heavily policed in activist spaces as part of designating 'real' activists. Sofia also raised some concerns about the way that activists acted in entrenched ways in terms of both aesthetics and perspectives, at the expense of creating the inclusive space they claim to desire. She suggested that at times this translated to activists announcing the needs and interests of migrants as if they were entirely predictable:

Sofia: There's lots of racism in No Borders ... I think sometimes there is. I don't consider myself an expert or anything but sometimes I go to meetings and these people are speaking about how to support migrants and actually supposedly I'm one of them and sometimes it feels like it's mainly white people, British, who make the decisions and sometimes it's frustrating ... I think that if we want to get involved supporting people

who were not born in the UK, it should be the people who really need that support who should also really get in on that decision.

Me: Do you think that the decisions are made for migrants rather than with migrants?

Sofia: Sometimes. Sometimes I feel there's a bit of power with that. Recently I've had a bit of a falling-out with someone because, although what she's doing is great, she has come to the point where she thinks she has a lot of experience working in a migrants' rights charity and doing No Borders activism so has a certain idea of what migrants think or need. And to me that is the worst conclusion to which anyone can come. Because the moment you think you know about another's situation, you might not see what a new person would ... you need to be open-minded and able to deal with situations in different ways ... you need to be ... flexible or willing to change your way of doing things and I think these things should be constantly changing.

(Interview with Sofia, 2013)

Sofia mentioned an essentialising of migrant activists as 'a known quantity'. She felt frustrated with her local No Borders group and the way that they interacted with migrants as outsiders. She thought that although the aim was to form a collective that was migrant-led and centred, but the result was more that meetings were exactly the same whether migrants attended or not, and people were expected to learn the specific kind of language and acronyms associated with No Borders projects and melt in to the background of an already-decided way of doing things. One reason that this might be the case was explored by Kavita, who noticed that displaying anything akin to 'cultural sensitivity' or catering things towards Others was called out as patronising and possibly even racist as it involves altering activities in the hopes of attracting people who you assume are similar due to their

race. Kavita expressed annoyance about what she saw as the overreaction from London No Borders activists when she and others attempted to be culturally 'sensitive', or cater activities to areas populated by particular ethnic groups. She felt as though the motivation to avoid being seen as racist or culturally essentialist resulted in activists refusing to adapt any of their behaviour or attitudes in the hopes of involving more migrants in shared projects. She told the following story:

I think there's a real thing in No Borders about not being patronising... and lots of things are deemed to be being patronising. Anything that smacks of cultural sensitivity is deemed to be patronising or bordering on racist. That's something you can't forget and it can be a bit complex... So we were doing a demo in Peckham with a big sound system. The aim is not to be an angry thing... we decided to have a sound system as a way of getting something happening thinking, it'll probably be small numbers and it'd be a good to be recognisable and have a presence. We're really just leafleting for a meeting and raising awareness about dawn raids and deportations to Nigeria that day. Go into the restaurants, shops, barber shops, etc., have a chat. And we've got a bit of a rally outside the library, it's all quite nice. And then someone puts on Rage Against the Machine really loudly and I'm like 'Hey this may be a little much for the crowd in this moment. What are you doing?' And I changed it to something else, and then it was changed again and I was like, 'Guys can you put something else on? This is a bit much'. And it got quite aggressive and I was like, that's not the aim of this, we're not trying to like scare people. And then someone puts on something from their iPod that sounds a bit like world music and someone suggested this was racist so Rage Against the Machine gets put back on. And afterwards when I suggested that it wasn't an appropriate set-up and it wasn't very appealing people were like, 'Well, you don't know, maybe a lot of Nigerians really like drum n bass.' And it's like, well, maybe, but it strikes me that maybe they also don't and that maybe as much as it sounds a little too close to cultural

sensitivity for some people's liking, maybe playing Nigerian music might have been a suitable move. It's like really tiny things that make you go, come one guys. It's not patronising I don't think, it's just not being really centred on your own position in the world and maybe thinking about other people.

(Interview with Kavita, 2013)

Kavita and I discussed the problems of being 'centred around your own position' when you are also attempting to be migrant-led. She thought that the conflict between acting like there is a universal 'common sense' position that racism is socially destructive and assuming that most people, especially migrants, will agree with that doesn't help. She went on to say that organising all No Borders political meetings and activities in mostly white 'specifically activist' spaces like social centres inevitably leaves the migrants who do participate in No Borders as the Other, at least in number. Kavita continued that one of the problems was that No borders as a collective went about attempting to avoid being racist by 'acting just like they would with any group of people involved in the activist scene' as if it was a neutral space and as if everyone arrived with the same activist subjectivity. She thought that on some level perhaps they had lost touch with, or never had, ideas about how to communicate with people about racism outside of an activist context using specific language that was not universally intelligible. The problem that activist culture reinforces migrants as Other to these solidarity movements is a clear sign that activists need to develop a different set of frameworks of what is politics, who is political, and what it means to form spaces collectively that allow for a myriad of identities and life experiences. There is a sense of ambivalence about this prescribed 'authenticity' and the identity that this requires that needs to be examined.

#### **4.7 We all feel out of place: Who is ‘too soft’ for ‘politics’?**

A common theme in my interviews was that no one appeared to feel that they were the ‘right kind’ of activist. An apparently singular view of what ‘politics’ is leads to an assumption that there is the right kind of activism, and the right kind of activist, the right kind of activist being someone who ‘martyrs’ themselves to the cause, can stay up all night participating in general meetings and always knows how to engage migrants in their political projects. This was something raised on numerous occasions during my interviews (Anna 2013, Fatima 2014, Sofia 2013, Rita 2013). These respondents struggled to outline who it was ‘really’ doing politics in the migrant solidarity networks they were involved with. This theme will be continued in the chapter on Vulnerability where I argue that ‘doing politics’ needs to be tied to a commitment to share the social reproduction that is necessary for the success of social movements and the need to collectivise vulnerabilities in order to do this.

Sofia mentioned that there seemed to be an activist way of dressing and presenting yourself, a ‘uniform’ that she wasn’t wearing and that this made her feel on the outside:

I remember when I went to that demonstration... when I got there lots of people looked me up and down, how I was dressed. Like you must dress in a certain way to be seen as ‘one of us’. But actually not all of us need to dress in black and have a hood and have a tattoo on my face saying ‘A’... I don’t care what people think. I’m not yet in the police list I don’t think ... For example in Brighton in a big demonstration, the police went straight up to people and kicked them out before the demo even started. I’m not yet recognised as one of them and this means I can go into places because I’m seen as the soft one.

(Interview with Sofia, Mar 2013)

Throughout this section of my interviews I was consistently surprised to see which participants considered themselves as 'soft' activists, or a 'part-time' activist or 'peripheral' to No Borders or Calais Migrant Solidarity (Interviews with Jeremy, Sofia, Rita, Kavita), especially as I considered these people to be vital members of these collectives. The groups certainly would not have continued to exist without the work of these individuals, and yet these participants compared themselves to others, excused their level of involvement and were apologetic for not doing 'enough'. The desire to place themselves as outside of the collective was partly a kind of guilt; some even apologised to me for not attending meetings, and I realised a lot in this section of the interviews about the power of acting like an important contributor, even if you too suspect you aren't. It takes a lot of confidence to say 'this group wouldn't be here if I didn't work to make it so'. It is important to interrogate the way that power is held by those who contribute the most to the online discussion groups or who take ownership over the collective in other public ways such as by chairing meetings or demonstrations, especially as it seems to lead to other people feeling that their contribution is not as strong or not enough.

I was at the planning meeting for the demonstration that Sofia mentions above, where there was a lot of discussion about one of the anti-prison activists who had been invited. He was someone who had been involved in lots of secret and high-risk activism, in contrast to what No Borders usually organised, which was usually low-risk and public demonstrations (what Sofia refers to as 'soft' activism):

A guy from Anarchist Black Cross [an anti-prison activist group] joined the regular monthly meeting of No Borders. He could only stay for ten minutes and refused to say what his name was. He wanted to talk about No Borders sharing the organising tasks for a day of action during the week-long anti-G8 demonstration being held in London. It was decided that the day of action be called 'No Borders! No Prisons!'. Some discussion was had about which migrant solidarity groups will not

support a day about the elimination of prisons (No One is Illegal was scoffed at as unlikely to support it, as they have what was viewed as a 'soft' and 'confused' position on shutting all prisons). Tasks were allocated, including someone to organise a 'fluffy' central London demo (this means a demonstration in which people who do not want to get arrested can participate). The guy left straight after this discussion, putting his hood up and looking around suspiciously at the walls for 'bugging devices'. The social centre, LARC, is rumoured for having meeting rooms that are secretly recorded by police via 'devices' and thus is known as a terrible place for discussions about actions. It feels quite atmospheric watching him do this, like we are all about to get swept up by the police.

(Fieldwork notes, Feb 14, 2013)

The new people at the meeting felt confused about the attitude and language used by the activist from Anarchist Black Cross. It was pointed out that of course what he had referred to as a 'fluffy' demonstration in central London was in fact the only part of the actions that would allow for the participation of migrants without papers without risk of being immediately arrested and potentially charged. In this sense, 'fluffy' just meant 'accessible'. But the fact that some at the meeting had shown a sense of disregard for such an action showed up who would be Othered by a collective that prioritises actions where you are likely to be arrested. The people who would find it the most difficult to attend an illegal action are specifically those most affected by a society that funds prisons and bordering practices, ex-prisoners, migrants, parents and carers and those with disabilities.

Kavita described the pressure to conform to a particular stereotype as being 'brand No Borders' though it was difficult to find anyone who identified comfortable in their activist identity as a 'No Borders Activist'. What came through from my

research was in fact that no one thought they were 'on the inside'. Here is an example from Anna:

Me: Do you think you have 'credentials' now? [A reference to how long it takes to be considered a member of the collective]

Anna: Yes, I guess so. Not that it always helps, I still never find out when the actions are. I am still not socially considered involved I guess. Not in the sphere or a legitimate part of the group. I found that really annoying at the convergence [The No Borders convergence in February 2012 at Goldsmiths College, London] I mean towards the end, it's not that I was really involved but I was working really hard on it, putting a workshop together etc. I couldn't go to one of the days because of work, and then suddenly I found out all these actions had happened over Twitter! And I thought, hey I've been involved in the convergence, and active in the group for a long time and yet no one will tell me! So to some extent I overcame the hierarchies, but in other ways, no.

Me: It really leaves you feeling, what would I have to do, to not be left on the outer, I know this feeling so well.

Anna: Go and live in Croydon! *(both laugh)*

(Interview with Anna, 2013)

For Anna it was clearly disappointing to find out that the collective she had been so actively participating in had neglected to tell her about the actions being undertaken because she had gone to work for the day. It made her feel that she was not considered a 'real' member by the rest of the group. She joked about remedying this by moving to live in Croydon. This is a reference to a household of four or five activists that specifically left their living arrangements in Inner London to 'do solidarity work' near the Immigration Reporting Centre in Croydon, South-East

London, known as 'Electric House'. Their plan was to 'authentically live their politics' under the name Croydon No Borders by living and providing solidarity to their new neighbours in Croydon. The group lasted about six months, during which time they produced a pamphlet on Radical Migrant Solidarity, and organised one demonstration at Electric House against the English Volunteer Force<sup>55</sup>. They had hoped to set up something similar to Glasgow's Unity Centre<sup>56</sup> but the energy and commitment had not been strong enough to set it up and their house had not been located quite close enough to the reporting centre to run as a drop-in for migrants on their way to appointments with immigration officials. This kind of 'lifestyle' politics where one gives up their day job to continue 'the struggle' was critiqued by Kavita, as will be discussed below. The Croydon house was comprised of the same 'in-crowd' that Rita refers to 'dominating the convergence meetings with their refusal to engage with academics'<sup>57</sup>. Kavita said of lifestyle activism:

K: I think that's one way that power plays out: if you have those material conditions to think about – you have a job basically - then somehow you're vaguely treacherous if you can't every morning be available first thing or whatever. If that is the case you kind of have to prove yourself for a bit longer I think. If you don't look like 'brand No Borders' then you're seen as ever-so-slightly-suspect. Which I do understand because I think we all do it ... but I think in a way that is very exclusive, and I find it a bit frustrating to be honest. Because I think the idea of migrant solidarity as lifestylism really doesn't sit very well with me and I think for some people it kind of is that. Not people who would come to meetings very much but certain lifestylist kids who are around who do actions but they don't do anything else.

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<sup>55</sup> Details on the work of Croydon Migrant Solidarity can be found at

<http://dysophia.files.wordpress.com/2012/06/radical-migrant-solidarity.pdf>

<sup>56</sup> For more about the Unity Centre project in Glasgow, see: <http://unitycentreglasgow.org>

<sup>57</sup> It may be worth noting that none of these three particular activists would agree to be interviewed for an academic project, including for my PhD thesis, though one emailed me to say they thought I had 'put in the hours', seemingly meaning I had spent enough time in migrant solidarity projects that they considered that I was 'permitted' to write a thesis about the collective. Their attitude was noticeably proprietorial, even managerial, considering the group claims to be collectively run.

Me: Yeah. I think that's one of the interesting things to come through with my interviews from Calais and people working on Calais. They're almost all in their very early twenties have access to welfare benefits (or independent wealth, or both) and go live in Calais for stretches of like 4 to 6 months at a time, which has a purpose, but at the end of the day that's not accessible or desirable for everyone.

(Interview with Kavita, 2013)

Exclusivity is something that can be produced by there being seeming expectations that activists will have a particular way of being, living and doing politics. These expectations are raced, gendered and classed and produce an authentic activist subject against a 'softer' more 'mainstream' activist Other who may well consider themselves only partly involved because of the attitudes that permeate the collective.

This chapter has looked at the ways in which Otherness is created in No Borders and Calais Migrant solidarity as networks. It has examined the way that discourses of privilege have shaped recent interventions around the whiteness of these solidarity collectives in ways that both called for reflexivity but also re-inscribed the essentialist category of racial Others. It was noted that giving migrants and racialised Others the power to intervene in meetings in order to stop individuals being 're-traumatised' had the effect of making systemic experiences of oppression reducible to individual mental health complaints, potentially exacerbating problems rather than collectivising them. It was also found to be exploited by those from the global North at different points, in order to claim power over collective meetings. The chapter then looked at the problems faced by activists who attempt to be 'migrant-centred' in their activism whilst simultaneously maintaining an activist culture, which is incredibly difficult to participate in for the majority of the

population potentially producing culture that relies upon having ‘martyrs, representatives and professional activists’ at the cost of accessible movements (Andrew, 1999). The question of who gets to feel comfortable in their position in the collective and who feel that they are ‘too soft’ was often gendered, raced and classed in who the activist ‘lifestyle’ was available to. The next chapter will look at discussions about who is Othered in ‘safety and security’ discourses, including the creation of safer spaces. There will be a discussion about the ways experiments in sharing safety have both maintained divisions between activists and migrants, but also opened the way to co-create spaces where a sense of safety can be negotiated collectively.

## **Chapter Five: Activist Cultures of Safety and Security**

The previous chapter looked at various ways that Otherness has been produced by those operating in the No Borders network, be it through universalising shared accounts of life in Calais in ways that flatten the different subjectivities and experiences of those in shared spaces, investments in being able to 'leave individual privileges in the UK' and the Otherness experienced by activists who feel that they are never 'as committed' as they should be, leading to a lack of feeling of responsibility for the actions of the network. It is by reproducing these forms of Otherness that it is difficult to build spaces of trust together. This chapter will look at the way cultures of safety are built and pulled apart in migrant solidarity organising, building towards the final chapter of this thesis that calls participants in these shared spaces to find ways to collectivise individual and collective vulnerabilities as part of building a sustainable and safe(r) activist culture.

This chapter will examine the creation of Otherness through political practices of seeking and enforcing ideas of safety enacted by transnational migrant solidarity collectives. Specifically I am going to look at Calais Migrant Solidarity and the utility and/or impact of safe(r) spaces policies in negotiating and confronting feelings of safety and insecurity within activist praxis and organising spaces. As part of processes of othering, the idea of prioritising women's safety is sometimes mobilised against the needs of racial Others, often with individualistic actions (such as dressing more modestly) recommended in order to deal with what are perhaps better considered as collective issues. As part of a collective endeavour to keep women and marginalised Others safe, an orientation towards collective responsibility may be necessary, rather than conceptualising safety/lack of safety as an individual failure of any particular female activist to navigate the complex and difficult environment that is Calais.

Ensuring that everyone feels safe in solidarity organising spaces is a priority for Calais Migrant Solidarity, and the challenge is how to do this whilst avoiding

assumptions about individual cultural backgrounds, relationships or non-normative ways of being that exist within collective environments. In the first half of this chapter I will recount some of the issues that arose during my fieldwork in 2012 – where, for one participant, guaranteeing safety for women meant trying to instigate a group ban on activists embarking on romantic relationships with migrants - and the responses to these. I will also provide an overview of the Calais No Border Camp of 2009 and the establishment of the Feminist Security Group as an answer to experiences of gendered insecurity (the issues at the camp were raised in my interviews by numerous participants including Jack, Sofia, and Anna). Following from this, in the second half of this chapter I draw from a set of four guidelines devised from the material put forward by my interview participants when considering the concept of safe(r) spaces policy in managing questions of safety and security in transnational migrant solidarity activisms. In analysing these interview excerpts, I used nVivo to cultivate a series of interconnecting guidelines or reflections relating to projects of building intersectional inclusion as a way to avoid exacerbating forms of Othering and exclusion in the search for safety in activist organising spaces and practices.

For activist groups such as Occupy and Calais Migrant Solidarity, part of the performance that solidarity organisations are ‘doing well’ is in the mobilisation of what are known as ‘safer spaces’ policies<sup>58</sup> to deal with those activities or attitudes perceived as oppressive or violent that occur *within* the core locations of the camps or organisations concerned. For these groups, part of what political activity means in these spaces is the act of tackling not only the conditions that give rise to the moments of repression, but also to the repressive social dynamics reproduced within spaces of resistance and survival, as part of a prefigurative form of politics.

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<sup>58</sup> ‘A safer space is a supportive, non-threatening environment that encourages open-mindedness, respect, a willingness to learn from others, as well as physical and mental safety. It is a space that is critical of the power structures that affect our everyday lives, and where power dynamics, backgrounds, and the effects of our behaviour on others are prioritized. It’s a space that strives to respect and understand survivors’ specific needs. Everyone who enters a safer space has a responsibility to uphold the values of the space’ (Coalition for Safer Spaces NYC, 2014).

Historically, these policies emerged alongside particular activist projects focused on models of transformative/restorative/community 'justice', that radical individuals use to deal with issues of sexism, racism, homophobia, transphobia or even assault that occur in these communities and spaces (CARA 2007; INCITE!, 2013). Such approaches are used as an alternative to calling in the police or other state agencies to settle these matters. The 'safer spaces' policy and recent activist projects concerning community justice come partly from an acknowledgement that the legal systems in mainstream society cannot regulate sexual (Serisier, 2013) or other sets of personal relations (consensual or non-consensual) in a way that is either fair or adequate and thus needs to be part of a broader project of prefigurative organising practices.

### **5.1 Getting What You Deserve? Facing punitive attitudes for acting outside of gendered norms**

At this point, an example of the kind of gendered and racialised othering that emerged in my fieldwork may illustrate the kinds of issues being faced in migrant solidarity organising. During my fieldwork in Calais in 2012 I had the following conversation after it emerged that someone from Calais Migrant Solidarity had started a sexual/romantic relationship with an Afghan migrant. The couple were spotted kissing and engaging in a lingering embrace whilst waiting in the queue at the food distribution centre. It was reported to me by another activist:

That sort of PDA [Public Display of Affection] will make them [the other migrants] think that we are all like that, free and easy and you know, sexually available ... it's irresponsible of her really ... When I was doing solidarity work in Palestine we weren't allowed to have relationships like that with Palestinians, no way.

(Interview with Jenna, 2012)

One reading of this statement would be as an example of a common trope around questions of sexual violence, the notion that one ‘gets what one deserves’, where women and their behaviour apparently makes them responsible for rape and assault. Added to this set of gendered assumptions is a reinforcing of the notion that ‘our’ women need protection from ‘their’ men, and implicitly references racialised imaginaries of non-Western migrants via the Orientalist trope that migrant men can’t control their urges (Bhabha 2004; Fanon 1952; Said 1978). It also appears to reinforce the liberal/ neoliberal notion that individuals are and should be responsible for their own safety. The idea that safety can be guaranteed by white women refraining from sexual activity lends itself to historical notions of white women as bearers of morality, as discussed in the literature review about constructions of white feminine purity in postcolonial writings (see Chapter One). Additionally, and importantly for this chapter, otherness as an impediment to our ability to communicate about sex and personal boundaries is embedded in Jenna’s comment, which essentially implies that once migrant men are reminded that white women are sexual beings, there will be no way of ‘holding them back’. The othering in this approach to ‘safety’ disables communication with migrant men and thus undermines the capacity to produce alternative social relations. This approach relies on the assumption that meaningful conversations about sex and intimacy are not possible between migrants and activists, an idea that has been proven to be incorrect (see the detailed analysis of conversations in the Africa House about abortion and domestic violence in the chapter six on vulnerability).

Lastly, Jenna’s comment reflects that the safety in the activist group she had in her previous experience with in Palestine was partly guaranteed through prohibiting sexual relationships between activists and those she was in solidarity with. In Natasha King’s book on the politics of ‘No Borders’ (2016) she writes that we need room to ‘think critically about borders: that our intention is not to destroy all borders (because sometimes we need to erect them in order to defend what we have made), but to undermine those borders that uphold the logic of

exclusion/inclusion.’ In this sense, it would of course be possible, in the name of protecting (European, activist) women’s safety, to make a rule that activists do not engage in romantic or sexual relationships with the migrants they are in solidarity with (it could be considered a border to defend what we have made) but this is not the kind of politics that seeks to engage each of us in a relationship to our problematic ideas about each other in order to create a sense of safety together, for women, migrants and Others.

In theory, this kind of comment would have been challenged by other Calais Migrant Solidarity activists as part of their implementation of the ‘Safer Spaces Policy’ (found in literature stacked in a pile at the Calais Migrant Solidarity office, along with various pamphlets on ‘trauma support’ (more information on further in section 5.2.1). In practice, as one of my respondents noted: ‘I think people see those sorts of policies as just the wallpaper you get in squats, no one really reads them any more as far as I can tell’ (Interview with Kavita, 2013). It is important to appreciate the weight of Jenna’s comment, as it reflects the culture of criminalisation of migrant men, and of blame and sexism towards women who experience assault (CARA 2007; Pendleton and Serisier 2009; Words To Fire 2013). For some critical race scholars, such as Leonardo and Porter, a safe space could not be created to discuss or reflect upon the power dynamics in relationships between migrants and activists in the context of a group where such a violent comment could have been made and that such a project should potentially be disbanded as a result (2010).

Sofia recounted to me that the safer spaces policy at the camp had been the hardest thing to find volunteers to write and as a result did not come into operation until the camp was almost over; ‘The original version in English was delayed and delayed until only an hour before the opening meeting and the translations of the document (most meetings were translated in to six languages) weren’t finished until the camp was nearly over!’ (interview with Sofia). This was agreed to be a failure in collective

responsibility, as it fell to a working group of mostly young men who were keen to take oppressive behaviours seriously, but, like everyone else, felt nervous about where to begin on account of ‘incorrectly’ negotiating the tensions around protecting those marginalised by not only by police and border officials but by their gender as well (Interviews with Anna and Sofia).

The key contention that my participants recalled concerning the No Border Camp in Calais in 2009 was a group complaint that was brought to the evening general meeting on day four of the camp. The group reported that ‘Afghan men’ had been unzipping women’s tents and attempting to enter without invitation. This was reported by one of the women from the anarchist zine Last Hours, who wrote in her account,

[...] a lot of women...felt unsafe at the camp with incidents of men hanging round tents asking women if they could come in and sexual harassment. However, in true DiY<sup>59</sup> form women organised to improve this situation, taking turns patrolling the area

(Last Hours Website, 2009)

The nature of the complaint was one that brought the as yet un-catered for questions of safety and security at the camp to the fore. At the Calais No Border camp there were neither a collectively agreed safer spaces policy nor an alternative to expelling or penalising those who acted outside of (un-agreed) norms. When no consensus was reached at the general meeting as to how to move forward, a group of women called their own meeting to discuss what to do and put forward strategies

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<sup>59</sup> DiY in this instance refers to a ‘Do it Yourself’ style of politics, where activist communities aim to resolve their own issues rather than calling in professionals or the state to fix practical or social problems within the community. This can be anything from learning to repair/install plumbing and electrics etc. in squats and social centres, right through to finding community solutions to problems of theft, sexual assault, anti-social behaviour etc. (for examples, see McKay, 1998; Feigenbaum, Frenzel and McCurdy, 2013).

(Sofia was part of this group). Those who felt upset were encouraged to speak in confidence with members of the trauma support team, of which Sofia was a member. She confirmed that there was a level of distress at the camp that was difficult to deal with, as not only were tents being unzipped, but there were number of complaints about aggressive British men who had been drinking too much, and numerous other safety concerns. There were pressures to 'put aside' an issue that appear to pose gender against race when organising in Calais (interview with Rita) and a response was formulated with little debate. In effect a group of women set up a 'security group' to patrol the sleeping areas<sup>60</sup>. Perhaps not unlike the development of Neighbourhood Watch groups, the intention of which are to be community-minded but can inadvertently lead to the racialisation of 'suspicious behaviour', the Security group was a cause for concern for many at the camp (interviews with Jack, Sofia, Anna).

The Feminist Security Group comprised a group of volunteers (mostly women, many from the queer bloc) regularly monitoring the encampment at night. The shifts were for 2-4 hours and would involve walking through the tents with torches asking if everyone was 'feeling okay' and encouraging those who seemed 'too intoxicated' to go to bed. This situation was an awkward if not moralising presence for many at the camp but was only in place for the final two nights of the camp before everyone returned home. There was seemingly not enough time to discuss the variety of problematic call-outs at the general meetings including, 'Who is available to monitor the Afghan area?' (cited in English, 2010, p.8).

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<sup>60</sup> Each year there is a donation of tents to Calais Migrant Solidarity following the music festivals in the UK such as Glastonbury. These are invariably made up of the cheapest tents available from the biggest commercial retailers. As a result, there were around 200 tents that looked very similar at the camp in Calais. Many were set up next to the activist tents, which were also mostly the cheapest tent available. One could argue in this situation that if men were unzipping the wrong tents, so possibly, was everyone else - because so many of the tents looked exactly the same. This is not to discredit those who were being harassed. I am noting this point about the tents because it was a fact strangely absent from reflections at the time.

Postcolonial theory can help to understand that such a situation in some ways mirrors a colonial discourse in which white women are mobilised as bearers of morality, piety and sexual purity against the 'uncivilised Other' (Perry, 1997, p. 501). Perry writes that 'as individual wives, architects of female society, or even as available objects of male desire, white women were constructed as natural agents of social control ... (1997, p. 502).

This is not to accuse those involved in the group as guilty of 'civilisational thinking'. It is however important to notice that intersectional thinking was missing from the analysis here, bringing forth a drive to posit those from a certain 'race' against those of a certain 'gender' with little attention to social and historical factors shaping this analysis. The Feminist Security Group, and its critics, mobilised understandings of power in particular ways. An example of this is below:

My skin colour means I am less likely to suffer violence at the hands of the police, and many other less obvious unearned privileges... (but) my gender, or people's perception of my gender, means that I am often seen as a second-class citizen, especially by those who come from *heavily patriarchal societies*. In Calais I have met many people who have become my friends, but I have also had moments where the inferiority with which people regard me has become... obvious, talking about me in a derogatory way ... following me to my tent during the camp, and refusing to engage with me... because of my gender. The jungle has been described as an 'open prison', made of predominantly men, and because of this I can understand some of the reasons for these behaviours, but it does not make it acceptable<sup>61</sup>.

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<sup>61</sup> The harassment of women at the camp and in ongoing ways for the CMS network is something that remains urgent and largely unspoken about. For further discussion on this see English, C (2014) 'Bordering on Reproducing the State: Migrant Solidarity Collectives and Constructions of the Other in

(Calais9 zine: 2009, emphasis added)

A generalisable environment of safety for all those participating in the camp is the goal of a safer spaces policy, but attempting to enact an equalised 'level' space is neither desirable nor possible, according to some of my interview participants (Kavita, 2013; Anna, 2013), as experiences of oppression are not distributed equally. Some argue that the way to end sexism in solidarity movements is to 'stick around through the drama and earn your stripes with the oppressed group in question' and push them on issues of sexism later on when you are a trusted ally (Mia, 2013). But what does it mean to do this kind of work? Is it possible to reach an idea of safety collectively? Can we find an agreement that respects the needs of marginalised communities and the vulnerabilities that we each bring to the solidarity camp? Could a policy regulating safety in the camp have averted this situation? Imelda offered an opinion about whether safety should be approached individually or collectively when it comes to difference:

I guess what I wanna say is that sexism can undermine our struggle and the surest way that it does that is when we expect spaces like the jungles to somehow be spaces relatively free of sexism or racism, or spaces that reflect our 'enlightened view' of these issues, so that we take some kind of zero tolerance approach to these things... I don't mean that we should tolerate these things either, but that we shouldn't refuse to work with someone because they have views on race or sex that we disagree with. I don't... mean that it's a woman's responsibility to make themselves safe in the jungles. Rather that part of making oneself safe is to recognise what the risks are, i.e. that views towards women might be different in those spaces. As a woman I have a right to not be raped, and to be treated as an equal. But if I'm living among communities of people who come

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Safer Space' in S Price and R Sanz Sabido (eds.) *Contemporary Protest and the Legacy of Dissent*, Rowman and Littlefield: London

from places where those rights are not upheld or valued, then my assertion of that right does little for me.

(interview with Imelda, 2014)

It's difficult to view this quote without seeing the Otherness inherent in exploring issues of safety and gender in Calais. Imelda expects women to take a considerable amount of personal responsibility; '[P]art of making oneself safe is to recognise what the risks are'. Imelda implies that it should be immediately assumed that when engaging with migrants there is a risk of rape or assault and that it is our job individually to weigh these risks up and consider the consequences ourselves. This is far from an approach that sees gendered vulnerabilities and individual safety as primarily a community concern that ought to be engaged with as collectively as possible. It is not a space that is good for men if it is a space that is unsafe for women. Migrants experience the jungle as extremely unsafe; they are under constant threat from border guards, trafficking mafias, police raids and so on. I raised this with Imelda, but we could not get past the fact that each woman who walks in to the jungles needs to weigh up taking 'a risk'. I think it is possible to argue that whilst certain aspects of collective struggle in the jungles are gendered, the fact that it is unsafe for everyone leaves room to consider how to make spaces together that are more robust for everyone. How do we collectively assert our right to safety? In the remainder of this chapter I want to explore four considerations that my interviewees believed necessary in order to negotiate 'safer practice' within transnational migrant solidarity organising.

## **5.2 Four Considerations for Safer Spaces and Migrant Solidarity Projects**

Throughout the interview process it became clear that many of my participants had thought about issues related to safety and otherness, especially the way that people

of colour felt in these spaces (interviews with Sofia, Kavita, Fatima and Anna). As people who were aware of substance abuse in transnational migrant solidarity spaces by all the groups that frequent the spaces - activists, local people and the migrants themselves -they had concerns about how to deal with any problems that emerged in ways that were fair or just. The idea that these collectives could reframe ideas of safety away from ideas of sameness and predictability are outlined below in their four reflections on the way activists use and misuse the quest for a sense of safety in transnational migrant solidarity activism.

*Safety in the Spaces we construct together- Safety and substances and our limits*

Kavita argued that even if the No Border Camp had successfully developed a safer space policy, (and indeed the organising spaces used by Calais Migrant Solidarity since that time have often displayed safer spaces policies and trauma support materials), the possibility of safer spaces can only be enabled through collectively designing and composing these documents, rather than simply displaying prepared written guidelines -this will be explored further below (interview with Kavita, 2013). The kinds of spaces that we construct are important to the kind of organising that can be done. In this section these issues around the limits of safe spacer polices will be addressed through the concrete example of the barriers that emerge when attempting to organise with people who may appear chaotic or obstructive due to substance abuse or as a result of suffering from trauma. At this point the limits of what can be done within a limited infrastructure and with limited funds also becomes clear. The safety that activist organisations can guarantee people involved in a conflict relies upon there being volunteers willing to do emotional labour, separate spaces for those involved in the conflict to sleep at night and sometimes even translators or counselling services. Having a 'Do-it-Yourself' ethos is not always enough in these situations.

One of the issues with the use of existing, codified safer space policies that came through in my interviews was that although such policies are supposed to indicate a commitment to fighting forms of oppression such as sexism, racism, homophobia, transphobia and so on, it has in many ways become what was referred to as a 'box-ticking' activity.

I mean sometimes there's a piece of paper that people write stuff on, so they're 'doing' safe spaces but still ... you get to meetings and actually they're not creating a safe space. So I'm not entirely sure if people use them (safer space policies). Sometimes you go to an activist camp and

people talk about safe space, consensus decision-making and having vegan food, and it just becomes something that comes with it rather than anything else.

(Interview with Anna, 2013)

This is reminiscent of the themes in Sara Ahmed's examination of how the Race Relations Amendment Act (2000) has shaped a new politics of documentation. She argues that the distinction between 'meeting the requirements', 'fulfilling the requirements' and 'compliance' is crucial (Ahmed, 2007, p. 595). This relates to migrant solidarity collectives' approaches to safer spaces policies in that they put a policy up on the wall (meeting the requirements), and ask people to read the policy upon entering the space or even sign a document saying that they will act accordingly (fulfilling the requirements), but whether these lead to creating an organising space that is safe(r) than the outside world (compliance) remains to be seen.

Kavita insisted that the process of deciding upon the content of the policy being achieved collectively is more important than the document itself and that importing documentation from other events simply follows in the footsteps of US activist projects in ways that do not always translate smoothly to the UK context:

The point originally wasn't the document *but the process of getting there* and now it's like, well, if we've lost the document we can print one off the internet ... And it will probably be from North America so it will use expressions that most of us don't use here like 'Folk of Color'. Like, who?

(interview with Kavita, 2013)

The idea of a safer spaces policy is that it is an agreement that people who want to frequent a particular space will sign up to, even if it is not an agreement they participated in composing. Kavita pointed out that there is likely to eventually be a

situation where people do not agree to the conditions of the agreement; she asked, what then?

K: It's all very social contract as well isn't it? Sign something, agree to something. What if you don't agree? Cos the point of the Safe Space policy is surely that when it's controversial you're undone. Unless something's done to enforce it... otherwise it's just a list of nice ideas. Utopian ideas, really. So unless there's some come-uppance to it... I dunno like...what?

Me: Yeah it's a bit like being a regulator isn't it? Finding an appropriate punishment and...

K: Yeah. A system. It's breeding a system.

(interview with Kavita, 2013)

This led to a discussion linked to the earlier ideas of community accountability and transformative justice referenced in the literature review<sup>62</sup>, but with the caveat that there is an added level of complexity when someone involved in your project is unable to comply with safer space policies due to their methods of managing their vulnerability, i.e. through the use or overuse of substances. There is no way of enforcing certain norms aside from the social pressures associated with 'asking someone to leave' which is a strange act for migrant solidarity activists to undertake in a building on the outskirts of the jungle which exists only as a project to live together with migrants. A lot of actions are immediate, without time for reflection or ongoing discussion, as it is such a transient space for all involved, this will be explored further in the chapter six about vulnerability.

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<sup>62</sup> These forms of justice attempt to find clarity around how best to seek emotional or physical compensation from those who have made others feel unsafe, including, what is punishment without banishment? What helps survivors believe their attacker has changed and is ready to re-engage with the community or person they have damaged? These questions are not ones this paper will attempt to solve, but the work in this area is inextricably linked to discourses of safety and space.

The use of substances is particularly relevant, as the environment in Calais is often one of high stress. At any moment everyone in the organising space is preparing for an immigration raid or some kind of police harassment (I witnessed this tension during my fieldwork, March 2013 and throughout my involvement with CMS since its establishment). Some people are suffering from post-traumatic stress symptoms or other mental health problems resulting from their time in warzones or due to difficult personal circumstances. Activists too, are often suffering with the shock of the reality of life in Calais for migrants, or their own personal struggles that lead them, perhaps, to be moved to action in Calais and against other systems of inequity and injustice (this will be explored further in the next chapter about the vulnerabilities activists can suffer from as activists and as individuals living in precarious social and economic times). There is very little support in Calais for either migrants or activists<sup>63</sup>. This can lead to self-medicating, often in the form of alcohol consumption. The presence of alcohol can indicate a less-than-safe environment for some people, including ex-addicts and abuse survivors. Whether this immediately makes the space unsafe is not clear though. My experience of the office in Calais is that it is often fairly contained during the day, but can become quite drunken and rowdy in the evenings, when those who are not attempting to cross the border that night attempt to unwind with activists and local people. I wrote the following fieldnotes during my most recent trip to Calais:

We [Virginia and I] were the only women in the office of about 30 men and were getting attention, but contrary to what we had been warned at the Calais Training about socialising with groups of men in Calais, no one hassled us - they were seemingly just pleased to have different company. One guy followed us around, but I think it was more because he was

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<sup>63</sup> Some information on trauma support for activists in Calais has been produced, but it only barely touches on issues of structural oppression or gendered trauma and relates more to activist burnout than post-traumatic stress: [https://www.activist-trauma.net/assets/files/ATnobor\\_A5\\_4pp\\_leaflet.pdf](https://www.activist-trauma.net/assets/files/ATnobor_A5_4pp_leaflet.pdf)

confused than aggressive, and he was visibly drunk. He kept asking 'You take me in car, England, yes?' and then going away for a minute before returning again. He repeated this to us about 50 times, it was more tiresome than intimidating, but he was a big guy and I didn't really know what he thought we could do for him - he'd be much too big to hide in a car. In the end he followed us to the car that was taking us to the train station. He was still repeating the same question and wouldn't let us shut the car door - that felt something between scary and painful - I could feel his frustration. He was too drunk to be nimble enough to cross to the UK that night, I wondered how long he'd been trapped in the office drinking cans of beer asking women not to take the train, and realised it could have been a long time. People who spend a long time in Calais know which men are persistently annoying or sleazy or troublesome, I hoped he wasn't one of them. It didn't feel to me that the guy was dangerous, just stuck, and he'd been stuck there mostly by forces entirely out of his control.

(Fieldnotes, March 2013)

Agreements about alcohol consumption, be it recommendations of limited intake or total sobriety, have featured in discussions about how to run communal spaces in other activist spaces such as Occupy Wall Street and Occupy Sandy<sup>64</sup>. These guides were developed in part because some critiques of Occupy were that in demanding 'safe' behaviors from all individuals, some people were being isolated from the group, including the homeless people who usually slept on the sites of the demonstrations and who were told off for being noisy, drunk and 'badly-behaved', disturbing the activists who were trying to sleep<sup>65</sup>.

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<sup>64</sup> A guide was developed called 'Mindful Occupation' [http://mindfuloccupation.org/files/booklet/mindful\\_occupation\\_singles\\_latest.pdf](http://mindfuloccupation.org/files/booklet/mindful_occupation_singles_latest.pdf) which has a series of suggestions about how people suffering the effects of trauma or are 'stuck replaying a memory' can 'stay embodied', i.e. in the present, by avoiding alcohol.

<sup>65</sup> 'Sentiments within Occupy that criminalize and scapegoat 'the crazies' often primarily target participants who are homeless and/or people of color. These racist and classist assumptions distract

Alcohol and drug use in activist spaces has been taken up by antiracist transgender rights activist Sunny Drake in the lead up to recent Pride celebrations. He posted a critique on his blog of the ways that trans women have historically been excluded from parties and political organising spaces due to their substance usage. The message from Sunny was that event organisers ought to be particularly attuned to which people are excluded from collective spaces due to addictions that cannot be explained as simply ‘anti-social activity’.

Given that many sexual assaults and non-consensual behaviour have alcohol involved, drinking less can also mean there are more folks around to support a culture of consent and community safety. So how do we create inclusive spaces that feel safe and welcoming for a whole myriad of people, both those who are in recovery and sober as well as those who can't or choose not to function without alcohol and substances? Whilst I love intentionally sober space (Sober Pride!), I also want our communities to be able to hold space for those who use alcohol or drugs as medication or to cope with this shitty world... be it recovering from trauma or self-medicating for stress and anxiety, so our approaches will look different depending on who we are and what's going on... I'm horrified that visionaries such as Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P Johnson [both trans women of colour on the frontline of Stonewall] were banned from some LGBTQ spaces because of their drinking or using. The impacts of that likely involved further marginalisation for each of them, as well as a HUGE loss of wisdom and experience to the movements which they kick-started.

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from the ever-present threat of police brutality and depict Occupy as divided and unstable to ‘the outside.’’ (‘Mindful Occupation’, 2012, p. 9)

(Drake, 2013)

This is an important reflection, as it reminds solidarity organisers that wisdom comes from many places, and any attempt to make spaces safe for normative participants must also be offered to Others who are suffering in ways that may cause 'difficult' feelings and behaviours. It connects to narratives of the 'good' victims and the 'bad' ones and the relationship between these so-called bad victims and the supposed moral purity of white (colonial) women. Whilst I know that storytelling projects in Calais exist<sup>66</sup>, and different individual stories are posted on the Calais Migrant Solidarity website, I am reminded how powerful it is to know how someone got to Calais and why they are there, contextualizing different ways that people deal with their suffering is a key part of solidarity work in shared spaces. Substance use and misuse occurs at consistently higher rates in marginalised communities and in a sense this makes these groups more vulnerable and thus in greater need of solidarity. The ways that migrants in Calais, transgender queers at Pride and indigenous activists (see section below) might be made vulnerable by systemic inequalities, poverty and other kinds of injustice are the kinds of links that need to be explored, built upon and generalized in order to find ways to collectively reproduce ourselves in ways that embrace marginal experiences rather than relegate them to the position of 'difficult outsiders'. This will be explored further in the next chapter about vulnerabilities, but for now the need to make spaces 'safe'<sup>67</sup> and accessible in a broader sense is the focus, and the ways that calls for safety can set in place a wider discursive apparatus around risk and threat.

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<sup>66</sup> An example is here: <http://migrationmuseum.org/exhibition/calaisstories/>

<sup>67</sup> The need to move away from safety as an absence of banal and ambient fear is taken up by Susan McManus: 'There is a performative indeterminacy at work here in the affects cultivated: objects of fear were rendered indeterminate, vague, amorphous, emptied of content and specificity but embedded in the routines and, literally, the detritus of everyday life' where anyone and anything could be a potential threat.' The everyday is an important terrain on which to examine fear and vulnerability as well as solidarity and care. If there is a sense that anyone and anything could be a potential threat, what needs to be examined is how groups can function if anyone and everyone is a potential source of care. This will be discussed further in the next chapter on vulnerability.

This is echoed here by Andrea Smith, an indigenous rights activist from the INCITE! Collective, who writes:

Indigenous organiser Heather Milton-Lightening once prophetically declared at an Indigenous Women’s Network gathering many years ago that our movements were shunning people who might have issues, such as substance abuse. She called on us all to embrace whoever wants to be part of our movements as they are rather than as who we think they should be. The challenge for us, she noted, is to build movement structures that take into account the reality of how personal and collective trauma has impacted all of us.

(Smith 2014)

This is a really useful way to look at the problem of one individual’s behaviour, be it drunken or too loud, or consistently interrupting the space. After all, these were the critiques of the homeless people at Occupy (Occupy wellbeing, 2012, p.9), but similar critiques could be made about experiences of substance abuse at the office in Calais, making the space uncomfortable for someone else. It is possible that the trauma<sup>68</sup> of both people is linked. Drake writes about sober people being triggered by alcoholism in activist spaces above; it is possible that there is a place of understanding that could be reached by both people if they could express themselves about what is at stake, though it would be likely to make both people feel vulnerable and exposed. Smith asks what movement structures could be made in order to talk through these shared traumas. This is also a theme that comes through in the literature on Safer Spaces. The Roestone Collective describe safer spaces as a ‘relational work’ (2014, p. 3). By examining safe spaces through the relational work of creating and maintaining them, we find that this reconfigures the

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<sup>68</sup> I will use the word ‘trauma’ here as this is Smith’s wording, but there are critiques of using individualistic or medicalised language to describe systemic problems. For more on this see chapter four on Otherness.

experience of space as safe or unsafe (2014, p.4). In other words, it is through a critical cultivation of these kinds of spaces (be they aiming for 'safety' or simply attempting to open the possibility for engagement from as many people as possible) that these policies begin to matter.

It is not always possible with the time and energy capacity that activist organisations currently have to carry out these experiments with justice successfully. In my fieldwork I spoke to Bryn, who had been in Calais during an evening when a very intoxicated man started to behave aggressively towards women in the office so many times that he was eventually encouraged to leave. There was pain in Bryn's voice when he explained that later he'd heard that the intoxicated man had suffered a serious fall trying to get on a lorry heading to England. Bryn wished there had been other places that he could have directed him where he could have sobered up or calmed down somehow. It was during a time when there were no sleeping spaces in the squats and no more rooms in the homes of people involved with CMS where it would have been possible to provide a bed for someone to sleep for the night. Whilst Bryn knew that this man could not have remained in the office for the night, women already felt their boundaries had been crossed, the capacity of the organisation was not such that there was another place that this man could have gone to instead (Fieldwork, 2014). As with most projects that migrant solidarity organisations attempt, the lack of funding and organising spaces mean that it is sometimes hard to practice our politics successfully and in a way that provides some kind of safety for all involved in the projects. Whilst safety is a question of collectivising forms of care, where possible it also a question of material needs, including infrastructure and our ability to find funding for crisis situations, keeping focused at all times on questions of: Whose safety? Defined by whom? And for whose benefit and to what end?

*Safety in/as Separation*

Within activist communities some hold the belief that by organising ‘autonomously’- or outside of dominant social hierarchies and relationships, individuals can be free of or protected from oppressive social relations. ‘Autonomous’ in this context means the formation of independent groups of people who face specific forms of exploitation and oppression, including but not limited to people of colour, women, queers, trans people, gender nonconforming people, and others<sup>69</sup>. This conception of a necessarily ‘separate organising space’ was apparent in my interview with Virginia about whether there was a grievance policy (something she used interchangeably with the term ‘safer spaces policy’, though it has more institutional foundations in battles for equality in the workplace<sup>70</sup>) being used by her feminist group. The lack of urgency to put one in place was stark in comparison to her reflections on her time in Calais. She was very clear that her experience of Calais was one that left her more committed than ever to opening up discussions around safety and gender in her organising practices. But of her own collective she remarked:

We haven’t got a safer spaces policy and I do think we should because there have been a lot of discussion around these things because of stuff that is happening in other parts of the Left and the need to have a proactive policy before things happen... rather than just a policy that is just reacting which I think is something that’s happened in quite a lot of cases. *Our meetings are self-defined women only and for this reason it doesn’t seem like such an important concern* but I think it is and I think it’s something that we can and will look at but haven’t... it’s not a big concern for us at the moment.

(interview with Virginia)

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<sup>69</sup> For more information see <https://libcom.org/library/non-negotiable-necessity-autonomous-organising>

<sup>70</sup> A guide to grievance procedures can be found here: [http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/k/b/Acas\\_Code\\_of\\_Practice\\_1\\_on\\_disciplinary\\_and\\_grievance\\_procedures-accessible-version-Jul-2012.pdf](http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/k/b/Acas_Code_of_Practice_1_on_disciplinary_and_grievance_procedures-accessible-version-Jul-2012.pdf)

This comment implies that there are less likely to be grievances between women than in general organising spaces. Jozey, another interviewee from the same feminist collective, recounted a time that the collective's trans-inclusiveness had been brought in to question by a transgender woman, and without a grievance policy it had been difficult to have a dialogue about it. 'We had nothing to fall back on in this instance, no process to go through with this person' (Interview with Jozey). It could be argued that a policy would not have been necessary if there was an atmosphere of inclusion and openness that could have made those conversations possible in the moment- but how does this atmosphere come about? As Jozey pointed out, having some process to go through in terms of dealing with a complaint would have helped. The process of creating the safer spaces policy as a collective may have created the kind of commitment and atmosphere in the group that would have spurred them into action around trans inclusivity because they were confident about what process needed to take place around complaints. Making an environment where all women in the collective felt confident to contribute to a project such as this (a relatively high level of English language proficiency would be necessary, for example), would be another part of this task, but it may be a good place to begin in creating an environment where critique could be raised and dealt with collectively. As Kavita pointed out earlier, the power of a safer spaces policy is in the collective creation of these documents.

Throughout my fieldwork in Calais there were various reported experiments with women-only sleeping spaces for both activists and migrants. Rita was an advocate for keeping a separate room for women in the office, so that activists could sleep separately along the lines of gender:

Where's the bit of paper that says, right you're here (in Calais), this room is only for women to sleep, because there could be reasons that after a certain time of night this is where you can go, this is where you can't go. No men can go here, then there's no exceptions...

(interview with Rita)

Although this is one measure that has been tried out in Calais, I learned during my fieldwork that it was eventually abandoned as many of the women had travelled with male comrades or lovers and wanted to be able to sleep in the same space as them. This follows Black Feminist writings on how political identities are elaborated, with many Black women centring their political identities on being Black, not women (Combahee River Collective, 1977). After the women-only sleeping spaces idea was abandoned, there was a rule that people would be strongly advised not to sleep in the migrant camps without another activist with them (though it should be noted that this was only mentioned in relation to women's safety). This rule relied upon the assumption that women are more likely to be safe alone with other activist (mostly white) men in the office than with the migrant men in the jungles. This was disputed by Janeska, who I spoke to during my fieldwork in August 2013, who recounted the following:

When I was in Calais an activist approached me and said, "I know the rules are that women shouldn't hang out in migrant circles by ourselves overnight ... But right now the activist house is full of men I don't know and actually the migrant house is full of men I do know who I've been socialising with for three months and... I just don't care, I'm gonna sleep up there with them" and at the end of the day what argument can you make about that? If that's where she feels safe then that's fine. I mean actually what happened that night was that there was a police raid really late at night and she got scared and it didn't work out that there was a safe space for her in the activist house or in the migrant house...

(Janeska, informal interview, 2013).

Trying to mediate the complexities of solidarity work in Calais through encouraging a coalescence around identity may obscure the intersectional and personal experiences of both what feels oppressive and what feels safe, leading to

assumptions about what particular groups need in order to be involved in the project. One example of the splintering of a radical separatist community on 'Lesbian Land' is referred to in the literature review chapter.

There are times when tactically autonomous organising is necessary in order to intervene in a campaign or group, especially when the needs of marginalised people are being consistently put aside. Patricia Hill Collins (2000) describes safe spaces as 'resistive sites of independent self-definition'. Thompson argues that 'Safe spaces represented somewhere that Black women could freely examine the issues that concerned them and, in the process, foster their empowerment, ultimately even enhancing their ability to participate in social justice struggles'. Both Thompson (2017) and Hill Collins (2000) argue that the freedom to examine these issues was predicated on exclusions: 'By definition, such spaces became less 'safe' if shared with those who were not Black and female' (2017). Yet the exclusions of these safe spaces are best understood as strategic and temporary: 'Safe spaces rely on exclusionary practices but their overall purpose aims for a more inclusionary, just society' (Hill Collins, 2000). Following Black Feminist scholars, the Roestone Collective argue that what is needed to challenge patriarchy is experimentations with intersectional inclusion. To foster this, one of my interviewee's suggestions was that groups spend more time in collective reflection (interviews with Rita and Sofia 2013), but there are surely many other ways to do this.

### *Safety in Discomfort*

Most of the people I interviewed who had spent time in Calais were amenable to, and some desperately keen for, a discussion of collective safety. However, there was a resistance to it as well, and the discomfort around the issue wasn't easily alleviated. There was both a feeling that as activists 'they didn't need it personally' (interviews with Jeremy and Jack), that it was something likely to be needed by

Others, and that this somehow meant that the discussion should be initiated only by those Others. Jack said that he had seen Trauma Support Spaces and Safer Spaces (which he thought of as the same or very similar) in operation before but,

To be honest I've never really interacted with them, if I'd been at an eviction... I might have. I've probably got a distorted view... and not a very big view of it anyway, I've really only heard people in the trauma support group come along to meetings and explaining what they do. And I've thought, 'Hmmm, this all sounds a bit wishy washy.' Now maybe if I was actually in trauma and in need of some support I would find it really helpful so I'm not dismissing it but it never engaged me hearing them talk about it. I mean I've certainly been in traumatic situations where there hasn't been anything, you know I've been on anti-fascist demonstrations where I've been a quivering wreck on the way home, so I can see it's a good thing if it works but I've not actually been engaged with it so...

(Interview with Jack, 2013)

The interview with Jack was interesting; his personal experience of discomfort or lack of safety in activist movements was tied more to fear of physical assault from outsiders (fascists for example) than it was to experiences of interactions between activists. He was able to reflect upon the fact that women and migrants might need extra support, but he was 'waiting for their lead' (interview with Jack). This quote shows up the tensions between taking the lead from the marginalised group that are likely to be the most affected by this issue, which as the chapter on Otherness showed is the desire of most solidarity activists, with the reality that this then results in the majority of the thinking and emotional work on this issue being done by those who are suffering injustice to a greater extent. Jack's response perhaps suggests a limit to identitarian approaches to discomfort or trauma in that because he doesn't think it is his place to make the policy or take a lead on the issue because

he is not the subject of the problem, this then has the paradoxical effect of making the subject experiencing the problem compelled to be the one who fixes it. This relates back to earlier discussions about the problem of safety – Safety for whom? And who enacts safety? In some senses if Jack was compelled to act from his point of privilege, then it would be him making other people safe, potentially constituting them as victims and at the same time reproducing his comfort/security. This reproduction of norms in some ways makes no-one safer but would at least show some action from those inhabiting a subject position that at present in Calais is sitting back and waiting for direction. This reinscribes the importance of experimentation with how to collectivise the vulnerabilities felt by Others, which will be explored further in the next chapter. The discomfort needs to be shared around somehow on this front, where those that do not feel the brunt of the issue can somehow shoulder their complicity in what is sometimes evident as a silence around the issue of safety/lack of safety for Others.

The interview with Jeremy was similar in tone. When reflecting on his experience of organising in anarchist groups:

Calais was probably the only situation I've ever been in where the gender composition has been so unbalanced but most of the time when organising, going on actions... but gender binaries have never been brought up at all, which is not necessarily a good thing because we have to talk about them. The problem is that I don't really know how to discuss these things with a lot of the people who are migrating and the migrant community. I don't think I yet have the tools to do that.

(Interview with Jeremy, 2013)

I asked Jeremy how he thought that the tools could be gained to talk about forms of gendered and racialised oppression present within the collective, and whether he

thought people would set aside the time for that. He answered that he thought more recently people had become interested in intersectional politics and that the climate to talk about it was upon us, 'if time could be allocated'.

The intersectional politics that I've encountered has always come from outside of the solidarity networks and it's difficult to set aside time and space to discuss these things and they never are fully explored and it's never talked about in a specific way because ...it's always boiled down to time, space and practical and kind of slightly glib turns of phrase about what may happen –specifically in terms of gender and race - but they're never engaged with in a very complex manner but then I think that's bad... I feel like No Borders is constructed by intersectional politics and it's included in it but it's never talked about explicitly which is probably a bad thing, but then I'm trying in my own way to construct and understand these differences through the actions that I commit.

(Interview with Jeremy, 2013)

When trying to generalise 'safety' as a concept, one can produce generalisations around the question of needs, and it is through the articulation of general needs (women's needs, migrants needs, needs of trans or traumatised peoples and so on) that Othering takes place and the unproductive discussions around what women or migrants '*really* need' occur. Acknowledging that these generalisations occur and knowing that they produce a culture that activists are keen to do away with leads to feelings of discomfort. This does not necessarily mean it is work that should not be done. Stengel and Weems (2010) and hooks (1990) argue that in the quest for safer spaces we must remember that discomfort does not impede learning. The Roestone Collective argue that individuals in collective environments should feel 'safe enough' - but not necessarily comfortable - to voice their opinions and constructively respond to their peers. This is the kind of atmosphere of reflexivity that is necessary

to change the culture of silence around safety and Otherness in our shared organising spaces. It is not easy to talk about how each of us feels safe and unsafe in our shared spaces, but creating an atmosphere where we attempt to is a place to start.

### *Safety in Complexity*

In this final section I would like to look at the way an atmosphere of safety may be constructed through universalising particular actions or traits as 'normal' and 'to be expected' from particular groups but not others, exacerbating Orientalist and gendered tendencies in collective thinking. The Roestone Collective observe that strategies to create safety often fail to critically engage with the paradigms that underlie harassment and discrimination (2014, p. 8). Put another way, structural and institutional forms of oppression such as racism and sexism may not be effectively addressed in trying to create safer spaces if they are designed to moderate individual behaviour rather than looking at systems of power. This can result in the following kinds of generalisation:

... I think in Calais you're often in the situation where your race defines you more than your gender, so the westerners that come over to do No Borders migrant solidarity actions are often seen as a homogenous group, some of them are obviously targeted or treated differently because of their gender but I think that race is more of a division in that space than gender.

(Interview with Jeremy, Feb 2013)

There is a some confusion amongst activists in Calais about what ‘the right reasons’ for participating in migrant solidarity are. For some, anyone who comes to do solidarity work ought to agree to be in the space ‘primarily’ to show solidarity to migrants (fieldwork, March 2013). This has at times resulted in complaints that concerns about sexism brought up by women at general meetings are not being taken seriously, as if their concerns are not or ought not to be as important as those arising from the ‘division put in place by race’ (interview with Jeremy). The attempt to ‘rank’ forms of oppression with those perceived to have the least power at the top and those with the most structural power at the bottom has proven caused friction in the group, and does not always equate to who has the most access to ‘safety’. This is one of the many reasons that an there has been an increasing call to look at intersectional analyses of power by feminists and anti-racists in the collective. This, along with a critique of examples where individuals have mobilised universalising categories of ‘all women’ and ‘all men’ to avoid racial or cultural essentialism, (i.e. statements like ‘men don’t experience feelings of insecurity when out at night like women do’) has not always helped people to feel confident in the organising space or practices. The following section is from an interview with Sofia about her time at the No Border Camp in Calais as a volunteer with the trauma support group, and as a woman sleeping in a tent alone for the duration of the camp. She described the aftermath of some women reporting harassment:

One night at trauma support I met some people and they were telling me about two girls at the camp who had had a man following them for some time and they were scared. I tried to speak about this to some people... many people left the camp because of this sexism. And of course... some migrants tried to go into people’s tents. One of them tried to come into my tent, maybe about one or two o’clock in the morning and he came again a couple of times...And I didn’t feel safe there. But the frustration

about this wasn't that he was a migrant... But this was the reaction of some of the activists that I told. One of them was like, 'This is a terrible, they can't do that! But those poor men, they haven't had a shag for one and a half years, so...' And I thought, what? What kind of excuse is that? And I knew because of working at the trauma support that drunk European men were making huge trouble too... at the camp, so it wasn't about people coming from Afghanistan.

(Interview with Sofia, 2013)

The way that Sofia recounted this event shows the pressures that have been consistently present in discussions of gender and race in Calais Migrant Solidarity since before its inception. The pressure to both hold migrant men and activists to account in the same way so as to not be making excuses based on someone's race on the one hand, and the pressure to ignore certain elements of sexism in the camp because of the difficulties associated with embodying a migrant subjectivity (seemingly this leaves migrants in a position where they cannot be expected to understand someone pointing 'get out of my tent' – on account of vagaries attributed to cultural background) on the other. Both of these conclusions are reductive, and whilst direct communication directly about these sorts of issues is difficult, especially when you cannot find a translator in the middle of the night, the camp reached a crisis point because a series of problematic assumptions were made on the basis of gender, race and or cultural background.

Another similarly thorny issue arose in my fieldwork in 2012 when I had gone to Calais even though no one else from No Borders London was available (we usually travelled in groups) as a callout for a greater activist presence had gone out on the email list (fieldwork notes, 2012). It was a time when the office had been temporarily opened for anyone to sleep in (at certain points it was an activist-only or women only-sleeping space) as it was a larger space than that previously rented.

Seemingly we had exchanged natural light for larger space as there were no windows at all in the sleeping area. There were as many as 30 people sleeping in the space on bunk beds and mattresses on the floor and other makeshift beds; there was also a scabies outbreak so everyone was sleeping somewhat uncomfortably. I was sleeping on an upper bunk. In the middle of the night I was suddenly awake, I could hear that others were awake too, coughing, rolling around, clearing their throats. I wondered what had woke me up and then heard from one of the beds below what can only be described as the sound of a man masturbating. This sound went on for some time. I wondered why on earth no one was saying anything? What would we say? Eventually the noise stopped and we all went back to sleep. The next day it felt important to talk to someone about what had happened. I didn't have any close friends or comrades with me so it was awkward. Eventually I stopped a Swedish comrade and asked her if she was awake in the night. She replied 'Yes, I think everyone was! But what could you do? The migrants have nowhere to do this kind of thing, no enclosed toilets or bathrooms or bedroom or anything! I just thought to ignore it, you know, as a kindness?' and then laughed. I laughed too, because I didn't know what to say. She'd assumed it was a migrant and I realised I had too. I wondered what the response would have been if the assumption was it was an activist man. I imagine he would have been told that it wasn't a respectful way to interact in a large room, that there are some women or queers that would have found that experience really triggering, i.e. experiences around male desire taking precedence over a space no matter the consequence. I can imagine myself calling a meeting about it the following morning and speaking harshly about it. But I didn't call a meeting about it, because I don't know how to have difficult conversations across differences that feel as huge as that. And because this isn't the work that survivors should do, this is a job for our allies (fieldwork notes, 2012).

This moment in my fieldwork was difficult, partly because the community aspect of the space didn't seem to be solidly in place, because everyone is embarrassed to talk about sexual issues in group meetings, because my ill-feeling wasn't grounded in

any bad consequences, just a feeling of distance from the space, a feeling that it wasn't safe to sleep there. This links back to the discomfort around finding a clear understanding of what safety is, and brings us back to the question of safety for whom and in what circumstances? How is safety connected to the historically amorphous concept of acceptability? As Jan Marsh points out, in Victorian England defecation and fornication occurred in public places frequently because privacy and individual space were the domain of the rich (2001), presumably safety needed to be discerned not from 'avoiding seeing what we would rather not' but from relying on the public to mediate what was acceptable and what was not.

Discussions about safety and safer spaces are marginalised and ignored by left and the right. Indeed the Prime Minister Theresa May said in October 2016 that " 'safe spaces' in our universities (rely on) a sense of ridiculous entitlement by a minority of students means that their wish not to be offended is more important (than anything else)" (in Thompson, 2017). I wondered if my desire not to be offended was the problem here. Or perhaps a discomfort around the idea that the Swedish comrade wanted to excuse what happened on the basis that the man in question could not control his sexuality. Orientalist thinking includes the idea that there is a particular kind of uncontrollable Arab male sexuality that is near impossible for westerners to comprehend (Hersh in Puar, 2007, p.522). This idea (and its supposed antidote, the total disregard of any factors that could be attributed to differing experiences of socialisation - including differences that could be attributed to structural power or the impact of colonialism on people's beliefs in relation to gender or sexuality etc.) illustrates even more strongly that it is only through an intersectional analysis of solidarity politics that activists can begin to speak of and act around making spaces 'safer'.

In summary, this chapter has sought to explore the different conceptions of 'safety' in migrant solidarity collectives to further identify ways that activists may inadvertently employ processes of Otherness to address issues of safety in migrant solidarity spaces. Processes of Otherness occur in a number of ways including the

mobilisation of Orientalist conceptions of masculinity, and the desire to universalise individual subjectivities that may in fact have been shaped differently through colonial legacies and other structural forms of inequality.

The chapter has instead suggested looking to practices of 'intersectional inclusion' as proposed by scholars including the Roestone Collective, as a way to avoid establishing a hierarchy of oppression and subsequently silencing some marginal voices. In the production of safer spaces, one of the lessons is that people should feel 'safe enough' but not necessarily comfortable, as the best spaces for learning are not always spaces that feel completely easy, especially for those from more privileged positions in society.

There are four considerations for those that wish to pursue the composition of processual and messy collective writing experiences in the safer space policy. These policies are still widely used, and thus the insights from my fieldwork and interviews aim to make a contribution to the way that these policies are written.

Firstly, an atmosphere of (relative) safety is processual; it is the act of collective writing and discussion that give safer spaces policies their usefulness, not the performance of a small working group producing piece of writing to stick on a wall. Consider who fails to be cared for when creating a safer space. If you are creating a set of rules that might be broken, what happens to those individuals? There are also infrastructural considerations that need to be taken in to account when dealing with conflicts. The safety that activist organisations can guarantee people involved in a conflict relies upon there being volunteers willing to do emotional labour, separate spaces for those involved in the conflict to sleep at night and sometimes even translators or counselling services. Our ability to provide relative safety is therefore reliant upon volunteers and the maintenance of structures that allow for conflicts to

be resolved as fairly as possible.

Secondly, organising spaces based on identity (also known as autonomous organising), whilst useful as a tactic or as respite during particular disputes, cannot, or at least have not so far, enabled a holistic struggle against oppressive tendencies within broader organising spaces. Thirdly, reflexivity is an integral part of a collective that takes the on-going participation of marginalised groups as paramount to solidarity work, i.e. never be 'too busy fighting' to reflect. Fourthly, it is sometimes important to feel uncomfortable when addressing issues of safety.

Fanonian scholars would argue that removing all elements of risk and danger reinforces a politics of reformism that just reproduces the existing social order. In other words, politics is not something that can always be engaged with safely. According to Jackie Wang (2012), 'militancy is undermined by the politics of safety. It becomes impossible to do anything that involves risk when people habitually block such actions on the grounds that it makes them feel unsafe.' For this reason I think that safer spaces are at least in part a situated tactic rather than a strategy for creating safer spaces for organising in, and these spaces are more likely to be safe for larger numbers of activists if those larger numbers are also involved in the collective composition of these policies.

Doing the work of thinking through how to make our spaces better through processes of intersectional inclusion is vital to the continuation of effective spaces for solidarity and shared spaces to reproduce ourselves as the people we would like to be.

## **Chapter Six: Collectivising Vulnerability: Organising Strategies, Sustainable Practices and Learning from Others**

In February 2013 I undertook my final trip to Calais before going on maternity leave. I was 28 weeks pregnant, tired and bloated and my feet were swollen, but I'd been trying to interview this particular charity worker and activist for some time. I'd decided to do one more trip, one more interview and spend one more evening hanging out with CMS at food distribution. I had a friend with me who was looking to spend a few months living in Calais with Calais Migrant Solidarity and I wanted to show her around and acquaint her with the project. We'd brought a large bag of donations of men's shoes, clothes and some blankets from the London storage unit, it felt right that I go. I realised when we got to food distribution how it was going to be different it was going to be that time, as a visibly pregnant, visibly exhausted participant. Instead of the conversations I had with migrants over dinner that usual went like this: "Are you journalist? Are you charity? Are you No Border? Ahhh, No Border. You like my friend? He'd make a very good husband!" This time migrants were desperately trying to share the protein from their meagre portions, their bananas (for the vitamins, they said), and instead of just enjoying a new person to chat with, they were concerned about me. Concerned about where I would sleep and how late it was. Despite and also, because of my physical frailty, it was the safest I'd ever felt in Calais. It felt like a community of care had swung into action.

(fieldwork notes, February 2013)

### **6.1 Feeling Vulnerable, fighting to recover**

The above excerpt from my fieldwork notes connects to questions of safety covered

in the previous chapter, and is one example of what safety in collectivity looks and feels like. My vulnerability in this situation began to feel like a collective project, suddenly being addressed by everyone around me. It could certainly have felt paternalistic, as so many forms of safety are (for more on this see Chapter Five, especially how safety is exhibited for whom), but it felt that people wanted to make the space one where it was possible for me to participate, and were willing to give up what they had in order to make this happen. This thesis explores the potential for different forms of and experiences of vulnerability to be embraced as an organising tool. This embracing of vulnerability is both transformative and collective in its purpose and practice. This chapter explores whether the production of Otherness that occurs in some of the organising practices discussed in the previous chapters can be undone. I will suggest that it can be undone through a reconceptualisation of subjectivities previously-considered 'disparate' into subjectivities that have conditions in common and necessitate the collectivising of individual vulnerabilities. These vulnerabilities, far from impediments, could in fact be tools in our effort to create spaces for solidarity that are open, brave, reflective and mutually sustaining. The argument at the core of this chapter is that care needs to be collectivised as part of our work in producing transformative structures within migrant solidarity projects.

As part of creating communities of care across borders that do not require individuals to have particular sets of predetermined ideas or adhering to particular sets of norms, put simply: if we think that working together is learned best by struggling side-by-side, this chapter is an experiment with ideas of making this possible by collectivising our vulnerabilities as activists, local people in Calais, migrants and Others. This is important as through processes of intersectional inclusion (Roestone Collective, 2014) and an acknowledgment of complex personhood (1997), we can begin to build capacity through a commitment to developing ideas and subjectivities in the everyday together.

The term 'vulnerability' is contested. Vulnerability has been used as an individualised concept where the impetus is on the victim to change their circumstances through relying on their 'strength and resilience' rather than looking at structural factors that cause people to be 'made vulnerable'. Similarly to understandings of 'safety', 'vulnerability' is an emotive and evocative term, used to describe not only the experiences of individuals but also the experiences of what governments see as the permeable borders of nation states. A UKBA briefing paper uses the term in this way:

There is still more we can do to reduce the vulnerability of our systems and services to abuse. Some overseas visitors travel to the UK with the specific intent of taking advantage of our free health services (UKBA, 2010, p.18).

The anthropomorphisation of the systems and services of the British state as 'vulnerable' is the kind of emotive language routinely employed to encourage citizens to feel that they are under attack from a homogenous and threatening migrant populace. Their argument is that the biopolitical services that constitute us, namely the NHS, are being made vulnerable *by* migrants; so too, in this logic, are 'we British' made vulnerable by them. In the case of the concepts of 'choice' and 'freedom' as discussed already, and 'safety' and 'vulnerability' in this chapter, it is clear that the language of emancipation has been appropriated and transformed by the neoliberal state. These terms are mobilised violently against some people, while constituting others as citizens. The mobilisations of this kind of language produces Otherness through the fear and projections of the Other who is not and cannot ever be 'us'. Writing in this context, I acknowledge the limits of the term vulnerability whilst arguing that it can still be used constructively and collectively.

In my fieldwork, the experience of vulnerability emerged as both negative and difficult, but also as potentially expansive in cases where participants imagined it could be collectivised. Interesting tensions emerged when examining the individualised experiences of tackling vulnerability in terms of personal 'strength' and 'resilience', which participants could acknowledge they had in many cases (see interviews with Leigh, Mia, Fatima and Anna) even where that strength was sometimes perceived as acting aggressively or 'crazy' (interview with Leigh, 2014). This individual resilience occurred concurrently with, and was connected to, more collectivised attempts at embracing uncertainty in the face of structural power. This exposes the concept of vulnerability as immediately both problematic and contributive.

Below I will explore the negative aspects of vulnerability through the personal experiences of activists and in terms of their assessment of what seems to be an impossibly difficult situation for migrants. I will consider this through the following lenses of gender difference and gendered oppression; mental health problems and burnout; organisational unsustainability and social reproduction; and feelings of hopelessness experienced by activist and charity workers when assessing the abject situation of migrants (Tyler, 2013, p. 4). Finally, I will consider critically the way that migrants' stories of brutality and loss are sometimes used as a currency in activist circles. I will demonstrate that particular people are presenting themselves as irrevocably intertwined with individual migrants and their struggles and thus individually performing their involvement as indispensable and heroic. When the vulnerability of an Other is used in this way it is not collective building, but a form of building up an activist's reputation, often to mediate feelings of guilt or privilege (interview with Leigh, 2014).

Creating spaces where people can be vulnerable requires a level of infrastructural stability as well as strong emotional foundations. I will examine the barriers to

building sustainable spaces and practices in Calais in terms of the personal capacity of activists and locals, as well as the challenges of trying to build and maintain spaces routinely disassembled or destroyed by the police and immigration authorities. I will briefly provide an overview of some successful examples of activist projects in building inclusive antiracist spaces for social reproduction on unequal terrains and evaluate what these projects could lend to migrant solidarity organising in Calais.

## **6.2 Gendered Vulnerability: Transforming feeling 'unsafe' through collective action**

The women I interviewed spoke about their time in in Calais being punctuated by feelings of vulnerability attributable to their gender (interviews with Anna, Sofia, Virginia, Rita) and that this gendered vulnerability was characterised partly by a fear that in the long term it was unavoidable that they would eventually be assaulted or harassed on the street or in activist spaces (interviews with Sofia and Rita). This was particularly clear in my fieldwork in Calais in August 2014, when a group composed mostly of women discussed the reasons that were proposing a weekly gender 'check-in' on a Monday night. They argued that this kind of meeting happened so infrequently and was always postponed in favor of more 'direct action' (referred to as 'putting out fires') to the point that the conversation was rarely opened up at all. Without this, the intensely gendered experiences they were having was building up to a point that would eventually make it difficult for these women to maintain such a sustained level of participation and input in to Calais Migrant Solidarity. Koshka said,

Sometimes it takes fifty per cent of my energy just to cope with deflecting sexism and looking after my personal safety when I'm in Calais, and that's before I even think about fighting the police or the border guards or the border regime.

(Koshka, August 2014)

The proposal to have a more regularly planned 'check-in' focusing on the safety of women seemed to be raised, agreed to and then forgotten with the next round of people who come to Calais (fieldwork notes, August 2014). Creating a space like this is important though, because at various times when I have been in Calais throughout my research period, I have noticed that conversations around gender in shared spaces are difficult, even when they are productive. Usually, despite the conversation being long and difficult a moment is reached where the importance of the issue seems to be more generally understood.

To illustrate this with an example, at dinner at Africa House (a space that was squatted and evicted regularly between 2010 and 2012 before eventually being destroyed) there was a conversation about a woman who had fallen pregnant to a man called Mohammed when he was living without documents in Germany. He expressed that he had been really happy imagining being a father and being able to get his name on a birth certificate, as he hoped this would also help his asylum case. The woman had chosen to terminate the pregnancy. We discussed for a while as we were cooking dinner about whether that woman had done something wrong or was a 'bad woman'. Many of the activists thought that she hadn't done anything wrong, and of the migrants participating in the conversation a number of them thought that she had. It was a conversation that could have been difficult for some people in the room, but it ended with us agreeing that no one should need their name on another person's birth certificate to stay in the country of their choice. And that all of us believed that the man in question should still be living in Germany if that is what he wanted. In that moment we had agreement and we knew where most of the people in the room stood on the issue. Seemingly, even those that completely disagreed with each other were perfectly happy to sit down together for the meal we had prepared together, and for me at least, there was a sense of peace. A number of women needed to talk about how they felt about the discussion afterwards and we discussed it on the way back to the office later that night, but we agreed that these

were the kinds of discussions that probably needed more space for debrief, even though it had ended well (fieldwork notes, June 2012). It wasn't that anyone's mind was changed necessarily; the important part seemed to be finding ways to build alliances and intersectional forms of inclusion for people who do not agree. The conversation prompted a discussion about how likely it was that everyone in the configuration was stepping carefully, we all had a sense that each of us was trying to be generous with each other's ideas because we wanted the shared space and sense of alliance to continue (fieldwork notes, June 2012).

Fostering a sense of alliance is not always easy given the conflictual nature of everyday life in Calais. For women and marginalised Others in particular, putting up with and preparing for the routine violence and conflict witnessed or experienced in Calais (between activists and police, activists and migrants, locals and migrants, between different migrant groupings, between locals and activists and of course amongst the members of each group as well, as the high octane environment can cause more conflict than expected at times) uses up energy and capacity and can leave individuals feeling that they are in perpetually in preparation for exposure to conversations and actions that can bring forth feelings of vulnerability and lack of control. This time taken in the lead-up to exposing oneself to these forces has referred to as 'preparatory time' by Avery Gordon (2014), who uses this term to describe the temporal and emotional investment that each person involved in changing personal and social circumstance puts into preparing for future upheavals (this concept will be explored further later on in this chapter). It is important to make clear to the collective the times when the experience of gender has felt incredibly limiting, for example the times that women have not been given an invitation to particular meetings in the jungles<sup>71</sup>, when women activists have experienced stalking or harassment on the street, when activist men have refused (or simply forgotten) to clean up after meals, when gender issues has been dropped

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<sup>71</sup> For a more detailed account of one woman's exclusion from the jungles see The Calais9 'zine (2009).

down in importance and then been left completely off the agenda for what seems like the hundredth time (informal discussion, fieldwork 2014).

It is also important to consider that this preparatory time extends well beyond the alleged 'frontline' of Calais to No Borders meetings in the UK and migrant solidarity politics more generally. Rita spoke about how much effort she would expend convincing herself to attend meetings when she had experienced sexism at the pub after a previous meeting. She felt that she had to leave home feeling especially confident if she was going to engage with No Borders as one of the few heterosexual women in that space. This kind of emotional preparation for upheaval is part of what I believe constitutes feelings of vulnerability, but also is a sign of commitment in spite of this and constitutes the promise of action and change. If everyone involved in solidarity work took a moment to think about their own vulnerabilities and responsibilities as part of their preparation then things could play out quite differently in Calais. Preparatory time will be reconsidered in the conclusion.

### **6.3 Responsibility for Others as Gendered Labour**

During a trauma support workshop in Calais in August, Katja told a harrowing account about a migrant woman, Mrs X, who was in an abusive relationship but had neither the fluency of language or nor the inclination to seek help from a domestic violence refuge. She did not want to speak to activist men, so a small number of women who had been in Calais for a longer period of time took turns going to check on her each day. At one point they had to wipe the blood from her face when they found her partially conscious on the street (fieldwork, August 2014). This was happening on an ongoing basis and there was seemingly no way to distribute the care more evenly across the activist group, as she was only comfortable interacting with a small group of women who she'd built relations with. It was a very difficult

role that Katja had been taking on and she needed to return to Berlin so it was unclear if anyone would visit this woman in the following weeks. The women involved with Mrs X were feeling shaken by their experience and how gendered it was, which meant that most of the session dedicated to trauma support was spent speaking to the women involved about their own experiences and what this brought up for them about their own physical safety and emotional stability.

It was an issue that we were unable to find a resolution for, but Katja made clear that having the space to talk about how she felt about her experience, and also to think it through as a microcosm of the violence of the border regime and the complete lack of freedom of movement allowed to this woman, steadied her resolve. This woman could not move across the border without being accompanied by her husband, her very limited English language did not allow her to navigate the world outside of her domestic situation, and there was only limited scope for her to improve it when it was against cultural norms for her to be out in public without her husband. Mrs X had only very few friends from her own cultural community and was generally socially isolated. Theorising the borders in place that prevented this woman from living more freely is the kind of work that the Institute for Precarious Consciousness refer to as 'recognising the reality, and the systemic nature, of our experiences'. They suggest that

The point is not simply to recount experiences but to transform and restructure them through their theorisation. Participants change the dominant meaning of their experience by mapping it with different assumptions. This is often done by finding patterns in experiences which are related to liberatory theory, and seeing personal problems and small injustices as symptoms of wider structural problems. It leads to a new perspective, a vocabulary of motives; an anti-anti-political horizon.

(Institute for Precarious Consciousness, 2014)

The empathy that had been called up in the women through their involvement with Mrs X made them feel more vulnerable in themselves and in how they interacted in Calais. The discussion showed the different ways that the responsibility for her as well as for each other was disproportionate to the amount of emotional labour being done by the men in the collective, but it was difficult to share these difficult experiences and feelings collectively. This is just an example of the kinds of ways that gender and the experiences associated with a female socialisation impact on the ways in which activism may make people feel vulnerable, and also the necessity for sharing as much as possible the emotional labour that comes along with this. The long-term effects of other highly stressful forms of activism will be explored further in the section below about activist burnout.

So far in this chapter I have shifted the emphasis from 'safety' to another way of relating through sharing vulnerabilities and care in order to explore paths through the problematics explored in the previous chapter as those where safety is the focus. I have done this because collectivising vulnerability is collectivising safety, and thus both require a certain amount of confidence and faith that the collective you are a part of will look after you, along with knowing the limits of where it cannot. Defining how safe a space needs to be in order to foster robust debate but also to avoid increasing the vulnerability of already vulnerable voices is complex. This was taken up by another anti-authoritarian group of feminists (some with connections to migrant solidarity projects) who were disappointed at how the safer spaces of an Anarcha-Feminist conference (AFEM, 2014) seemed to be attempting to limit what they saw as potentially useful discomfort. They are open to the idea that vulnerable women participate in these kinds of gatherings and that it is not always easy to make a space safe for people who are triggered by particular conversations or events. The open letter, a segment of which is below, argues that women do lots of things to mediate gendered alienation and vulnerability, such as attempting to engage 'bravely' in collective spaces that may involve difficult 'risky' topics and conversations that it may be preferable to avoid. This is a continuation from

previous discussions about safety that argue the importance of intersectional forms of inclusion and for safety through collectivising vulnerability.

... A good gathering also needs a bit of danger. Empowering encounters often involve an edge of confrontation, challenge and expose us and push us out of our comfort zones. Maybe a half-decent analogy is how we learn martial arts: you don't want to break your bones every time you train, but you expect a few bruised muscles and egos. Of course, we can't be sparring all the time. You need to rest and recover between sessions. Get a massage, get a hug. Sometimes you need a longer break, time to recover from an injury. But, if we want to be fighters, we can't be in recuperation mode all the time. Not if we want to grow, become powerful, able to defend each other and take on our enemies... It's (the logic of safer spaces) pushing an image of meetings, encounters, exchanges as all about safety, retreat and recovery, with no element of risk or confrontation. Like every time we meet we need to be wrapped up in a warm fluffy blanket of caution, to protect us against all the sharp words and edges.

(Letter to AFEM)

There are reasonable concerns about exposing people who already feel vulnerable to everyday sexism to difficult and potentially upsetting conversations about gendered inequality and violence. If there were a culture of exploring and theorising our vulnerabilities collectively, one could argue that movements would become stronger and able to defend ourselves and each other. Thinking and acting against sexism in our movement spaces is not about always feeling safe; it is about feeling supported in our undertakings against these things. The next section will discuss the importance of feeling supported in the undertaking of various kinds of activist work and the increased vulnerability individuals feel when they take on too much labour and responsibility without collective support.

## 6.4 Activist Burnout

Continuing from the consideration of the ways that gender makes some people vulnerable to certain risks or dangers, I will now look at ‘activist burnout’ and mental health issues as other signifiers that care needs to be collectivised as part of our work in producing transformative structures within migrant solidarity projects. This need is particularly discernible when we approach vulnerability from the perspective of the ways in which activists discuss feeling as though they have been overexposed or have over-committed to solidarity actions and activist activities to the detriment of their health; this is known as ‘burning out’<sup>72</sup>. For some of those I interviewed, their burnout came as a result of experiencing traumatic events during their time in Calais (Jeremy, Rita, Anna) or from visiting immigration detention centres (Leigh and Sofia).

The question of how to set up the necessary infrastructures to prevent activist burnout or assist people who feel they are ‘on the edge’ was evident throughout my interviews and yet most activist organisations that my respondents were involved with still appeared to be being held together by a small group of over-committed, highly stressed individuals. This unintentionally seemed to be promoting the idea that being a ‘real’ activist is incredibly hard work (this is explored in the first empirical chapter on Otherness) with nothing else in place to soften the difficulty of this. There is at least a rhetorical agreement that activists ought to be generous towards those ‘dropping out’ or ‘stepping back’ or needing ‘time off’, as it is an investment in that individual’s future propensity to participate, and can lead to reflection and acknowledgement about the work done in the past. However, this still does not seem to result in a culture free from burnout and seems to remain at the level of knowing we are ‘saying the right thing’. This work is a part of what is referred to in this thesis as the social reproduction of activist culture.

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<sup>72</sup> For more on this see Chen and Gorski (2015) ‘Burnout in Social Justice and Human Rights Activists: Symptoms, Causes and Implications’ *Journal of Human Rights Practice*, issue 7 (3) pp 366-390

Within activist organisations, there is a discomfort around the inability to seriously reflect upon the ways that they reproduce themselves because it is at the heart of why activist cultures feel unsustainable to so many people (interviews with Sofia, Kavita, Rita), and because it demands a form of self-critique that long-term activists do not always wish to participate in. Frank is a good example of a long-standing activist who doesn't always feel comfortable spending time reflecting on activist practice, and indicated at various points that he didn't think that the emotional work that is part of migrant solidarity was hard or 'that bad' for most people. Frank's comments reflected a process of Othering in that it is an attempt to outsource those hard and bad feelings that undeniably exist onto individuals to process on their own, rather than trying to understand how these bad feelings could be more equally distributed or carried. On visiting migrants in detention centres and whether or not he considered it an emotionally sustainable activity for activists, he commented:

[Y]eah, there's some people who've said they found it too stressful and they didn't want to come back you know, but it's not like they were traumatised [laughs] um, to the [extent] that they needed, they had post-traumatic stress or something like that. It's not that bad, but it can be a bit difficult for people *who don't want to deal with these sorts of stories*. And there's been times when it's been worse than others you know because when we first started going there, we met some people who had been in detention for a long long time and had had very little contact with the outside world and it just all came out.

(interview with Frank 2014, emphasis added)

Frank is able to attribute the problems associated with what is often an extremely emotionally draining experience (interviews with Sofia and Leigh) as being 'not that bad' or down to people 'who don't want to deal with these sorts of stories' fit with his thoughts cited in the previous chapter, where he suggested that you could make

activist work sustainable if you know ‘the right things to prioritise’, which in his mind is organising protests. This is indicative of a particular set of problems in migrant solidarity networks where ‘burning out’ is attributed to ‘not wanting to deal with these sorts of stories’. Frank implies that a certain level of political analysis is all that is needed to be able to engage sustainably with these sorts of activities, and thus that you might be less likely to burn out if you can take the right attitude. It also individualises the experience of visiting, as though it is a person’s fault if they apparently cannot engage with stories that are often horrifically violent. By casting people as either ‘wanting to deal with these sorts of stories’ or as those who ‘don’t want to deal with these sorts of stories’ it individualises the various difficulties associated with migrant solidarity work. This kind of analysis is not down to Frank being lazy or impenetrable, but instead reflects a culture that chimes with neoliberalism. Mark Fisher described the impact of this pressure to shoulder discomfort on our own as part of a politics ‘consciousness deflation.’ This is what individualist neoliberalism pushes on people suffering with depression and anxiety, ‘telling them that if you ‘feel bad’ you ‘haven’t worked hard enough to tell yourself a positive story’ ’ (Fisher, 2016) and you must innovate your own happiness, safety, and, in this case, ability to cope.

In an informal interview with John from a group ‘Mad Pride’ following a No Borders discussion on the Mobile Commons that I convened in Edale in 2014, we tried to work out at which points politics make you feel hopeful and at which point our involvement seemed to draw away individual resources that we could not afford:

Sometimes I’m just torn. Activism makes my life feel so much better when I feel like we are winning things and getting somewhere. But sometimes I just feel completely adrift. That it’s an uphill battle to keep on fighting all the time and sometimes your comrades are beside you and sometimes you maybe dropped out for a bit because you feel like you have to, but no one calls to see how you are or anything. They feel let down by you. And it’s a lot to deal with, isn’t it? The world is messed up

and you can't even show up to a meeting or something and then everything feels like your fault, that your problems are down to you.

(interview with John, 2014)

Although there are important differences between activist burnout and the experiences of those with long-term mental health issues, some of which will be discussed below, both are related to the ways in which activist groups deal collectively with those that are suffering or feeling vulnerable to the social forces outside of themselves. The quote below is from Mia, an activist who wanted to draw out the importance of how activists can feel more prone to burning out or feeling depressed about the state of the world as a result of what can be sometimes seen as a series of chronological defeats for the refugee rights movement.

The refugee rights campaign is quite intense because unlike the same sex marriage campaign, which is the other campaign that I've played a role in, we haven't won anything significant, in fact we've gone backwards, so we've gone backwards through government policy becoming worse and we've gone backwards in the sense that, um, that... we've seen a decline in the movement, so the movement was at its height in the early 2000s ... mid 2000 period, 2004-6... We had, you know significant layers of the church mobilising, we had trade union support, so we had very good reach, when it was at its height, but since then... it's uphill. I sometimes feel like we aren't getting anywhere. It's hard to look at what you're doing in terms of successive defeats, you can't feel good about that, you just can't.

(interview with Mia, 2014)

The notion that activists are responsible for socially reproducing themselves in some ways but also function as a cog in a machine of failure (failure to transform politics and relations between people) and as people who can 'never do enough' is a common feeling amongst those I interviewed (for example Kavita, Anna, and Rita). Activist burnout is without doubt part of these individualised processes, and the fact that most activists are so weary themselves that taking time out to care for someone

within their collective instead of visiting a detention centre or going to an action is at times difficult to justify to themselves. It is as if more vulnerable people (often migrant Others) need so much that so activists can't help less vulnerable people in their own collective, nor ask for help from collective when they aren't managing. This will be discussed further in the section below about mental health problems and the way that racism and islamophobia have contributed to what Fatima sees as her deteriorating mental health.

It is notable that respondents felt considerably happier commenting about perceptions which they felt exist concerning activist burnout than they were discussing questions of mental ill-health. This could be related to a belief that burnout is in some ways immediately collectively recognised and felt (comments such as 'we could see they were doing all the work', as Rita pointed out in one interview) whereas mental health problems are seen as a more individualised and private problem, down to factors that are often seen as beyond outside control. The question of mental health issues as a collective concern will be discussed further below.

### **6.5 Mental Health Problems: Feeling vulnerable to the ills of your own mind**

Connected to activist burnout, one of the notions associated with 'managing' the sorts of vulnerabilities being discussed here (including depression, fatigue, exhaustion and anxiety, as listed in my interview with Fatima), is to seek out individualised 'fixes' such as practices associated with self-help discourses and individual counselling. This is not to discount the assistance that some of these methods bring, but to ask if an individual 'fix' is always the best course of action. A feminist critique of the vulnerability discourse as being inextricably linked to

individualist 'self-help' style literature/gatherings is important and for the purposes of this chapter will be summarised here:

... no doubt connected to the security of populations as its 'dialectical other,' vulnerability occupies the self-help terrain. From books to talk shows, vulnerability signifies a risk that has to be managed by individuals themselves or is reclaimed as a new virtue to be cultivated.

(Ziarek, 2013)

This was made particularly clear in my interviews with activists who were already in individual counselling for both personal traumas as well as the pressures related to activism (interviews with Fatima, Leigh) and for those who had dealt with family traumas from earlier life (interview with Kelly). It is with this in mind that efforts are being made to collectivise the issues dealt with by those who experience mental health struggles to avoid the continuation of what the Institute of Precarious Consciousness call a 'public secret':

Excessive anxiety and stress are a public secret. When discussed at all, they are understood as individual psychological problems, often blamed on faulty thought patterns or poor adaptation.

(Institute of Precarious Consciousness, 2014)

The call to understand mental health problems as social problems caused at least in part by society rather than being the fault of individual genetics or behaviours is important to understanding the ways in which vulnerability is constituted by social relations. Leigh recalled an exchange with her therapist, saying that the counsellor was confused about why Leigh communicated in such a 'frantic' way and wondered whether it was related to her 'activism' or to her 'disorder' and therefore needing to be managed through medication:

My counsellor said this funny thing: "I don't know if you speak in this overly emphatic way to fit all your astute observations about the world in to such a short session, or if this way of speaking is actually a symptom

of your PTSD”.

(Interview with Leigh)

We discussed briefly if Leigh knew which it was, and I noted that her manner was indeed ‘hectic’ or ‘fast-paced,’ but that this was how I knew her, as someone deeply involved with her activism and in her work as a historian writing about genocide. Although I am not convinced that activists would necessarily be able to help Leigh through her PTSD better than an individualised method might, I wonder if a space to collectively think through some of the pressures associated with her life might have helped in some way.

Both Leigh and Fatima experienced feeling ‘other’ to those in their activist circles. Fatima’s account of what she considered to be her deteriorating mental health which was caused in part by a lack of support in dealing with Islamophobia she suffers and witnesses in society and social movements:

Because of having a Muslim part of my family I feel like islamophobia is on my mind all the time, it’s everywhere, it’s driving me mad! It’s so much worse than homophobia in the Muslim community... Seriously, I’m so worn down by that conversation. I’ve actually restarted therapy recently because I need to talk about it (islamophobia) a lot more and I don’t have anyone to speak to. It’s weird to pay someone to talk to about islamophobia when you’re in the all the antiracist groups you can find... but there you are.

C: Do you feel like you've got any kind of queer of colour, or queer Muslim community that you rely on?

F: Yeah, kind of. There's a queer Muslim email list. There's some ambiguity I guess about... well there has been some ambiguity about whether it is appropriate for me to be on that list because I’m not a practicing Muslim. However, these people decided that it was appropriate because I face some of that same issues that queer Muslims face and um I really need support! [laughs]. Um yeah, so I’m on that e-list

but I have thought about getting off it cos sometimes I'm not comfortable myself with whether I should be on it, if it should just be a space for Muslims...

(interview with Fatima, 2014)

For Fatima, Islamophobia, a structural form of oppression, combined with where she can speak and whom she can speak to about this, is increasingly leading her towards feeling isolated, lonely and even mentally unwell. It is not clear through the interview to what extent she thinks her mental health problems come from her experiences as a woman of colour, but she argues quite forcefully that social attitudes towards Muslims, in society in general, but also from queer people that she organises with, have led to her feeling more isolated and upset. She experiences a form of Othering even within the spaces she hoped for support from as a result of not being a practicing Muslim, even though she identifies 'culturally' with these people. She is part of an organised leftist group and stated that she believes that by politically organising with as many people from diverse backgrounds as possible that society will change, but in the meantime she thinks she is suffering more as a result of her racial and religious identities, with few allies that understand her either in the queer left or in the queer Muslim community. Whether or not this kind of vulnerability can be collectivised through a more reflexive activist milieu that is able to take on her concerns about islamophobia and thus leave her in less of an exhausting educational role is as yet unclear. But as a woman of colour from a Muslim background who is suffering with mental health issues, she appeared to feel both vulnerable but also highly motivated to create spaces that can deal with these negative feelings.

Further, when interviewing Kelly about her long running personal and professional association with children's shelters (she works with unaccompanied Afghan minors), she found it difficult to know how much of her own history to bring to her explanation for why she felt state care facilities and youth programs were so

important:

I don't know how much detail to give. I grew up in care and I was living with some young refugees, when my Mum couldn't look after me... I realised how hard it was not having anyone to speak to if you're feeling bad at home or having issues around trauma. Now, as an adult, I can help make that space. I also realise that I can't completely understand their situation, because of not being a refugee myself and not having that experience, but I wanted to help empower people to do stuff off their own backs...

(interview with Kelly, 2013)

When I asked Kelly if she felt that her own experiences as a child helped her in her work, she agreed that she had a level of empathy that helped her 'keep on' with even the most difficult and traumatised children she was working with. She wanted to give them a space to 'create themselves' as they saw fit, and helped with creative projects and skills like facilitating them to make films and do performance art (interview with Kelly, 2013). Her own vulnerabilities generated as a child that had a chaotic upbringing in many ways, gave her a sense of understanding and purpose when it came to working with traumatised young children who had suffered terribly in the journey from Afghanistan. She felt committed to them as part of giving children like her a chance to feel safe and understood. I found Kelly very convincing in the way that she spoke about her commitment to holding space for people to socially reproduce themselves and felt that by attempting to share their vulnerabilities, she was also using those stories as a motivation to make things better not only for those migrant children, but in the world.

## **6.6 Hopelessness: Feeling vulnerable to the organised brutality of the state**

Coupled with the vulnerable feelings expressed in the discussion of their own experiences and subjectivities, a sense of hopelessness was also generated for some participants in understanding and contextualising the situation of migrants as 'object.' (Tyler, *ibid.*). These participants' experiences of migrant solidarity work seemed at times to be an endless witness of forms of misery, persecution and vulnerability from the state apparatus. This made the activists feel hopeless about the future. This hopelessness left them feeling that they are 'up against' so much that everything that could possibly be done by them or those like them invisible and irrelevant. They felt they were totally vulnerable to the forces outside of themselves, mirroring precisely their perceptions of the way migrants might feel.

Whilst interviewing Frank, who was particularly involved in visiting immigration detention centres, I noticed that he appeared to be moderating his difficult emotions through continually reminding me that if you kept a structural analysis of immigration controls, then you were never sad or disappointed when people you cared about were deported or experienced other difficulties. He explained to me that if you were too invested in individual cases and not organising political demonstrations against the system as a whole, you burn out. He reflected that the impact of this work at times felt like nothing but 'a drop in the ocean' and other times was extremely grounding and a meaningful way to build relationships with people in migrant communities and that it was about finding a balance. He told a number of similar stories to the one below: quite difficult emotional accounts of everyday actions he was taking as part of a detention centre visiting group. One was about trying to find dresses for a Somali woman who had to have a mastectomy and needed clothes that you could put on without pulling something over your head, and how it felt for him to think that she only had one dress to wear when he looked at his daughter's wardrobe, and that this woman had nothing she could wear after surgery. Another similar account is below:

Well, just to tell you a story. Like, I go out to the detention centre I visit and sometimes you come home and sometimes it's hard to sleep because you are so concerned about that person's health and what can you do for them etc., etc., and also... because we've made connections with other people who work in the [charitable] service organisations, sometimes they've rung me up and said "oh we've got a Tamil family moving into a flat and they've just got their bags that they carry, there's no fridge, there's no washing machine, there's no bed, there's no linen, there's no lounge, no nothing you know" - and I've actually put a call out on the internet and ran around madly trying to get stuff like that you know, and you can get drawn into spending all your time doing that. And I did find that a little bit exhausting at times, but um nonetheless when you do put it out on Facebook that there's this family in need, somebody says "I've got this item" and you meet new people and you talk to them and it also anchors your connection to the actual refugee community, yeah and people who work in the service sector, you've got much more credibility with them. You have to do a bit of this sort of stuff. But it's hard. These people have nothing and it feels hopeless sometimes, you know? That's just one family. There are thousands, probably tens of thousands in similar situations.

(interview with Frank, 2014)

Frank's perceived ambivalence towards visiting as a political act is clear in this excerpt in that he can tell that it is important 'you have to do a bit of this stuff' but also that it feels hopeless to be wedded to set of actions such as working on individual cases in the hope that it might be possible to change systemic poverty and institutional violence faced by migrants. He was also clear that his attitude has softened a lot towards direct support (often named by activists as 'charity work') as a political contribution since beginning to do this kind of work himself. The impact made even in individual situations had in fact made him feel that his contributions to more conventional political activity had more meaning behind them, now that he saw the material situation of migrants in detention. He saw them as 'made

vulnerable', temporarily at least, and certainly systematically, by the state, rather than *inherently* vulnerable as a result of their experiences fleeing violence or torture. In this way, this kind of everyday direct solidarity challenges some of the othering processes or the ways we think of people as others. I will reflect on this difference in the conclusion of this chapter.

Rita spoke similarly about her experience of befriending migrants and how it encouraged her to develop a critique of the institutions that facilitate the growth and continuation of immigration controls. She spoke more of people 'being reduced' to something in these regimes of control and what the system 'does to people'. She spoke both of her work in the charity sector and what she has written about academically:

I actually wrote my Masters [thesis] about befriending and *the dilemma of being involved in people's lives*. And it was all born out of this fury because you realise what the system does to people, *what people get reduced to* in a detention centre, the complete lack of any rights. I think that through working in a human rights framework and in NGOs I became disillusioned with the idea of rights... you found people in this limbo situation where they weren't in detention anymore because they couldn't be deported but they weren't entitled to any kind of hardship fund so they were just destitute. There are people who just get left like that and nobody really realises what that means, they've got no home, they're just on the street. And I just didn't know because you don't know until you get involved. And it was through walking someone through that process and trying to help them that you realised you couldn't save them, you couldn't say well I'll financially provide for you because even that wasn't enough. I was really rocked by what that experience taught me.

(interview with Rita)

Many of those I interviewed who were involved with direct support, including 'befriending' (interview with Rita), working on individual or family campaigns against deportation (interviews with Anna, Jeremy, Jack), visiting detention centres (interviews with Mia, Frank, and Leigh), distributing furniture and clothes from donations to migrants in Calais, and so on (interview with Jean, fieldwork in Calais 2014) struggled to navigate the differing power dynamics between those with papers and those without. However, as Rita and Frank show us, direct organising against the state and casework-based organising, often separated in activist circles, is a false binary; through enmeshing activisms of casework and protest, we have the potential to decrease the vulnerability of both of activists and migrants through collectivising our shared social reproduction.

However, despite the positive potential of activist cultures that include radical casework and organised protest, what came through from interviews and fieldwork is incredibly difficult to imagine how to see the material conditions of migrants' lives and know how to relate to their political agency when they had been deemed by various forces in society (the state, the charities and some activists) as 'vulnerable people', a title which is both limiting and also sometimes useful for getting certain needs met<sup>73</sup>. The mobilisation of migrant vulnerability will be discussed in the following section, alongside debates around questions of agency in migration theory and balancing the idea of being made vulnerable by the state alongside seeing the resourcefulness and agency of migrant subjects in even the most difficult of circumstances.

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<sup>73</sup> There are certain ways of performing your vulnerability so that you can get as much assistance as possible from the state; for example if a person can prove they are destitute then they can sometimes apply for housing assistance, and charities are more likely to assist you with the provision of food, etc. The use/misuse of categorising migrants as 'destitute' subjects is explored in the next section of this chapter.

## 6.7 When Migrant Vulnerability is Instrumentalised by Activists

The otherness produced by identifying migrants as in an 'abject' situation, with a constant and desperate need for assistance of the kind that can be provided by activists, has been covered in some detail in the previous chapter on Otherness. This section will look at the social power associated with activists being 'up close' to the struggles migrants face when fighting deportation. This is certainly present in the No Borders milieu and can also be read as a 'production of vulnerability' as identified by Leigh in the excerpt below:

L: These kinds of ...regular visitors to the detention centre, the bleeding hearts, they kind of thrive on an economy of kind of finding out the story... and it's not very realistic.

Me: You mean that people felt like they needed to know 'emotional stories' to motivate them to be there somehow?

L: Yeah, it was a currency and the way that people were using them... I mean as a historian you're really aware when you do oral histories... that as an individual you don't do that, press them for the most gruesome tale. As an individual, well me personally, I don't like it when people break down and cry... But you can watch these conversations happening because of course you're all in a room together talking to them [the migrants] about how they're going and then... also in the car trip back, because there's a big carpool, people would talk 'oh he's in a bad way because this guy did this' and then someone else would say 'yeah, well I got this phone call from another guy in another centre and he said that this had happened', so it was like ... yeah it was like this currency of how close you could be to people's traumas and there's no point to it, it doesn't make you look cool it makes you look like a vulture. If people need money, give money, if people want a book, give a book, that's my

approach to it... I'm not a lawyer so knowing their story won't help, and more than that you know that there are multiple sides to every story...

(interview with Leigh)

When Leigh described this, I was struck by how familiar it was and what it feels like when activists visiting detention centres appear to be in some way revelling in the misery of others. The importance of 'misery' as political or financial leverage has been written about extensively by postcolonial scholars exploring representations of women from the global south in anti-poverty campaigns as 'needy and destitute' for example, and the shift towards painting a picture of a worthy, toiling, entrepreneurial subject in more recent years (Wilson, 2012 p.47). Leigh refers to these activists as 'bleeding hearts' a term usually followed by the word 'liberal', i.e. 'bleeding-heart liberals.' This, like Wilson's anti-poverty campaigner, is a synecdoche used to refer to those that are and are unable or unwilling to think of the violence being perpetrated against those they are caring for as part of a structural problem. The critique that liberals need to be invulnerable themselves in order to 'do good' is one that is also made of the charities in Calais (interview with Jean). The charity workers may seem to be people in a position of power from the outside when they hand out free food to migrants, but they are very often unemployed or underemployed Church attendees from very poor areas of Calais themselves. Despite their difficulties (that are in some ways very similar) there is very little sharing or emotional interaction between the two groups; food distribution is carried out as a service. It is also interesting to note the way that neoliberal language is being used here by Leigh. There is a 'currency' of people visiting detention centres are using and an 'economy' of emotion that people are participating in. As Leigh sees it, it is not so much the migrants themselves but the stories of their 'vulnerability' that is to be gained from.

The phenomenon described above is a particular mobilisation of vulnerability by those who do not have personal experience of it, when tied to an activist notion of

getting as close to the experience of migrants as possible in order to really appear to be sharing that pain is one worth exploring. In these contexts, the individual migrant in question and their story is not as relevant as the credibility of being able to recite a story from someone you are close to; the closer the better. This is connected to the 'activist guilt complex' that was explored in the chapter on Otherness, in that there is an apparent urge to appear to be shouldering as much of the difficulty experienced by migrants as possible in order to balance out the feelings of guilt that are held by those with comparatively more freedom. Even when activists want to become emotionally close to migrants, local people and each other in order to share their vulnerabilities, feelings of guilt and ideas of their own privileges sometimes cause activists to mimic this charitable service-oriented approach, feeling that their own privileges mean it is better to listen and be strong than to share their own difficulties. It also connects to the way that activist burnout occurs, in that there is a desire to take on as much misery of Others as possible, to do the most support work possible, to organise politically as much as possible in the hopes of balancing out the ways that migrants are produced as Other, in comparison to the rest of the activists involved in these projects.

Even when the misery of migrants is not being used as a way to gain credibility with other activists or to structurally challenge the Othering of migrants, the immigration system requires migrants to be in as abject a position as possible in order to be considered for asylum. As a result, activists in Calais find themselves encouraging migrants to be explicit about experiences of violence and torture in preparation for their interview with the UKBA. A key function or activity of activists participating in Calais Migrant Solidarity is to offer migrants an opportunity to run through a list of questions that people have been asked during their initial interview with the UKBA. The answers migrants give at that initial interview have been found to have significant bearing on whether or not their claim is accepted, and more than this,

any inconsistencies in stories can result in deportation<sup>74</sup>. Failure to give full details of experiences of rape and torture until later interviews means that the UKBA often counter that the claims have been fabricated because these experiences were not mentioned initially. Communicating this sort of information to migrants, along with expressing the importance of explicitly detailing all the moments of extreme vulnerability and other similar advice, does tend to replicate an environment of seeing migrants as little more than survivors of tragedy, and thus furthering a culture of Otherness.

This demonstrates why activists in Calais Migrant Solidarity are keen to extend beyond being more than the providers of a service who undertake tasks such as explaining UKBA interview questions. It points to the politics of why people want to make social and spaces together, and make space to discuss the political implications of a system that requires people to make themselves appear as helpless as possible in order to receive asylum in the UK. Collaborating on projects in the everyday are some ways activist and migrant subjectivities are tied together, as will be explored in the next section.

## **6.8 Building Capacity through Caring for Others and Ourselves**

I often get people contact me through our visiting group website and say they want to go out to a detention centre and visit people and yeah I think yeah you can be just an ordinary person sitting in the community burning up about what's happening including to the asylum seekers and your immediate reaction is I want to go and hug them, I want to hold them and I want to talk to them and say the government doesn't represent me...

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<sup>74</sup> There is more detail in the below report From Asylum Aid (2011 p.52) about the penalties associated with inconsistencies in personal accounts of the, often traumatic, experiences leading people to claim asylum. There have been cases of this leading to asylum claims being refused on the grounds that they have been dishonest: <http://www.asylumaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/unsustainableweb.pdf>

(Interview with Frank, 2014)

It is this 'burning up' that I will consider next: the feeling that 'ordinary' individuals are sitting at home simultaneously 'burning up' as a result of the 'hot' injustice dealt by the state in detention centres and then replicated in our own social relations. Frank asks how to turn this burning heat in to a collective desire to change the conditions that maintain immigration controls, and this is a question I will follow in this chapter. Frank is suggesting that many people are at home 'burning up' and that this could be a moment of political 'awakening' that threatens to erupt into human-to-human action and care, care that can be generalised and expanded upon.

This section looks at the ways in which caring for others, caring for oneself and building spaces in which to undertake these tasks may be part of this collective desire for change. Gilson calls vulnerability a 'condition of openness, openness to being affected and affecting in turn' (2011, p. 52). This is something that came through in my interviews; many people started to look into injustices against migrants and asylum seekers only to feel so moved that they committed to spending much of their spare time contributing to what they hoped would make things better for others and thus for themselves (interviews with Rita, Anna, Kavita, Farida). Mia thought of her involvement as emerging from her experiences of homophobia, she had a sense that as a "minority group, if they come for the migrants first we could be next" (interview with Mia). Following these observations, Judith Butler advises us to see universal human vulnerability not as a problem, or negative emotion, but rather as a potential basis for community and 'a nonviolent ethics' (2016). By taking into account social and structural factors it becomes clear that some people are made more vulnerable than others and their lives are also 'less grievable' (Butler, 2009, p. 1). The particular and intersecting vulnerabilities of migrants, women, local Calaisians and other activists, when seen as a common place to begin the process of

collective politics, may offer hope of better ways of performing intersectional inclusion as part of our work. These vulnerabilities lead me to ask: Who does the 'caring' tasks? How can individuals acknowledge their own vulnerabilities and blockages in how they might be able or unable to offer solidarity? I would argue that this is where self-care becomes care for Others. It is in acknowledging our limits emotionally and physically before engaging in difficult tasks that vulnerability can be used for collective change.

Anna was keen to differentiate the kind of politics she wanted to participate in as different both to direct action and simply visiting detention centres and taking on the issues associated with individual cases. She wanted members of No Borders to collectively look at the forms of care that members are comfortable giving to each other, such as debriefing after violent protests to make sure people are okay, and wanted the collective to be looking to be involved in the ways that activists live their lives and reproduce themselves:

Me: What would be an example of migrant solidarity you could give?

A: Care. And how we care for each other. Communities of care rather than the kind of care where we just share about our emotional processes after especially violent or troubling actions or demos, which is the only care we give now, if we even manage that. Things that are behind the scenes. Much more low-level stuff... communities basically. Actually this makes me think about what Hywel said on the panel at the No Borders convergence, you know about communities of care and the kind of care migrants extend to each other and micro activism and things like that.

(interview with Anna, 2013)

Can we collectivise vulnerability through care? Is this part of understanding the ways that migrants care for each other as part of the mobile commons (Papadopoulos and Tsianos, 2013; Bishop, 2012)? Alongside caring for each other is the need to care for ourselves, as indicated in the previous sections on activist burn out and mental health problems and the way these cause alienation and a sense of being Other to activist communities. Collective thinking is needed to work with and through the vulnerability of Others in order to keep them involved in our networks of care.

These politics indicate the kind of solidarity work that is both non-normatively 'political' and caring. The production of alternative forms of existence is considered as 'part of an 'imperceptible politics' of the mobile commons (Papadopoulos et. al, 2008). These are politics that are imperceptible, first because we are not trained to perceive them as 'proper' politics and, second, because they create 'moments of excess' (The Free Association, 2011) that cannot be addressed in the existing system of political representation. But these politics are so powerful that they change the very conditions of a certain situation and the very conditions of existence of the participating actors, creating a mobile commons (Tsianos, et. al, 2012, p. 450). There are glimpses of the utility of these politics in the shared organising spaces in Calais; in the stories that are told when cooking together, in the connections that are made on one side of the border and then the other and the emotions that erupt when meeting old friends in new places.

In Calais, shared organising spaces must be rejuvenating and reconstituting in order to continue to nourish and encourage the involvement of those participating in

these struggles. The focus should be on caring for each other, thinking about what is possible together, theorising individual and collective experiences of vulnerability and what we can learn from them (Institute of Precarious Consciousness, 2014), and undertaking discussion and action so that a new kind of sustainable activist subjectivity can come in to being.

### **6.9 Preparatory Time, Self-care as part of Solidarity activism**

When people volunteer to visit detention centres, go to participate in solidarity work in Calais, spend time in night shelters and even undertake direct action like stopping deportation flights at airports, this chapter has shown that people may do this out of an acknowledgment of their own vulnerability and an acknowledgement of their inextricable links with Others. This is not always easy work, and in undertaking solidarity work, at times there needs to be a kind of personal compromise, looking away from the priorities each individual might make and instead choosing to work on issues strategically rather than because everyone involved shares the same set of norms or values. It does not always feel easy.

With this in mind, this chapter will now, finally, look at the different ways that empathy is linked with understanding and the acknowledgment of vulnerability. I will consider the powerful political use of this kind of empathy to offer what you can to Others. If there is a belief that the liberty of Others is tied to your own, as the much-claimed phrase suggests<sup>75</sup>, then the kinds of statements that Frank made in

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<sup>75</sup> “If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time. If you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.”(Lila Watson, aboriginal activist, 1972. For more details see [lillanetwork.wordpress.com](http://lillanetwork.wordpress.com))

his interview about who volunteers to visit detention centres becomes clear. Those who come forward can be anyone who is watching what happens in detention through the computer or television screen and wanting to show care to those impacted. Activists have attempted to redress the lack of spaces in which to share and be vulnerable with one another through what are termed 'activist practices of care' by Feigenbaum, Frenzel and McCurdy (2013) in their book on protest camps, where they recount:

By the early 2000s, counter-summit, No Borders and World Social Forum encampments were learning from the previous decades by pulling together strategies... infrastructures and practices for well-being and care in a territorial form. Childcare, communal cooking and well-being spaces were common-place. At the same time, issues of sexism, sexual violence and aggression were taken up in meetings and workshops...

(2013, p.210)

As raised in my interviews with Kavita and Anna, although providing these sorts of spaces (or offering it if requested, as is the case with childcare) has at times become more of a 'box-ticking activity', the desire to create more caring spaces for when people feel vulnerable has the potential to become more central to the way that transnational migrant solidarity groups reproduce each other.

Part of seeing self-care as part of collective organising is examining the invisible and often gendered and raced work that is done prior to engaging with transnational migrant solidarity organising spaces. In this sense, taking time for oneself is preparation for undertaking actions that could be personally stressful but taking time for self-care is also pre-figurative: processes of looking after ourselves and others is enacting and creating the world you would rather live in, now. Looking at

the different ways activists relate to what is called 'preparatory time' (Gordon, 2010) we can begin to see the ways in which creating moments of time for ourselves whilst focusing on the ways in which we can relate to others' ability to do the same is part of collectivising vulnerability and ensuring that it is met with care and understanding. There is radical potential in witnessing and bringing to light the invisibilised labour of preparatory time, both in allowing those who undertake this labour to feel acknowledged and for those who do not need to do work around feeling safe in these spaces to understand the work that Others are doing.

'Preparatory time' is described by Avery Gordon as the temporal and emotional investment that each person involved in changing personal and social circumstance puts in to preparing for future upheavals. She uses the term to write about slaves who planned to escape servitude in Mississippi in the 1860s and all the emotional, physical and financial effort that was put in to becoming a 'runaway'. This preparatory time could be in the form of squirrelling away smart dresses from their mistresses' wardrobes so that they could travel undetected or exchange the dresses for money or a place to stay, to organising places to hide out along the railroad, to saying goodbye to friends, to learning to speak in particular ways (Gordon, 2014). This speaks to the anecdotal experience of migrants in Calais in terms of preparing to leave their home countries, and in particular the work behind saying goodbye to loved ones (fieldwork notes, 2014). This term has been taken up by campaign group 'Sisters Uncut' to talk about the time that domestic violence survivors put into leaving abusive relationships, including the role of external and under-resourced bodies such as charities who specifically collect the pets that belong to these women, as victims often cite the need to care for their pet as a reason for taking so long to leave violent domestic situations (Sisters Uncut, 2015). For these women, finding someone to care for their pets is part of the preparatory time needed to leave an abusive partner.

This kind of preparatory time is evidently something that women in particular engage in in the lead up to participating in No Borders activism. The quotation from earlier in this chapter by Koshka helps us to imagine that preparing to be in Calais when you know that the kind of emotional and physical stress that you are likely to be existing under is a labour that must not be ignored. Her suggesting that when preparing for her time in Calais she reminds herself that it can take fifty per cent of her energy just to 'cope with deflecting sexism and looking after my personal safety' when at the site is striking and worth further examination. (Koshka, August 2014). Preparatory time, or the time we spend reproducing ourselves in order to continue to be activists, is a kind of work that anyone who feels vulnerable in engaging in particular sets of politics or spaces will have to undertake. Part of developing a reflexive political practice that orients around the intersectional inclusion of Others is recognising preparatory time and how it is differently distributed.

When discussing what Rita felt was motivating and demotivating about No Borders meetings, she mentioned how she had to 'gear herself up' before coming to meetings. On one hand she knew she would have to try to keep up with what had to be discussed in order to put on an event (she was organising the No Borders Convergence at Goldsmiths, University of London), and on the other, she was trying to keep track of what appeared to be glaring gender disparities and hierarchical power relations along gender lines and whether it felt useful or appropriate to raise them:

It's difficult for me because there's a sense in which I don't want to think about these issues because as soon as I think about them I get really wound up and it's just a frustrating thing to think about because you don't want every left-wing thing you do to be the same old problem again... totally gendered and hierarchical and I think, don't think about that now because you'll drive yourself crazy but it's just the same thing over and over again, I had to gear myself up to attend most organising meetings knowing that no matter what we decided it could be

‘undecided’ by a certain group of power-holders.

(interview with Rita)

The features of preparatory time unfold as gendered. This is what Boudry, Kuster and Lorenz refer to as ‘sexual labour’ (1999), where Rita realises that engaging with other activists ends up being a commitment to either push against or endure negatively gendered opinions or attitudes:

in No Borders I don’t very often feel unsafe but that’s to do with me, I think another person might find it more offputting than I do. Like I’m fine to go to meetings where it’s almost all heterosexual men because I feel like I’m in quite a strong position and I don’t have a whole history of bad experiences which would make me feel nervous and stuff so I feel OK. When there’s lots of heterosexual men and they’re being dominating I feel personally like I can know that it’s alright, but it’s not alright.

(interview with Rita)

In Rita’s experience, enduring sexism didn’t always take place during meetings, but also at the pub afterwards, the place where often the collective itself is reproduced. She discussed a time where members of the collective went to the pub afterwards and a friend told her that one of the guys was probably going to ‘make a move’ on her but that she should ignore him as he was known to be sleazy and already had a girlfriend. ‘[A]nd maybe it was meant to be a compliment but really underscored how gendered the whole experience was’ (interview with Rita). She noted that this was partly why she was ‘too tired’ to be really involved with No Borders; there was too much hidden labour involved in her participation as a woman, which was exhausting.

Another kind of ‘preparation’ for engaging in syncretic spaces (Gilmore 2008), where supposedly unconnected or contradictory narratives may come into contact

with one another that was discussed in my interviews emerged in my interview with Leigh. She spoke about the importance of ensuring that she entered the detention centre feeling clear and confident in herself so that she could engage with migrants without assuming they held any opinions about homosexuality, while also not appearing interested in opening this as a conversation that she is willing to have in any great detail if asked,

Yeah, and when people have asked us directly, so do you have a boyfriend and I say Sarah's my partner and it's never been a problem, and I don't get embarrassed, they don't get embarrassed, I don't have any ... I think because of Albania where I'm out and it's a supposedly a patriarchal (society) where having a gay relationship would be really weird, but I look like a guy, well I have a shaved head and I wear men's clothes and have a girlfriend... I don't leave any space for it to be weird. Well, not more weird than me in general!

(interview with Leigh)

I did not discuss with Leigh at the time whether gathering her confidence to go into these spaces felt like a form of gendered or sexualized labour, but it is a contribution, a use of preparatory time, to ready oneself for interactions that cannot always be easy to prepare for. Although my participants would not go into detail about it, it was acknowledged that Sofia, Kavita and Anna were deferred to for political solutions in particular moments because they were the only 'ethnics' (Anna's term) at many No Borders meetings (interview with Anna, Sofia, and Kavita). I decided not to get either Anna or Kavita to go in to detail about how this felt or came across; I realized I was asking them to do a particular kind of labour that they did not want to do for this project. The preparatory time undertaken to enable the involvement of people of colour in No Borders is important, but I do not go into it here as my participants did not elaborate the matter in the interviews.

This section has looked at vulnerability as something that is negotiated on a personal level so as to enter collective struggle. It acknowledges the labour that

individuals are constantly doing so as to be equipped to participate in collective structures. This activity is shaped by the categories examined in the previous section of this chapter, i.e. preparatory time is undertaken differently by those who are experiencing activist burnout, those who have to feel that their mental health is in order before engaging in politics, for those who experience racism, sexism or homophobia. In the final section this chapter will look to projects that focus on creating sustainable spaces and practices for collective social reproduction. These political structures show us how immensely important social reproduction is to the long-term viability of projects that centre around (physical) collective space as well as emotional relations. There are various challenges to creating sustainable projects in Calais, as will be discussed in the conclusion, but collective spaces for shared vulnerability and the empathetic negotiation of this continues to be an ongoing task for Calais Migrant Solidarity and is likely to be for some time.

#### **6.10: Challenges to building sustainable spaces and practices**

One way to negotiate and collectivise vulnerability is through establishing spaces and environments where activists, locals and migrants can mutually sustain each other in ways where vulnerability is acknowledged and care is placed at the centre of these spaces. It is not within the scope of this thesis to outline the networks of care and methods by which migrants already extend care to each other (see Bishop, 2012), except to note that Calais Migrant Solidarity is certainly shaped by this. This is particularly apparent considering that the only advertising about what Calais Migrant Solidarity offers occurs through word of mouth. Through building relationships with activists and migrants, these people would then suggest to newer migrants in Calais that the hangar or a particular squat was a space to go to during the day for a cup of tea and a conversation and was no more subject to police raids

than anywhere else. An article written by another member of Calais Migrant Solidarity found this in his research in Calais. He referred to CMS being a 'mobile commons' in which people would:

...pass on information about opportunities for work, or for places of work where the conditions are less exploitative, to lend someone documents knowing you'll never see them again, to show someone where best to cross the border without necessarily having to use the services of paid smugglers, where to shelter while on the move and so on. Focusing first on transnationalised care and how migrants create and draw on such networks to both become and remain mobile, or as they attempt to settle, as well as to enable those with caring commitments, such as children, to manage such responsibilities.

(Bishop, 2012)

Bishop's extension of traditional understandings of social reproduction and the ways that lives can be reproduced collectively across borders is an important background to the work being done by activists involved in Calais Migrant Solidarity and the ways the collective sees social reproduction as a space for sharing vulnerabilities through care. There is a particular difficulty Calais Migrant Solidarity faces in our ability to organise these spaces which foreground care and vulnerability in that our populations are completely mobile. This is different from other solidarity groups. Migrants are rarely in Calais longer than six weeks, activists are rarely there longer than a month, and local people involved in the project constantly have to move to find work, as unemployment is incredibly high in Calais (for more on this, see the section the Chapter Two concerning precarious economic situation in Calais). It is very difficult to build spaces that everybody can feel safe in and can trust to be reliably reconstituting, though efforts at regroupment after evictions have been mostly consistent up until this point (fieldwork, August 2014).

The destruction of these sorts of spaces can be direct, such as the state calling in joint police operations from all over France and England destroy the Jungle Village in 2011 (Crawley and Crochard, 2016), but also in more subtle ways. In an interview with a charity worker Jean Le Roy, he was certain that local government funding to the charities to provide lunch for the migrants had been withdrawn not because they didn't want to provide food for migrants, but because the food distribution had become a hub of discussion and organising by the migrants, locals and activists. He was certain that the threat was collective organising, not the existence of the migrants themselves in Calais:

Only one half of the people come to the food distribution...their communities are quite strong, they have good solidarity, there are some asylum seekers who have some money from the state and maybe they have some money to buy some food, sometimes they avoid to come like that. But it depends also about solidarity between people. Yeah it's going to be a problem for people who really are blocked here without any money but it's not necessarily the majority of the people. But also the food distribution is at a moment where not everybody is coming for food but a lot of people come and it's a meeting place where you can meet people and try to understand what is going on.

(interview with Jean, March 2013)

The collective often fails to hold onto the spaces in which the collective could perform the necessary social reproduction to make this kind of space feel sustainable or even less vulnerable to demolition. This is evident when examining the 'social spatial forms of enclosure' (Gordon, 2010), like the jungles, The No Borders Office, the squats and food distribution centre. What does it mean to the group's ability to build and sustain spaces to reproduce ourselves when we are at constant risk of having our 'assets stripped'? (Woods, 2009, p. 769). It is for this

reason that Bishop's argument about the importance of the mobile commons, and the office as a vital part of that, come to have meaning.

The idea of creating sustainable mutually beneficial relationships across migrant solidarity projects is also feasible in some instances through building ongoing relationships with detainees in detention. This is more possible when you look at detention centre visitation in some instances as, although legally this should not be the case, sometimes people are held for years at a time:

So, for example I was visiting a woman in her 50s, and they found a lump in her breast... actually her family had already been settled nearby. One of her sons lives a short drive away with his wife and her only granddaughter, but it's a long way though when you've got no job, or money it's impossible so they couldn't come and see her even though they were really worried about her cancer. So I organised to go down there and pick the family members up and took them there for a visit. Yeah, and you know, I'm more connected with the migrants in that area now, more connected with these people in the detention centre through doing all that, and it's little things like that.

(interview with Frank)

This is the kind of connection that might fit with the mobile commons in the following ways, and indicates the kind of solidarity work that is both non-normatively 'political' and caring. The production of alternative forms of existence is considered as 'part of an 'imperceptible politics': politics that are imperceptible, first because we are not trained to perceive them as 'proper' politics and, second, because they create an excess that cannot be addressed in the existing system of political representation. But these politics are so powerful that they change the very conditions of a certain situation and the very conditions of existence of the participating actors, creating a mobile commons (Tsianos, et al., 2012, p. 450).

It is clear that in Calais, we must reproduce ourselves as activists in order to continue to be involved in these struggles. We care for each other, we think about where we are and what we can do. But it does not always feel sustainable and often it is individualised, as shown in the discussion of preparatory time. It is only through collectivising and theorising these experiences of vulnerability - both of the migrant and the activist who experiences gendered oppression, mental health problems, feelings of hopelessness and burnout - and through discussion and action that a new kind of sustainable activist subjectivity can come into being.

## **Conclusion: Collective Vulnerability as Insurgent Power: Safety, Otherness and the Case for Collectivising Vulnerability**

This thesis will conclude with some examples of the power that can be seen in everyday vulnerability to demonstrate how we can begin to see this as something that needs to be collectivised, not to make it easier on Others but because it is a form of counterpower solidarity activists can and must wield. I will begin by looking to Fatima and her example of vulnerability as a form of insurgent familial power. Then I will look to the example of ‘consciousness-raising’ groups in the UK that took place from 2015-16 in order to use individual experiences of precarity to situate their politics through forms of shared investigation. Finally I will explore the account of ‘not having enough locks’ written by migrant solidarity activist Kate Evans when volunteering in Calais, and will consider other ways communities can come together to be the safety mechanisms in our activist camps, even in our most vulnerable of moments.

In our interview, Fatima situated her personal background by telling me about the anti-state groups her family had connections to in parts of South East Asia as a way of explaining that she and her family were always and had always been ‘outsiders’, which she believed led to them being so accepting of her queerness. She told me of their escape from government forces and the difficult negotiations around being marked as terrorist sympathisers when undertaking asylum applications. In trying to explain the ways in which her familial expectation to be a ‘freedom fighter at heart’, very beautiful and insightful comments about race and Otherness came spilling forth (interview with Fatima, 2014). For Fatima, her experience of family members who had always been fighting to be free and at the same time always subject to criminalisation both by the governments of their home nations and once settled in the Global North, meant that she was accustomed to seeing vulnerability as a sign of ‘insurgent power’ (interview with Fatima). Collective vulnerability as a form of insurgent power made immediate sense to Fatima. ‘[T]his is who we (our

family, our people) always were' - Others standing together through and against the conditions of shared vulnerability. Whilst she was mostly referring to those who are vulnerable by way of state persecution and experiences of racism, she was certain that this way of looking at power had translated in to an open-mindedness towards her queer sexuality, a welcoming of her white partner, and an encouragement of her revolutionary Marxist activities.

Part of creating a culture of shared vulnerability so that conditions could be changed in activist communities and society more generally was the project of feminist organising practices in the 1970s consciousness-raising (CR) groups. These groups of no more than 12 women met up regularly to discuss their lives, and according to Shulamith Firestone were the backbone of second-wave feminism (1970). I participated in a consciousness raising activity with Plan C in 2015 and collectively wrote the call out for people to participate. 'CR groups provide a wide and thoughtful base of supporters and militants who examine their lives, take hold of their experiences, politicise them, develop theory based on them, and take action relevant to them' (Plan C, 2015). These ideas have been built upon and modernised by the Institute for Precarious Consciousness and will be discussed below. Consciousness-raising in the 1970s was not only undertaken as a 'pedagogical method - of disseminating already-constructed theory, in the hope of marshalling people towards readymade action' (Plan C, 2015) but was also used as a radical tool for collectively creating theory and devising praxis. There is a lot to learn that can be read in books (and archives). But there is also a lot to learn which can only come from a collective and sustained examination of activists' lives and experiences (Plan C, 2015). People found these groups to be personally challenging but also brought about a higher level of consciousness in the groups, especially around issues of economic precarity, mental health problems in the group and the connections between the two. These sorts of experiments are an example of an attempt to collectivise vulnerabilities felt by members of the group by situating them in a political and theoretical context though engaging with people's experiences in a

generous and political way and as a way of fighting back against the consciousness deflation of neoliberalism (Fisher, 2016).

Kelly spoke about what she saw as the limits in her NGO job in terms of politicising and contextualising the vulnerability that migrants were experiencing, and the ways she saw conversations about vulnerability happening without people also trying to make plans about new ways of being together, which could be deeply demotivating:

Currently I'm involved in running Refugee Radio, at the moment I'm running a participatory project for refugees who've experienced trauma. There are ten members and they get together and conduct a panel session which is really focused on sharing experiences around trauma that they may have encountered, not just in their country of origin but trauma from the journey to the UK and their experiences in the UK. It's a really emotional space, which is powerful, but it is easy to get stuck there. I'm really interested in this idea of collectivising vulnerability because I think that's the kind of thing missing from these conversations sometimes. Not always, but sometimes. It's not the focus is what I mean.

(interview with Kelly, 2013)

The group Kelly is running could relate to the first phase of what the Institute for Precarious Consciousness calls 'producing new grounded theory relating to experience', but Kelly felt that the group would benefit from a structured approach to the next phase, 'recognising the reality, and the systemic nature of our experiences'. This is not to say that the group doesn't already do this; Kelly felt confident that there were forms of sharing and organising happening that related to the group she ran that would definitely have fit this remit. However, she wasn't sure exactly where the affect of vulnerability could start to feel like a form of power, although she was sure she had witnessed it. The Institute for Precarious

Consciousness, and the consciousness-raising groups connected to it, argue that emotions such as vulnerability need to be transformed into a sense of injustice, a type of anger which is less resentful and more focused, a move towards self-expression, and a reactivation of resistance (2014). The difference between this and consciousness-raising groups is that CR is not about being a space for group therapy (though they are more than happy for it to produce therapeutic side-effects as well as to strengthen solidarity by creating and intensifying affective ties (Institute for Precarious Consciousness, 2014). This practice, they suggest, 'cannot be separated from our self-organisation and action as people engaged in struggle. We are doing this in order to act more powerfully and effectively as revolutionaries. But we believe that revolutionary strategy must always be based on collective discussions of the experience of life' (ibid., 2014). Creating spaces where these discussions can take place is known as 'creating a dis-alienated space'. An example of where activists and charity workers could attempt to create such a space is below.

The following story is particularly important in terms of understandings of safety, security and Otherness in Calais. Kate Evans wrote a piece for the New Internationalist on her time as a volunteer in Calais (2016). She went to volunteer in Calais for the charities and was given the job of minding the tool tent to make sure nothing was stolen and that everything that used by the volunteers was, taken stock of for replacement. She noted that during the time she was volunteering what felt like 'hundreds of people' came requesting a lock for their tent, but she couldn't give them one, as the charity only had three in a box and she wasn't sure for what purpose they were needed. She tried to point out that it is pointless locking the door of a dwelling that can be slit down the sides with a Stanley knife. But, she says, everyone wants to be secure. A lock on the front of a tent has become symbolic of that person's security in Calais (Evans, 2016).

None of us can ever be indisputably safe or secure as activists, volunteers or migrants in Calais, desperately clamouring for the only three locks available. Of course the more structurally-privileged are the most likely to get them, and the volunteers could demand one as part of the conditions of their stay. But it doesn't make any one of us safer, or only marginally, it just makes activists and volunteers less like the migrants with whom they wish to show solidarity. This thesis argues that our relationships need to circumvent the need for individual locks; Our relationships need to be seen as the key to safety. If people are desperate enough to break in to each other's tents in a refugee camp then there is a lot of work that needs to be done collectively to change the social conditions that encourage this to happen. In many ways this connects to the problem of gender inequality in Calais. Every woman is vulnerable all day, every day, to gendered violence, yet we spend days, months and years trying to make ourselves safer through policy, agreements and debates, because we live in sense of constant vulnerability. What would it take to do away with our locks? What would it take to think about how to defend women's safety without establishing a Security Group to patrol racialised members of our solidarity camp?

Of course the battle is not just about our fears and feelings. As Ruth Wilson Gilmore argues, racism is 'the state-sanctioned or extra-legal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death.' She continues, 'It's not about feelings and words; it's about the devastation visited upon communities of colour by systems like capitalism and white supremacy' (2007 p.28). Safety is about structural power as much as it is about personal relationships. As the feminists behind consciousness-raising projects would have it, safety and who becomes Othered in the search for it, is differently distributed. Through the process of writing this thesis it became clear (mostly during my fieldwork period) that rather than dealing with the different experiences of otherness by attempting to forge a solidarity based

around sameness or lack of conflict, activists were seeking instead to move further from solutions that required solidarity through unity (Brown, 2014) and towards embracing more chaotic and marginal tactics and fluctuating moments of coherence- collectivising their individual vulnerabilities as part of an everyday praxis of shared social reproduction.

This leads me my closing arguments. The main question of this thesis looked at whether collectivising social reproduction within migrant solidarity organising spaces can offer alternatives to current forms of organising that put the focus on struggling against power dynamics outside of the collective and instead bring the focus inwards. This is important because some actions to 're-balance' the imbalances in the group along the lines of gender and race can in fact further processes of Othering, as detailed in the chapter on Otherness where the critical whiteness collective's focus on identity impacted upon democratic decision making processes and taking action together. This thesis has made the argument that through intersectional inclusion rather than a reliance upon shared common values migrant solidarity activists can move from viewing our Otherness from each other as a barrier to instead seeing it as an invitation to embrace the marginal, vulnerable aspects of ourselves and Others . I have also looked at preparedness and preparatory time as a form of openness to danger and bravery that needs to be acknowledged as part of the differentiated distribution of power experienced by activists- and thus the need for reflexivity about the labour this entails for marginalised individuals in our spaces. In the quest for becoming ungovernable transnational actors, I've argued for the communalising of everyday social reproduction and the idea of care as mobile and existing beyond reliance upon infrastructural integrity.

This thesis explored whether migrant solidarity projects necessitate collectivising individual vulnerabilities and redeploying them as tools in the quest to be open,

brave, reflective and mutually sustaining, and in our desire to struggle together. Through my interviews, participant observations and my own experiences in Calais, I believe the building blocks for future work around collectivising vulnerability through practices of intersectional inclusion are a vital part of the work being undertaken by migrant solidarity organisations in Calais, London and elsewhere and look forward to the opportunities for future research and work in this area.

I was also intrigued by the intense scrutiny in the mainstream media in the summer of 2016 focusing on the romantic and sexual relationships between migrants and charity workers in Calais<sup>76</sup>, and the approach to the issue which furthers regressive ideas around a 'migrant sexuality' and the sexuality of presumed-white women who are portrayed as both exploiting the migrants and also as victims of an aggressive 'Outsider' sexuality. In the future I may explore what relationships between migrants, activists and charity workers look like on the ground, how power operates within the non-profit sphere and whether or not regulating the sexuality of Others, either through practices of banning these relationships (as undertaken by the larger charities such as Calaid), or by informal practices of shaming, as I have witnessed in the activist community of Calais Migrant Solidarity (Calais Migrant Solidarity 2016) in my research results in the atmosphere of collectivism and diversity these organisations claim to be working towards. Finally I would like to explore with the activists and charity workers what possibilities they believe there are for a truly diverse community of Others in Calais. Of course there are equally interesting projects around Otherness in activist communities and their approaches to restorative justice that I would like to explore. There is much more to learn.

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<sup>76</sup> More can be found here: 'Calais Jungle Volunteers accused of sexually exploiting camp's refugees' (Bulman, 2016),

I have grown a lot personally throughout this process and will never forget the experiences I had in Calais, especially as a heavily-pregnant woman eating dinner in a carpark with new friends, that have brought me closer to feeling that community organising and vulnerability are key to prefiguring a world in which everyone can negotiate questions of safety, security and Otherness in healthy, productive and collective ways.

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