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Impossible Protest: noborders in Calais

Joe Rigby and Raphael Schlembach (**author's post-print**)

Since the closure of the Red Cross 'refugee reception centre' in Sangatte, undocumented migrants in Calais hoping to cross the border to Britain have been forced to take refuge in a number of squatted migrant camps, locally known by all as 'the jungles.' Unauthorised shanty-like residences built by the migrants themselves, living conditions in the camps are very poor. In June 2009 European 'noborder' activists set up a week long protest 'camp' in the area with the intention of confronting the authorities over their treatment of undocumented migrants. In this article, we analyze the June 2009 noborder camp as an instance of 'immigrant protest.' Drawing on ethnographic materials and Jacques Rancière's work on politics and aesthetics we construct a typology of forms of border control through which to analyze the different ways in which the politics of the noborder camp were staged, performed and policed. Developing a critique of policing practices which threatened to make immigrant protest 'impossible,' we highlight moments of protest which, through the affirmation of an 'axiomatic' equality, disrupted and disarticulated the borders between citizens and noncitizens, the political and non-political.

Keywords: Protest, policing, Franco-British border, camps, Rancière

The Afghans that come to the camp do not come for food and blankets, although it is very nice, this is not what we come for. Every time I come to meetings we discuss blankets, but we are not hungry, we do not come for blankets, open the borders (Afghani Migrant, noborder camp, Calais, June 2009)

How are we to understand this demand, made by a young Afghani migrant, immobilized, because undocumented, in the non-place of the Franco-British border? Is it a claim, an 'act' of citizenship, constitutive of a subject to whom the right to have rights (the right to freedom of movement) is due (Isin and Nielsen 2008, p. 2)? The question could indeed be considered a 'scholastic' one (Bourdieu 1990), divorced from the practical urgency of the situation, were it not for the fact that the Afghani's statement was itself aimed at questioning, quite directly, the content of the demand

‘open the borders.’ It was made as an intervention in a meeting held as part of a ‘noborders’ ‘protest camp’ which took place in the French port of Calais between 23 and 29 June 2009. The camp, conceived by British, French and Belgian noborder activists and organized and run in cooperation with undocumented migrants and aid organizations in Calais, was intended as a way of confronting the border authorities over their treatment of undocumented migrants trying to reach Britain.

In what follows we analyze the events and discourses surrounding the June 2009 noborder camp as an instance of ‘immigrant protest.’ Such a site is, we argue, particularly productive for thinking about the relationship between immigrant protest and contemporary citizenship. It acutely condenses what Imogen Tyler and Katarzyna Marciniak describe as the increasingly visible gap ‘between the democratic promise of citizenship and its mobilization as a mechanism for controlling the movements of people’ (Tyler and Marciniak *in this issue*). We show how on the border in Calais, and in the Calais noborder camp, citizenship was less a catalyst for political mobilization than a device for the policing of political subjectivity: part of a sovereign policing apparatus that, through various practices of *immobilization*, threatened to make acts of protest, or at least ‘immigrant protest,’ impossible. ‘Citizenship’ was a way of defining and policing the borders of who and what could count as political. Protest in the noborder camp thus necessarily entailed a ‘refusal of citizenship as the organizing frame of political subjectivity’ (Tyler and Marciniak *in this issue*).

There is, perhaps, nothing particularly surprising about this: immigrants cannot protest because they are not citizens. Their lack of political capacity is what defines their situation. Immigrant protest is *per definition* impossible. Yet it happens, or threatened to happen, hence everywhere in Calais the presence of the police. We demonstrate how immigrant protest involved confronting this imputed impossibility

through the assertion of an ‘axiomatic’ equality against sovereign and inegalitarian divisions. We conceptualize such moments of protest as moments of subjective dis-identification which, through staging scenes of what Jacques Rancière calls ‘dissensus’ (2010), call into question the limits of politics and the ‘impossibility’ of protest.

The intervention reproduced in our epigraph, for instance, was made as a direct challenge to the ‘content’ of the noborders movement: did the movement, as a political movement, include the physical movement against borders, or not? If so, then why did its meetings revolve around questions of ‘food and blankets’ and not the border itself? The intervention dramatized the apparent disjuncture between the (citizen) protest and the (noncitizen) movement against borders. In doing so it called for the verification of the political equality of the movement and the protest against borders.

In order to analyze the different ways in which the politics of the noborder camp were staged, contested and policed, we draw on Jacques Rancière’s work on politics and aesthetics to construct a typology of forms of ‘border policing’ or ‘border control.’ We think that Rancière offers some significant theoretical resources for rethinking citizenship (for alternative accounts see Nyers 2003; Nyers 2008; Panagia 2009). In particular, his maxim that every political community is also an aesthetic community, a particular ‘distribution of the sensible’ which governs a particular way of doing politics and grants a certain legibility and intelligibility (or not) to political action, alerts us to a key dimension of the political. Politics is not simply concerned with a certain kind of activity, less it be confused with the act of governing or the exercise of power, but crucially with the account given of this or that activity as

political or not. This is the 'aesthetic' dimension at the core of the political and a key site of any political struggle.

Using Rancière's work we demonstrate how citizenship provided one such political aesthetic, one idiom through which the divisions of sovereign politics exerted an effect on the politics of the noborder camp. Drawing on Rancière's (1999, p. 21-42) analytic of 'politics and police' we also show how 'humanitarianism' and 'activism' presented alternative but related prisms through which the border was both contested and regulated. The purpose of constructing this typology is not only to highlight the different forms of political domination, but to show the avenues of protest and political subjectivization that inhere as blind spots *within* these modalities of border control.

We begin with an introduction to the struggle between border authorities and undocumented migrants in Calais, before moving on to an analysis of the policing of a public demonstration held as part of the noborder camp on 27 June 2009. We develop the meeting between protestors and police on 27 June into a paradigm for the conflict over the borders of the political, between the sovereign act of bounding the political and egalitarian acts of protest which tend to undermine every border and every division. Rancière's work is useful to us in this context since instead of assuming or importing a set of positive distinctions - between citizenship and noncitizenship, the political and non-political, the possible and the impossible, it is sensitive to the fact that on the border, and in the protest against it, these become the very objects of dispute. In answer to the question posed by our epigraph, we will argue that 'noborders' is not a claim or an 'act' of citizenship, but an attempt to develop a politics of equality autonomously from the categories of citizenship, sovereignty and the state.

Bienvenue à Calais

Located on the north French coast, Calais overlooks a narrow and heavily trafficked straight of sea to the British port of Dover. Despite being a fully-fledged member of the European Union, Britain remains only a partial signatory of the Schengen Agreement - the treaty which in theory requires member states to abolish internal border controls with one another (Europa 2010). In part because of Britain's geographical and political relationship to the rest of Europe, but also in part because of the 'Europeanization' of immigration and asylum law (see Tsianos and Karakayali 2010) the presence of undocumented migrants hoping to reach the UK has become something of a recurrent problem for the Calais authorities. The imaginary of the clandestine migrant, both in Calais and in the rest of Europe, has also become a vehicle for the more general articulation of a complex of anxieties over border security and cooperation, migration and welfare provision, and asylum and citizenship in contemporary Europe (Walters 2008, p. 182)

Calais first staged the play of these specifically European anxieties in 2001-02. 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. The migrants, it was argued, were using the centre as a base from which to attempt clandestine border-crossings to the UK (Freedman 2004, p. 64-9). Following the termination of the Red Cross' Sangatte operation in 2002, undocumented migrants living in Calais have been forced to take refuge in a number of squatted migrant camps, locally known by all as 'the jungles.' Conceited from discarded materials and disused structures, nestled amongst sand-dunes, scattered

across waste-lands, or lodged in abandoned industrial zones in and around Calais, living conditions in these ‘jungle’ camps are very poor. Built by migrants themselves and intended as temporary residences, the intensification of Franco-British border control in the port made the camps into more permanent habitations, with a stay of 6 months or more not being uncommon. A United Nations spokesperson who visited the area in 2009 is reported to have said that he had never visited a refugee camp anywhere in the world with as ‘impossibly insanitary conditions’ as some of the Calais jungles (cited in Kirby 2009).

The very framing of Calais’ ‘migrant problem,’ insofar as it relates to the problem of *non*-European nationals trying, illegitimately, to reach Britain, outlines the contours of a specifically European racism (Balibar 2004, p. 44). Thousands of foreigners or ‘migrants,’ in the sense of non-French nationals, pass through Calais everyday. Yet for certain of these ‘migrants’ – tourists, businesspeople, *European* labourers – their ‘migranhood,’ as far as the border is concerned, is erased (Andersson 2008).

Visiting Calais and straying a little from the neatly-kept gardens and parks of the *centre-ville*, what Etienne Balibar (2004) invoked as the spectre of a European apartheid accompanying the development of a nascent European citizenship is given a very worldly apparition: spatial segregation, administrative detention, expulsions, enforced material deprivation, the rule of force for some and the rule of law for others. Among the many stories of police brutality we were told, we heard accounts of how police chased migrants by baton from public parks, corralled them into police vans only to abandon them miles out of town, destroyed their settlements, stole or pissed on their belongings, and contaminated their water supplies with CS gas.

Sandro Mezzadra has suggested that the emergence of such spaces as the Calais jungles within the European space gives the European Union a decidedly 'postcolonial constitution.' They mark a situation in which 'the "metaborder" between metropolis and colonies no longer organizes any stable world cartography' with the consequence that colonialism, and its organizing binary of 'citizen and subject,' re-emerges as a stratifying factor 'within the territory of the former metropolises themselves' (Mezzadra 2006, p. 35). In Calais the borders of the new Europe meet the struggles of migration, and the fissure at the heart of European citizenship is given a particularly callous expression. In Calais, Europe divides into two.

In keeping with this divisive geography 'camp' has become a recurrent designation in cultural responses to border struggles in Calais: the Red Cross 'refugee camp' at Sangatte, the shanty-like 'jungle-camps' around the port, the noborders 'protest camp' in June 2009. There are of course significant differences between a camp run by an international agency, a self-organized itinerant camp or slum, and a temporary protest camp organized by activists. Yet such commonplaces perhaps express a truth about some important features of the space of the border.

Giorgio Agamben has proposed the concept of 'camp' as the key to understanding the operation of modern sovereignty (see Agamben 1998; 2005; Diken and Laustsen 2005). Drawing on the politically opposed analyses of biopolitics and sovereignty in the respective works of Michel Foucault and Carl Schmitt, Agamben shows how sovereignty must be understood as a bordering practice, tracing a threshold between inside and outside; or in our context, citizen and noncitizen, documented and undocumented. Yet border crossings introduce a crisis at the very heart of the space of the border, creating 'a zone of indistinction between outside and inside, exception and rule' (Agamben 1998, p. 170). 'Camp' designates a permanent

spatial arrangement for dealing with this crisis, a space in which the tracing of the threshold between inside and outside, citizenship and noncitizenship, is continually being drawn.

Crucially, the tracing of this threshold produces ‘a limit-figure of life, a threshold in which life is both inside and outside the juridical order, and this threshold,’ writes Agamben, ‘is the place of sovereignty’ (Agamben 1998, p. 27). Life in the jungle-camps does approach this ‘limit-figure,’ what Agamben calls ‘bare’ or ‘naked life.’ The camps are in a sense outside Calais since for those living there the ‘normal’ civil protections and rights of redress do not apply. And yet precisely because of this life in the camps is much more closely subject to the scrutiny of the law and the rule of the police.

Agamben’s work is important for it complicates the oversimplified perspective that the problem of the camps can be solved through a simple granting of citizenship rights. Borderlands and camps don’t simply separate citizens and noncitizens. They produce the political existence of the citizen and the bare life of noncitizenship *together*, through their very separation. Hence confronting the camps necessarily involves a critique of the politics of citizenship, resting as it does on the constitutive scission between bare life and political existence.

Agamben’s analyses have been criticized for being pessimistic and totalizing (see Agamben 2004), and for excluding the question of political economy from a consideration of the camps (Mezzadra and Neilson 2003). And it is important not to overemphasise the extent to which the camps are effective in immobilizing migratory movements (Papadopoulos et al. 2008, p. 162-221; Bojadžijev et al. 2004). The Calais jungles were, after all, not just spaces of immobilization, but largely self-organized sites where migrants planned their next move. Nevertheless we think that

Agamben's concept of the camp is useful for showing how sovereignty provides a powerful motor of depoliticization – 'naturalizing' the right of some to control the movement of others, and that the camp is, like the border, a zone of indistinction, a space of conflict where the distinction between bare life and political existence, citizenship and noncitizenship, is resisted and imposed.

The noborder protest camp reflected this. A similarly liminal space, it accentuated and blurred the boundaries between citizens and noncitizens in different ways. During the week that the camp was held around 1000 noborder activists, undocumented migrants and local youths created and shared a self-managed space located near the centre of the port and some of the migrant 'jungle' camps. Some meetings and political discussions were held in four or five languages, and exchanges, encounters and confrontations occurred which temporarily disrupted the habituses, rhythms and everyday lives of the activist, the citizen and the undocumented. At its most principled level the camp called for the immediate abolition of controls on the movement of people, and for the intensification of the movement against systems of control dividing people into citizens and noncitizens.

Protestors and police

As part of the planned activities for the noborder camp a public demonstration was scheduled to take place on 27 June. Some months ahead of the demonstration the county mayor of the Pas-de-Calais region, Pierre de Bousquet, asserted that whilst the demonstration would be allowed to take place, it would be forbidden for 'the migrants' to take part. They were being forced into demonstrating, he argued, and warned that the *Compagnies Républicaines de Sécurité*, police specializing in public order, would be there to keep his word.

More than simply opposing his police force to the bodies of the protestors, the mayor framed the protest itself within what, following Rancière, we will call a police conception of politics – reflected in, but nevertheless irreducible to, the activities of the actual police. As Rancière puts it: ‘The police is, essentially, the law, generally implicit, that defines a party’s share or the lack of it’ (Rancière 1999, p. 29). When the mayor declares that the migrants have no place on a public demonstration he speaks with the voice, even promises the force, of the police.

Come the day of the demonstration it was clear that the mayor intended to make good on his promise as roughly 2000 police officers met around 1500 demonstrators. The police operation, which mobilized riot-equipped officers, water-cannons, a helicopter, armoured vehicles, police horses and dogs, had the very visible effect of preventing many of ‘the migrants’ from joining the demonstration. One Iraqi recalled how the police had blocked the roads leading from the site of the noborder camp to the beginning of the demonstration on the port-front. After a short stand-off between a group of protestors and police, officers decided to let the group pass on condition that passports or other identification documents were shown. When our interviewee shrugged his shoulders at the police officer asking him for his passport, the officer replied: ‘No passport – then go back to jungle.’

The Iraqi’s story was a common one. On the day of the demonstration the police effectively established border-control points at strategic points around the town centre and the planned route of the demonstration; wherever possible demanding that passports and identity documents be shown. The words ‘no passport – then back to the jungle’ became something of a refrain amongst those we asked to reflect on the day of the demonstration.

An Afghan teenager we spoke to described how he had walked with a group of about 400-500 protestors from the noborder camp and had almost reached the agreed starting point of the demonstration, a few kilometres walk from the noborder camp and many of the squatted Afghani migrant camps. At one point the bloc passed an asbestos riddled building squatted by African migrants. Some of the demonstrators went to hand out leaflets and make contact with a group of African onlookers. Riot police quickly established lines to separate and prevent contact between the demonstrators and the onlookers. At this point a plain clothed police officer stopped the young Afghani and asked to see his passport. After failing to produce one the officer nodded tellingly to him: ‘if you want my advice, I’d leave the demonstration’ – and with that, taking heed, he left the demonstration. He explained all this to us later the same day, adding: ‘many people are very afraid of coming on the demonstration. They are afraid that the police will take a serious action on the spot. They are afraid of being deported.’

The policing of protest on 27 June involved restricting protest to those with the proper documentation, to those with a *recognized and identifiable* citizenship status. The police and the mayor sought to delimit and define the proper place where, and the persons amongst which, politics and protest could take place. Policing literally involved maintaining the border and a certain distance between citizens and noncitizens, ‘not so much the disciplining of bodies as a rule governing their appearing, a configuration of occupations and the properties of spaces where these occupations are distributed’ (Rancière 1999, p. 29). At stake in the confrontation between protestors and police was the very appearance of subjects in public space:

Police interventions in public spaces consist primarily not in interpellating demonstrators, but in breaking up demonstrations... It consists, before all else, in recalling the obviousness of what there is, or rather of what there is not, and its slogan is: "Move along! There is nothing to see here!" The police is that which says that here, on this street, there's nothing to see and so nothing to do but move along. It asserts that the space for circulating is nothing but the space of circulation (Rancière 2010, p. 37).

The police defended the very perimeters of the possible and the impossible, a certain 'distribution of the sensible' determining 'the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience' (Rancière 2004, p. 13). The politics of the noborder camp did not begin in some pre-established domain of the political, but in the struggle over whether or not migration could be a site of politics at all. It began with the struggle against the police assertion that 'the space of circulation is nothing but the space of circulation.' This brings us to the 'aesthetic' dimension at the core of political. An originary confrontation revolving around 'what can be seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time' (Rancière 2004, p. 13). We further discuss this policing of the political, this partitioning of the possible and the impossible in the politics of the noborder camp through our typology of border policing below.

Border policing I: sovereignty

Through the physical control of the space of the border the police force in Calais bring sovereignty concretely into play. The dividing practice of the police, separating citizens from noncitizens, legitimate protestors and border-crossers from the

illegitimate, reflects a more global characteristic of the politics of undocumented migration. As Angela Mitropoulos and Brett Neilson note, there is a tendency even *within* political struggles surrounding undocumented migration such as the noborder movement for such movements ‘to fracture on a biopolitical or racialized axis: between movement understood in a political register (as political actors and/or forces more or less representable) and movement undertaken in a kinetic sense (as a passage between points on the globe, or from one point to an unknown or unreachable destination)’ (Mitropoulos and Neilson 2006).

‘Border policing,’ in this context, relates not just to the fact that those without papers were prevented from demonstrating, but to a more general aesthetic division in the account given of what constitutes a political movement. The separation of ‘movement as politics’ from ‘movement as motion’ consistently presents the acts of undocumented migrants, their *movements* as ‘bereft of political decision and action,’ thereby suturing politics to sovereignty and territoriality (Mitropoulos and Neilson 2006).

In the popular language used to describe the border struggle in Calais a whole aesthetics of sovereignty tends to divide and fracture sociopolitical space. Symptomatic in this respect is the popular designation of the squatted migrant camps as ‘jungles.’ Insofar as some of the camps were situated in small wooded areas, the camps really did resemble ‘jungle’ or ‘forest’ dwellings. Still other camps were set amongst sand dunes or in disused buildings, but more or less all of them were referred to as ‘jungles.’

This description of the migrant camps as ‘jungles’ rehearses an older opposition between city and forest which, for centuries, has played an important role in the development of modern sovereignty. The most infamous deployment of this

imagery in political theory is of course the Hobbesian narrative of ‘the state of nature’ as the violent and unruly state of human coexistence before the establishment of sovereign political rule. Political life, for Hobbes, is only possible on condition that a sovereign power exists which is capable of effectively ruling on conflicts of interest and matters of security, or else politics becomes impossible and life reverts to being ‘nasty, brutish and short.’

In a classical sovereign gesture opposing the state of nature to the rule of law the French Immigration Minister, Eric Besson, speaking of his intention to destroy the Calais migrant camps in April 2009 remarked: ‘the law of the jungle will not rule either here in Calais or anywhere else in France.’ ‘The jungle will not exist anymore’ (BBC News 2009). The problem with this temporalized and temporalizing picture, however, is that the existence of the Calais jungles is not a consequence of the absence of rule. They are the consequence of a series of undeniably political decisions on the part of British and French governments, including the decision to withhold even the most basic forms of assistance to undocumented migrants in Calais:

The state of nature is, in truth, a state of exception, in which the city appears for an instant... *tanquam dissoluta* [as if it were dissolved]. The foundation [of the city] is thus not an event achieved once and for all but is continually operative in the civil state in the form of the sovereign decision. What is more, the latter refers immediately to the life (and not the free will) of the citizens... Yet this life is not simply natural reproductive life, the *zoe* of the Greeks, nor *bios*, a qualified form of life. It is, rather, the bare [naked] life of *homo sacer* and the *wargus*, a zone of indistinction and continuous transition between man and beast, nature and culture (Agamben 1998, p. 109).

Sovereign authority founds itself on the identification of a non-political element, bare or naked life, within the political realm. When this bare or naked life becomes the subject of political regulation and decision, politics becomes *biopolitics*: ‘literally the decision concerning the unpolitical’ (Agamben 1998, p. 173). The police officer’s refrain, ‘no passport – back to the jungle,’ outlaws or abandons the undocumented migrants from the city, the site of politics, to a condition of bare or naked life in the state of nature - excluded from politics but nevertheless subject to power.

To an extent, the jungle-camps are experienced as a machine of naked-life, stigmatizing their inhabitants, ‘immobilizing’ individuals in their identity as excluded others (Bauman 1991, p. 68). One of our interviewees noted the social production of the stigma they carried: ‘some people say that Afghani people are not clean, but we live in the jungle, how can we be clean, in the jungle it is not possible to be clean.’

Yet the aesthetics of sovereignty did not go unchallenged, and the line separating bare life and political existence was not one that can easily be drawn with any finality. Besson’s sovereign gesture is founded on a ‘mythological’ power sustaining the fantasy that he can, and does, keep the spheres of ‘city’ and ‘jungle’ apart. The need for the actual police, their show of force and weapons, signals the contingency of this boundary, not its immutability (Rancière 1999, p. 28; Agamben 2000, p. 104-5). One of the Afghani migrants we spoke to protested against the desocializing and dehumanizing nature of his subjection: ‘We don’t want to live forever in the jungle, are we not human, why they treat us like this, are we not humans, are we not all brothers?’ Sovereignty denies this commonality, it is, as Roberto Esposito notes, ‘the not being in common of individuals, the political form of their desocialization’ (2008, p. 61). His challenge was thus to the perceptual frame of

sovereignty, to the sense of what was common between us from that defined by sovereignty and the police. His specific challenge to us as interviewers was to openly admit that, positively, he was not an equal - that he did not 'count' as a brother, whilst at the same time verifying that he was human, an equal, and a brother.

Far from directly claiming citizenship rights or affirming a different identity and way of life from that forced on him by the police, his protest proceeded *via negativa*. It consisted not in the affirmation of one kind of political community against the one that excluded him, but in demonstrating the 'impossible' community of the world where his humanity and fraternity was valid and the world where it was not. He invoked 'humanity' and 'fraternity' not as regulative ideals against which the reality of the world came up hopelessly short, but put them to use as part of the 'configuration of the given,' as inscriptions which give equality a form of visibility (Rancière 2010, p. 68).

Significantly then, and herein lies the specific force of his challenge to sovereignty and the police, he did not claim to speak only for himself, or on behalf of some excluded others, but in place of *anyone*. His protest constructed, against the partial and conditional 'universalism' of the police order, a singular case of universality *by means of an assumption of equality*. What sovereignty cannot tolerate is the universal claim of equality across, or 'in spite of' (Tyler and Marciniak, p. 15), the citizen/noncitizen divide: the coming of a 'whatever' subject, rejecting all properties of identity and representable conditions of belonging (Agamben 1993, p. 87). 'Properly' speaking, of course, we are not all brothers. Fraternity here has the structure of an aesthetic 'as if,' implying a certain substitutability or equivalence, *as if* we are all brothers (Rancière 2009, p. 278-80).

Equality *as* substitutability is axiomatic to his protest; hence instead of *identifying* with the substantive content of his suffering, protest entailed a dis-identification with his position, or lack of position, in the social order. A dis-identification which simultaneously called for a dis-identification on the part of the whole community from the community as such: ‘are we not human, are we not *all* brothers.’ ‘The opening up of a subject space where anyone can be counted since it is the space where those of no account are counted, where a connection is made between having a part and having no part’ (Rancière 1999, p. 36). His protest made manifest this dissensus between having a part and having no part. It staged the ‘dissensual’ or ‘impossible’ presence of ‘two worlds in one’ (Rancière 2010, p. 36-7). We are *all* human, we are *all* brothers, or we are not.

Border policing II: humanitarianism

In March 2008 Calais elected a new town mayor, Natacha Bouchart. Upon being elected Bouchart responded to fears that a ‘Sangatte mark II’ was to be established to deal with the problem of undocumented migrants living in the jungles. Between 1999 and 2002 when the Red Cross ran its Sangatte operation it is estimated that in excess of 75,000 migrants passed through the centre (Walters 2008, p. 182). There would be ‘no new Sangatte’ asserted Bouchart. Taking a soft line on the problem of undocumented migrants in Calais, such as providing them with food and shelter, she argued, would only encourage attempts at clandestine border crossings from the port (Sparks 2008).

The creation of a new Sangatte-style refugee camp has been consistently presented as a ‘humanitarian’ alternative to the contemporary border regime in Calais. In the absence of such an arrangement destitute migrants rely on the goodwill and

charity of individuals and organizations, such as *Association SALAM* and *La Belle Etoile* for food on a daily basis. For their opposition to the hard-line policing strategy such individuals and groups have been threatened with criminal charges through what has come to be known as the *délit de solidarité*, or ‘crime of solidarity.’ Article L622-1 of the French Penal code makes it illegal to assist, directly or indirectly, the arrival, movement or residence of persons irregularly present on French territory. The offence is punishable by a €30,000 fine or up to five years in prison. Whilst the law is primarily used to convict people engaged in people trafficking, it is also the background against which the activities of individuals and organizations assisting those living in the jungles have been disciplined and curtailed.

The organizing networks for the noborder camp recognized that they were entering a field already framed by the work of civil society and humanitarian organizations. The *délit de solidarité* had, to a certain extent, ‘politicized’ the issue of basic material assistance to undocumented migrants in Calais. Nevertheless noborder activists were keen to challenge what, in ‘humanitarianism,’ they saw as a limited framework of understanding. Some activists were even highly critical of the aid organizations’ work (albeit recognising that differences existed between the various ones). During a meeting held in the noborder camp, one stressed the role that humanitarianism played in maintaining the domination of the state, reproducing it on a voluntary level. ‘The state relies on you,’ was his charge to the representatives of aid organisations.

There was a definite attempt by some in the noborder camp to move beyond a simple opposition between humanitarianism and politics. To this end, food and shelter and washing facilities were available for anyone who came to the camp and a medical treatment centre was established on site, run by first-aid trained activists. There was

of course no question of being able to provide anything like the level of care, permanent habitation and subsistence required. But all these activities became a central part of the struggle to achieve a sense of collective security and self-organization in the camp and materialize a different kind of political space in Calais.

Despite this the immediate situation of the migrants living in Calais was so bad that, even in the space for political discussions made possible by the camp, humanitarian sentiments often overrode more explicitly political discussions. This caused audible frustration within the camp, best expressed by the individual whose statement provides the opening epigraph to this article: ‘The Afghans that come to the camp do not come for food and blankets, although it is very nice, this is not what we come for. Every time I come to meetings we discuss blankets, but we are not hungry, we do not come for blankets, open the borders!’ The overall consequence of this humanitarianism was that the politics of the noborder camp risked remaining confined to a consensus set by the space of the border, and hence sovereignty, itself.

Symptomatic in this respect was the prevalent valorization of humanitarian ‘realism,’ typically contrasted with the ‘idealism’ of the ‘noborder’ position, even when the suffering caused by the border itself, and not just some contingent feature of it, was manifestly what was at stake. Such ‘realism’ is part of a ‘police logic of order, which asserts, in all circumstances, that it is the only thing possible to do’ (Rancière 1999, p. 132). Protest on ‘humanitarian realist’ grounds reduces protest to a contest over ‘the possible’ which can only ever mean, at a fundamental level, a conservative acceptance of the existing framework for grasping problems and their solutions. Protest is not ‘the art of the possible,’ but rather ‘the art of the *impossible* – it changes the very parameters of what is considered ‘possible’ in the existing constellation’ (Žižek 1999, p. 199).

In fact the Calais migrants have no shortage of ‘impossible’ stories concerning their journeys and escapes. When viewed from the perspective of those trying to cross the border, humanitarian ‘realism’ is in fact thoroughly ‘idealist,’ subordinating the material struggle against the border to the problem of rights and their recognition. Here idealism is, as always, an apparatus for purging or disavowing material antagonisms. A group of Afghani’s we spoke to highlighted the continuity between war in Afghanistan and their struggle against the border authorities in Calais. ‘If we categorize the whole journey [from Afghanistan to Calais], this here [Calais] is more difficult than the whole journey.’ Asked how the situation they faced in Calais compared to the situation they faced in Afghanistan, one replied bluntly, ‘no, no, Calais *is* Afghanistan.’

This ‘impossible’ claim of a single world of Calais and Afghanistan is precisely what the border is there to deny. Yet it is significant that the majority of would-be border crossers held up in Calais originate from countries which have had or continue to have some colonial and/or imperial relationship to Britain – their desired destination. In 2009 the majority of undocumented migrants in the Calais jungles were from Afghanistan and Iraq. Other significant groups included migrants from Iran, the Congo, Sudan, Ethiopia and Eritrea. Their movements constitute a *reversal* of the flow of imperial expansion, refusals of the ‘naturalness’ of their subordinated positions in these ‘other’ worlds (Mitropoulos 2007a, p. 129-30).

Within the noborders movement the concept of ‘the autonomy of migration’ has been developed as a way of orientating noborder politics around an insistence on the constituent and political element of migratory movements. As Manuela Bojadžijev and Serhat Karakayalı point out, developing their account of the autonomy of migration thesis, ‘the border regime does not transform of its own accord, but rather

obtains its dynamic from the forms of migration movements' (2010). This is not to attribute an isolated 'agency' to migrants, but simply to appreciate that although migration is 'entangled within relations of power and domination... this does not mean that migrants are forever condemned to reproducing these relations in the same way.' Migration and mobility are both a source of exploitation *and* 'the symptom of flight from relations of exploitation and oppression' (Bojadžijev and Karakayali 2010). The wager of 'the autonomy of migration' is, then, that the border, like the factory, is both a site of suffering and a vector of antagonism.

At stake in the struggle over the border in Calais, but also in the mediation of this struggle in public discourse, in the practice of professional sociology, journalism and so on, is the control of the borders of the political itself:

In presenting the act of migration as something outside the field of politics [as economic, familial, criminal, humanitarian, environmental] the very definition of what a [political] movement and politics is remains tied to the organization of democratic representation in a very precise sense, and so, *in turn*, the terrain in which migration occurs appears as that which must be controlled, regulated, and mediated (Mitropoulos 2007a, p. 131).

In terms of 'protest,' the autonomy of migration this helps to conceptualize the border as a site of struggle. When compared to other analytical frameworks 'autonomy' reintroduces dissensus into the border struggle in Calais. It is a determined act of de-classification and dis-identification, an exodus from the existing and proliferating categories of migration. The autonomy of migration proposes an analytic through which to make migration not simply visible, but visible as an activity: the act of an

equal will and intellect. The autonomy of migration is a concept and the everyday practice of equality. 'Equality is not given, nor is it claimed; it is practiced, it is *verified*' (Rancière 1991, p. 137). And it can only be verified if there is something common on both sides of the border. The autonomy of migration '*opens the possibility* for analytically and practically connecting various struggles within the context of migration,' for creating a framework for 'a broader movement in the concerns of migrants,' 'beyond basic pity and general human rights' (Bojadžijev and Karakayalı 2010 our emphasis).

'We must never look only to the tip of the iceberg,' urges Yann Moulier-Boutang, 'the institutionalized forms, or the word of the people... supposing that, as soon as the aren't saying anything, they aren't acting... the silences, the refusals, and the flight [are] something active' (2001, p. 227). To restrict our discussion of protest to those moments when injustice was 'obviously' challenged would be, we argue, to redraw the perceptible divisions of the police order which see in undocumented migration only the symptom or malaise of some other economic, military, humanitarian or criminal dysfunction.

Border policing III: activism

In contrast to the relatively invisible and/or apolitical construal of migrant subjectivity in Calais the activities of citizen-activists were highly visible. Almost *any* act by a 'protester' was seen as politically motivated and thereby subject to the limitations set by the local authorities and police. Arrests were made for the most mundane of activities, attempts to leaflet shoppers in the town centre were prevented, flyers, activist newspapers and even toilet rolls were confiscated. Police barred a planned football match that the press had been invited to and which was to take place on a

pitch not far from the noborder camp with mixed teams of migrants, activists and local youths. A trip to the local supermarket, which would have otherwise only taken a few minutes, could take in excess of an hour as activists underwent passport controls anytime they strayed far from the site of the noborder camp. These policing tactics, however, far from making protest ‘impossible’ for the activists, in effect made it very difficult for activists to act in a way which was not considered ‘protest.’ Indeed it was little possible to walk around the town without being recognised as ‘one of the noborder,’ and challenged by Calais residents on political motivation, violence and anarchism.

The local press ran sensationalist stories dramatizing an impending violent clash between noborder ‘militants’ and police. On 27 June, the day of the public demonstration, half the town centre was shut down. The front page of the daily paper *Nord Littoral* carried an image of noborder activists dressed in black, donning hoods and face scarves: ‘Day of truth for the no-borders,’ ‘D-Day has arrived’ ran the headlines. The popular mediation of the noborder camp tended to emphasise the relationship between noborder activists and police effectively restricting what was considered intelligible as political action to the actions of the noborder ‘activists.’ Whilst the mainstream accounts of the noborder camp did not go unchallenged in the form of alternative media, still other ‘actions’ did little to unsettle the validity of this image of activism.

In any case the spectacular opposition between noborder activists and the police, dramatized by both sides, in fact masks a more fundamental identity between them. Invariably in this picture what gets presented as ‘activism’ essentially remains defined by the state. Recall the mayor’s declaration that the protest of 27 June would indeed be able to take place, only that ‘the migrants’ were to have no part in it. In the

event the protest was strictly limited to a previously agreed and heavily guarded route, away from the town centre and ferry-port. Policing the separation between migrants and activists involved not only denying undocumented migrants the capacity of protest, but also framed protest and ‘activism’ in a particularly statist way.

Wherever ‘activism’ remains defined by the state, even if this means opposition to it, it fails to put itself ‘at a distance to the state,’ denying ‘at bottom any active autonomy, any real independence, any affirmative political virtuality, to what rises up in the enraged rebel of good faith. ‘Down with repression!’ leads no further than a *placed* reactive’ (Badiou 2009, p. 32). That is, ‘activism’ had both a place and an identity in the context of the border struggles which tended to limit the contours of protest to a reaction to the regulations, discourses, categories and practices of the state.

One British activist, for instance, super-glued his hands to the doors of the Town Hall in Calais, his bare back carrying a bold penned message: ‘showers for the migrants!’ The assumption behind this kind of action is that the ‘exclusion’ of undocumented migrants from systems of political representation calls for an ‘activism’ which will ‘represent the unrepresented.’ But this notion of ‘representing the unrepresented,’ whilst introducing issues which were certainly not on the mainstream political agenda, in fact reinforces the very same divisions it seeks to oppose. The ‘excluded’ (‘the migrants!’) become ‘included’ through this call for recognition, a call which in marking a political deficiency or lack only ends up reaffirming, rather than challenging, the necessity of a sovereign power capable of recognizing it (Mitropoulos 2007a, p. 131).

In this sense then, ‘activism’ is much less a synonym for political action than a definition of it, a ‘distribution of the sensible’ circumscribing ‘what actions and

dispositions might be deemed properly political and therefore, by contrast, those which are not.’ Moreover, what gets deemed as ‘protest’ in this conception of politics is ‘for the most part, the kinds of [actions] that make representational claims possible... One does not speak, or act, for oneself, but for others’ (Mitropoulos 2007b). This matching of interests to be represented with positions and identities in fact *forecloses* protest. Since everybody, ‘including the excluded,’ is already accounted for, the mechanisms of appearance whereby the ‘impossible’ community of citizens and noncitizens could be demonstrated or staged are in advance effaced (Rancière 1999, p. 116). The ‘excluded’ are ‘included’ through the very discourse of exclusion. Thereby closing ‘spaces of dissensus by plugging intervals and patching up any possible gaps between appearance and reality, law and fact’ (Rancière 2010, p. 71).

‘Activism’ is the other side of what remains after the separation of movement as motion from movement as politics. Whilst there was much talk and criticism in the camp about the appropriate vocabulary with which to refer to ‘the migrants,’ there was less practical interrogation about the limitations which ‘activist’ identity placed on the approach to border protest. But in separating the protest from the movement against borders, the border became a more global instrument of political domination, and not just one affecting ‘the migrants.’

The separation of movement as politics from movement as motion divides ‘word’ from ‘action.’ Protest is permitted, possible, solicited even, so long as it is not connected to any concrete threat of change. In this context protest literally becomes a matter of ‘spectacle,’ in Guy Debord’s sense. The spectacle as ‘the culmination of humanity’s internal separation’ (Debord [1967], p. 20) exiling art from life, images from action. At first glance the society of the spectacle seems to radically affirm and

valorize ‘appearances,’ making politics and protest into a question of appearances. Yet it is actually the precise opposite. ‘Appearance’ stands not simply for an image, but for the *arrival* of something which marks a difference or initiates a change, a *reconfiguration* of ‘the space where parties, parts, or the lack of parts have been defined,’ which *undoes* ‘the perceptible divisions of the police order’ (Rancière 1999, p. 30, 95-105; see also Žižek 1999, p. 191-98).

‘Post-politics’ is another word for this ‘disappearance of appearance,’ this severing of the link between words and action (Diken and Laustsen 2005, p. 170). In post-politics anything can be political, so long as it is disconnected from a sense of movement understood as the possibility of real change. It is thus the very antithesis of dissensus. In post-politics the spectacle of a border protest without consequence coincides with the biopolitics of border struggles pushed to the limits of bare life:

To the media devices which control and handle the public word thus corresponds the technological devices which register and identify naked life: between these two extremes of a word without body and a body without word the space of what we formerly called politics is increasingly more reduced and exiguous (Agamben cited in Diken and Laustsen 2005, p. 65)

There were, however, and continue to be, practical attempts to overcome this division between the protest and the movement against borders. Following the noborder camp in 2009 a new organization in Calais has been established, ‘Calais Migrant Solidarity.’ Instead of simply campaigning on behalf of the Calais migrants, the group take their directions from the border struggles of the migrants themselves, offering practical support, monitoring police activity, documenting and where possible

preventing arrests and the destruction of migrant settlements. There are of course limitations to this kind of ‘resistance,’ but in disarticulating the implicit border (and hierarchy) between ‘protest’ and ‘movement’ Calais Migrant Solidarity perhaps present a challenge to post-politics. A new politics? A new politics beyond citizenship?

Conclusion

‘At stake in every politics of border control is the control of the borders of the political’ (Mitropoulos 2007a, p. 131). Or, put differently, an essential part of any political dispute concerns the very ‘politicity’ of the dispute itself (Rancière 2010, p. 35). In this paper we have analyzed the play of this conflict as it played out in the context of the Calais noborder camp. Each of the *dispositifs* of border control which we have analyzed, from ‘citizenship’ and ‘sovereignty,’ through to ‘humanitarianism’ and ‘activism,’ each define a particular ‘distribution of the sensible,’ a particular aesthetics of politics, a certain mapping of ‘the visible, the intelligible and also of the possible’ (Rancière 2006) that we found to be particularly effective in the way the politics of the noborder camp was staged, regulated and contested.

In making a terminological distinction between ‘protest’ and ‘police’ we hope to have shown that the internal dynamism which animates our diagrams of border control is not reducible to a power struggle over what can and cannot count as political. ‘Protest’ and ‘police’ work according to two totally contradictory logics. ‘Police’ works according to inegalitarian logic which always sets out to police the borders of the political through defining not only the space and subjects of politics, but also the space of non-politics. From the perspective of the police the *dispositifs* define strategies for controlling the borders of the political: relations of visibility

between power, knowledge and the subject, particular definitions of politics and the subjects that are proper to it.

‘Protest,’ by contrast, proceeds through an egalitarian logic which explodes every border of the political, ‘*displacing* the borders of what is acknowledged as “the” political’ (Rancière 2010, p. 149 our emphasis). It is a displacement which occurs from within a given regime of the perceptible but, since equality is not a ‘property’ of the arrangement, by a logic which does not ‘belong’ to it. Strictly speaking then, from this perspective, equality is indeed ‘impossible,’ but this does not mean that it cannot exert an effect.

We have shown some of the ways in which the logic of equality disrupted the activities and distributions of the police. How certain inscriptions of equality are put to use within the different modalities of border control, even if their effectiveness tends to be subordinated to the distributions of places, properties and roles (Rancière 2010, p. 207). Policing does no so much as ‘deny’ equality, as ‘wrongs’ equality, and protest occurs wherever the verification of equality is obliged to turn into the disputation of this wrong (Rancière 1992, p. 59).

Our conclusions resonate with a question posed by Imogen Tyler; that is, if citizenship is deployed (if not ‘designed’) ‘for purposes of disenfranchisement and political dispossession, in what sense can it be said to retain any radical promise for social justice?’ (Tyler 2010, p. 72). Historically, citizenship has been built on exceptions: the exception of colonial subjects, of women, of the non-propertied classes, the young, the mad, and so on. This is, we would argue, a consequence of conceptualizing citizenship in terms of a property which individuals can, and therefore cannot, possess. The demand of ‘citizenship for all’ does not escape this quandary (Hindess 2004).

The novelty and hence the promise of ‘noborder’ politics lies not in its demand of ‘freedom of movement for all,’ not as an ‘act’ or claim of citizenship, but in its capacity to disrupt the tentative ways in which the borders of the political are policed and produced. That the critique of one form of border control has a tendency to call another figure of the police into existence, as we move from sovereignty, to humanitarianism, to activism, shows, we believe, not only the importance of thinking through the complexities of the relationship between politics and movement (Mitropoulos and Neilson 2006), but also the importance of thinking through equality, not as a property or end, but as a political axiom - not least for a movement which privileges the struggle against borders in the fight for emancipation.

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