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Mémoire de fin d'études

The Horizon of Action:
Conduct and Agency in the France-UK Borderscape

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Abstract

The France-UK borderscape is characterised by hostile conditions that structure the lives and movements of people on the move seeking to cross the Channel. While existing literature has extensively documented these conditions and their effects, this thesis examines how they structure the possibilities through which people on the move conduct their lives. It asks how people on the move in the France-UK borderscape respond to hostile conditions. Drawing on 6 weeks of immersive ethnographic fieldwork, this thesis examines the lived experiences of people on the move across different sites in northern France. The analysis finds that hostile conditions produce a fluid and unequal *horizon of action*, shaping which possibilities are available, sustainable or worth pursuing, without determining how people act. Within this horizon, people navigate the possibilities that remain, suggesting a form of situated agency that is neither reducible to determination nor to resistance or resilience against border power. At the same time, everyday actions of sociality show that conduct within the horizon is not exhausted by its relation to border power. The thesis therefore proposes the horizon of action as a way of understanding how border power structures conduct without reducing the exercise of agency to responses to it.

Keywords: borderscape, France-UK border, hostile conditions, horizon of action, conduct, agency.

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To my family and closest friends, without whom this thesis and master's wouldn't have been possible, who had to endure hours of self-reflective monologues during phone calls and also challenged my critical thinking.



(Self-taken picture)

For those who were killed through, and for those who had to endure the horrors of the border.

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1. Introduction

We were at our distribution point at the entrance of the living site. It was a sunny day. The mood was nice; we drank tea, had good conversations, laughed a lot, played football, and the children played board games. People seemed relaxed. Then, very suddenly, someone announced that an opportunity to cross had arisen and they'd have to leave, now. The relaxed mood quickly changed as people began packing their belongings and rounding up their families and friends. Once everyone and everything was gathered, the group left in a hurry. A few minutes later, my colleagues and I left as well. As we drove away, we saw the group standing at the bus stop – waiting again (Fieldnotes, undisclosed date).[1]

This scene captures the shifting character of everyday life in the France-United Kingdom (UK) borderscape. Moments of sociality, leisure and waiting existed alongside preparations for onward movement, while opportunities to cross could suddenly reorganise people's actions and the rhythm of the day. Yet, such moments of acceleration did not necessarily bring movement itself, as the group's return to waiting at the bus stop illustrates. The scene therefore raises a broader question about how people conduct their lives within conditions that constrain, interrupt and continually reshape what can be done. To approach this question, it is first necessary to clarify what is meant here by the France-UK border.

The France-UK border is here not understood simply as the territorial boundary separating the two sites. This thesis speaks of the France-UK border in the broader sense, including the dispersed practices, infrastructures and spaces through which movement towards the UK is governed. While scholars generally speak of the UK-France border to highlight the externalisation of the UK border to French territory (e.g. Welander, 2020), this thesis foregrounds the French site to highlight where the bordering practices occur that are examined here. Such an understanding follows scholarship that has moved away from perceiving borders as fixed territorial lines and towards understanding them as processes that are produced across a field of sites, practices and relations (Rajaram & Grundy-Warr, 2007; Brambilla, 2015; Wille, 2021). The concept of borderscape is especially useful for capturing this fluid character of the border (Brambilla, 2015), and will be used in this thesis rather than to speak simply of the border. It describes the border as mobile, relational and perspectival (Rajaram & Grundy-Warr, 2007). A central defining feature of this borderscape examined in this thesis is the production of hostile conditions. In this thesis, the notion of hostile conditions is used as a broad term for conditions that adversely affect, constrain, or disrupt the lives and movements of people seeking to cross the

[1] Exact dates are withheld and information abstracted throughout the thesis where sensitive material, combined with temporal information and other fieldnotes, could enable the reconstruction of locations, participants, or practices.

channel. Such conditions have been documented through, among others, practices of abandonment, exhaustion, and the disruption of infrastructures of liveability (Davies et al., 2017; Tazzioli, 2021; Welander, 2020).

Scholarship on the France-UK border has documented how border controls and practices extend beyond the territorial crossing and are enacted through the material and spatial conditions in which people seeking to reach the UK live and move. Studies on the France-UK border have examined, for example, political abandonment and inadequate provision (Davies et al., 2017), eviction and destruction of living spaces (Van Isacker, 2019), dispersal (Tazzioli, 2020), as well as policing and border control (Welander, 2020). Alongside this literature, scholars have further examined how people on the move act within and respond to the border, including through strategies of resistance and survival (Briké, 2016), the construction and reconstruction of material spaces (Mould, 2018), practices of mobility (Scott-Smith, 2022), sites of contestation (Rygiel, 2011), gendered negotiations (Hagan, 2023), as well as legal and institutional navigation (Lendaro & Roland, 2023).

Existing scholarship has documented both the hostile conditions produced through the France-UK border regime and the various ways in which people on the move navigate, contest and respond to those conditions. Yet, in the discourse, the responses have been conceptualised through a range of different frameworks, including resistance, autonomy, survival, mobility, material practice and legal navigation, and across changing configurations of the France-UK border. What these frameworks share, however, is that they conceptualise the conduct of people on the move primarily through its relation to border power, reading action in advance as resistance, survival, or another form of response to it. This leaves open not only the empirical question of how people on the move respond to hostile conditions, but also the conceptual question of whether their conduct can be adequately understood through the category of response at all. The research question of this thesis therefore asks:

How do people on the move in the France-UK borderscape respond to hostile conditions?

The term response is used as a provisional starting point rather than a settled analytical category.

A separate terminological choice concerns how the people at the centre of this study are described. Throughout this thesis, I use people on the move rather than categories such as migrant, refugee or asylum seeker. This follows calls to “de-migranticize” migration research by questioning the treatment of migrants as a self-evident and bounded analytical category (Dahinden, 2016). Such terms are used only when discussing existing literature, in order to remain faithful to the categories and terminologies used by the respective authors.

The following chapter outlines the research approach to explore the research question. Afterwards, the theoretical considerations that have been used in this thesis will be presented. The following section explores the France-UK borderscape to contextualise the border studied.

Afterwards, the collected data will be presented and analysed. In the discussion, the findings will be situated and put in dialogue with relevant literature. The thesis will close with a conclusion that summarises the findings and provides an outlook for future research.

2. Methodology and Research Design

2.1 Methodology

This study is a qualitative, multi-sited ethnography. An ethnography has been chosen because this study seeks to understand conditions and responses in hostile environments through people's experiences in everyday life. Ethnography is understood here, following Hammersley and Atkinson (2010), as an immersive approach that seeks to understand people's everyday lives through prolonged engagement in everyday settings, combining participant observation with informal conversations, fieldnotes, and interviews. Given the delocalisation and multiplication of *borders* (Balibar, 2002; Parker & Vaughan-Williams, 2009), it becomes essential to apply a multi-sited approach to study border contexts. For George E. Marcus (1995), multi-sited ethnography "moves out from the single sites and local situations of conventional ethnographic research designs to examine the circulation of cultural meanings, objects, and identities in diffuse time-space" (Marcus, 1995, p. 96). Rather than treating the border as a fixed territorial line, this approach allows us to understand how conditions are experienced and responded to across and through different sites of everyday life.

Epistemologically, this research adopts a constructivist epistemological stance, understanding social reality as produced through situated interactions, interpretations and practices rather than as an objective reality existing independently of social actors. Knowledge is therefore understood as context-dependent and generated through the meanings actors attach to their experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This approach aligns with an interpretivist research paradigm, in which the aim is not to identify universal laws of social behaviour, but to understand how social worlds are constructed and experienced within particular contexts (Geertz, 1973).

Following Geertz (1973), this study makes use of the approach of *thick descriptions*, whereby ethnography aims not only to document observable behaviour of participants, but to interpret what meaning they attribute to it. It aims to situate practices, interactions and narratives within *webs of significance* through which social life is constituted. Geertz hereby emphasises how social action becomes meaningful within cultural systems of interpretation. This study instead focuses on investigating how conditions at the border shape what actions become possible. Meaning is therefore read against these conditions, rather than focussing on cultural or national backgrounds. The study further does not take participants' accounts of why the conditions exist as explanations. Its object is rather how the conditions are experienced and how people act within them. *Thick description* thereby

keeps the detail and meaning of context-based practice in view, while the analysis holds the conditions as the frame in which the practice is made sense of.

This thesis has been designed to be exploratory and inductive. Initially, a focus on technology was explored; this focus was then abandoned before fieldwork to remain open to relevant topics that would emerge from the data. While an inductive approach has been followed, a purely inductive approach is unrealistic. The approach applied here is closer to what Hammersley and Atkinson (2010) describe as an iterative process, "in which ideas are used to make sense of data, and data are used to change our ideas" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2010, p. 159). This is not the first time I have explored borders academically, and by far not the first time I have engaged with questions of power. Hence, my research was guided by *sensitising concepts* (Blumer, 1954) that informed how I, for example, understand power (relational; Foucault et al., 2014), read borders (Borderscapes; Brambilla, 2015), or consider actions of people on the move (anti-essentialist; Brubaker, 2004; Dahinden, 2016). This will be elaborated on thoroughly in the chapter on theoretical considerations. The research question took shape through the fieldwork itself, from what the borderscape presented and what people described about living in it, rather than arriving as a question the field was then asked to answer. The analytical axis, on which the coded material was later sorted, was in turn built from that question, so it inherits the field's shaping rather than importing a frame from outside. Conceptualisation and analysis therefore proceeded recursively rather than in a fixed sequence (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012), and the direction of reasoning ran upward from the material throughout.

The structure of this thesis reflects the approach of the research process conducted. Due to its inductive and ethnographic design, no classic extensive state-of-the-research section has been included prior to the fieldwork or analysis. Rather, its function was split into three parts. In the introduction, the research problem and gap have been developed. The contextualisation further draws on academic literature, NGO and government reports, and grey literature more broadly to situate the characteristics of the specific borderscape and its history. Lastly, the findings and therefore the thesis itself are discussed and situated in broader literature in the discussion section.

2.2 Research design

This thesis is based on 6 weeks of multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork in the France-UK borderscape region between April and May 2026. I was immersed in the humanitarian infrastructure supporting people on the move in the northern French border region by working as a volunteer for a local solidarity organisation. I use solidarity organisations, and respectively solidarity workers, to describe non-state affiliated organisations concerned with the care of people on the move in the borderscape, as well as their volunteer and paid workers. These terms reflect the self-description of all organisations I encountered during the fieldwork, in explicit contrast to a humanitarian framing. While the exact

nature of the work will not be disclosed for privacy reasons, it allowed me to be with people on the move for several hours a day for 5 days a week. The data collection was not strictly limited to the work, as free time was also used to engage in diverse facets of the city's social life; further, simply taking walks through the city and its surroundings proved to be an excellent strategy for observation. The corpus of this thesis, therefore, rests on around 350 hours of data collection.

The field consisted of a variety of sites that will be outlined in the contextualization chapter. I visited various sites each day, depending on organisational needs. If sites had been underexplored, I requested additional time there, and the organisation has always granted it. If specific events occurred at sites of interest to this thesis, special attention was given to those sites at that time (e.g., acts of violence, evictions, etc.). Visits to the site usually consisted of a support activity that allowed about two to three hours to be spent at a distribution point at the entrance to living sites or support facilities. Sometimes, exploration walks were conducted in the living sites. While the France-UK borderscape is vast, the data collection focused primarily on sites in and around the cities of Calais and Dunkirk. The list of sites mentioned in the contextualisation is non-exhaustive, as it merely constitutes the primary sites where data was collected through the access gained. Other sites were treated as secondary spaces that informed or confirmed observations.

The research object of this thesis is the actions of people on the move in the France-UK borderscape. The primary participant group therefore consisted of people on the move. Whether a person could be counted in this group was always determined by self-description. Most contact with people on the move was related to the organisation's work. Therefore, convenience sampling was used to identify participants I had already been in contact with through the work. When questions arose, especially through reflection on the data already collected, the secondary participant group of experts (volunteers/permanent staff of solidarity organisations, locals) was identified through purposive sampling. At the end of the research period, the participants with whom regular contact had been established were informed of the imminent departure. Personal safeguarding guidelines and ethical reasons led me not to exchange contact details with primary participants.

A clear language barrier existed between myself as the researcher and potential participants. I am fluent in English and German, and have some proficiency in French. Many participants spoke English at a relatively fluent level, which enabled smooth data collection. However, Google Translate was frequently used to enable more in-depth discussions. This approach mirrored the standard practice among solidarity workers and people on the move, and participants adopted it automatically. Occasionally, other individuals assisted by translating during conversations. Although this introduced social and interpretive barriers, the short duration of most participant interactions, as well as the data collection settings, did not permit adequate privacy. These challenges affected only a small number of data collection instances, as the majority of conversations were conducted one-on-one. In my professional role, I was often asked to translate. The number of people on the move who were fluent

in German exceeded my expectations. Several individuals I encountered had spent significant time in Germany before attempting to cross to the UK, making German the primary language of communication, even before English. One participant noted that he primarily spoke German with others on the move, as it was more common for people to share German than their native languages.

This thesis treated smuggler networks and infrastructure, as well as individuals who described themselves as *smugglers*, as external actors before data collection began, to avoid mistaking smugglers' responses to the borderscape for those of people on the move. It is yet important to take into consideration the potential harm a generalisation of a smuggler category can bring, at the same time as to reflect upon exploitative and harmful dynamics smuggler practices and networks can pose to people on the move. The literature acknowledges that the line between the two categories can be blurred, as sometimes, to ensure onward movement, people on the move can be coerced, pressured, and forced to participate in informal economies or to facilitate crossing (Augustova et al., 2023; Mayblin et al., 2024). While this can blur the line for external readers, this thesis perceives the two groups as distinct actors.

2.3 Methods

For this multi-sited ethnography, given the specific context, it was deemed appropriate to combine different ethnographic methods (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2010). Generally, participant observation and informal conversations contributed most of the data collection. In total, the corpus rests on around 180 hours of formal participant observation, around 168 hours of informal observation, around 720 informal conversations and 1 semi-structured interview. Throughout the thesis, participant observation, informal conversations, and fieldnotes are cited as "(Fieldnotes, Date)" because all three methods are recorded in the same fieldnotes document. The interview is cited as "(Interview)".

2.3.1 Participant observation

Participant observation is an ethnographic method in which researchers gain an in-depth understanding of people's everyday practices by observing and participating in their activities within their "natural" [2] setting (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2010). This research distinguishes, in the application of participant observation, between formal and informal observations. As formal observations (around 180 hours), all observations conducted in line with the organisational work are counted. Every working day, I was active at distribution sites, where parts of the target population's daily routines and activities were observed. It is important to note that these observations are limited

[2] Natural settings refer to those settings that are not created artificially by the researcher for the research.

to the observable – how participants behaved and interacted in these sites during daily activities (e.g. waiting in lines, eating and drinking, charging their phones, playing games, doing sports, dancing). Visits to the different sites in the region covered in this thesis were relatively evenly distributed. Observations at distribution sites were complemented by 7 visits to living sites. Here, the infrastructure and activities in the living sites could be observed.

Informal observations (around 168 hours) were conducted outside the formal work settings, generally in free time at all times of the day. This includes time spent with participants before and after work, as well as over the weekends. They were conducted across all spaces the interviewer encountered in his free time, namely cafes and bars, restaurants, parks, streets, the train station, cooking and social gatherings across different houses and apartments, beaches, the hospital, football fields, activist and community houses, and commemorations. These observations were mostly not conducted in a planned manner but rather on an ad hoc basis when opportunities arose. Some specific places (like certain bars and parks) were sought after once information appeared that those might be of interest.

It is important to note that across all time spent in observations, data was not collected thoroughly, nor was it limited to set circumstances. Observation dynamics often repeated themselves, or, conversely, observations emerged naturally beyond intentional observation windows. The times indicated here are therefore estimates. Observations were a crucial method to use for this thesis, as it allowed me to gain insights into people's practices and behaviour in everyday situations. The opening to informal observations, while creating the challenge to set boundaries, allowed to emerge further into informal settings that were essential to everyday practices.

2.3.2 Informal conversations

While many researchers treat informal conversations as complementary to participant observation (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2010), others argue for viewing them as more than that. Swain and King (2022), for example, highlight that "sometimes [,] informal conversations are not only the best way, but they are also the only way to generate data" (Swain & King, 2022, p. 1). That informal conversations are not the only way to generate data in this study is clear through the presentation of other methods applied. Still, given the fact that part of the participant group of this research might be irregularised (I. Katz, 2023), traditional interviewing techniques can reinforce mistrust and pressure, especially through their resemblance to institutional questioning and documentation practices that may evoke concerns about legal repercussions (Barone & Swain, 2025; Höpfner & Promberger, 2023).

This study made use of informal conversations on a daily basis, in the context of participant observation and beyond. During the daily work, numerous conversations were held with potential participants. These conversations were not guided by a predetermined set of questions, but emerged

naturally from ongoing interactions. They provided insights into participants' experiences, helped build rapport, and informed the development of emerging themes throughout the fieldwork. When conversations touched upon topics relevant to the research and the situation allowed it (as discussed in the Ethics section), contemporaneous or subsequent fieldnotes were produced to document their content. The use of informal conversations allowed drawing on people's own perspectives and interpretations of everyday practices. Given the special context and participant group, it allowed me to collect data without putting additional pressure on participants through artificially constructed environments.

2.3.3 Fieldnotes

Fieldnotes are the written records produced by the researcher during and after fieldwork, documenting observations, interactions, conversations, and reflections arising from the research setting (Emerson et al., 2011). In the fieldnotes, the participant observations and the informal conversations were documented. During the fieldwork, they were sometimes documented directly while observing or during conversations. Mostly, however, they were produced in calmer moments, such as breaks or after conversations, to respect the participants. After each day, the fieldnotes were cleaned up, sorted and reflected upon again. This allowed me to draft analytical notes highlighting connections among notes on practices, dynamics, and sites. It was further used as a space for memos and positionality notes. Throughout the notes, open questions emerged and were noted for investigation at a later point. Also, impressions, reactions and events that gave insights into my positionality were recorded.

Fieldnotes were important after each day to reflect on what was observed, heard, and experienced. Going through the notes allowed me to write analytical notes about what the data means. It allowed me to make connections between other notes and to my sensitising concepts. It was further a space for memos and positionality notes. Often, throughout the day or during the reflection, open questions emerged that were noted for later investigation. I further noted down any impressions, reactions or events that influenced my positionality or provided insights into how people read my position. Fieldnotes allowed me to take time to break out of the often busy and sometimes overwhelming fieldwork; they allowed me to reorganise my thoughts and ideas and to better understand where to look next.

2.3.4 Semi-structured interview

A semi-structured interview is a type of interview that uses pre-existing thematic orientations and questions while leaving flexibility to explore topics that emerge during the conversation (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2010). In addition to participant observation, fieldnotes, and informal conversations, one

semi-structured interview was conducted. While formal interviews were not initially planned due to the sensitivity of conducting research with people on the move, one interview (1 hour) was conducted in the final week of data collection after rapport had been established with the participant. It was recorded and locally stored on my phone. The interview followed a flexible, narrative-oriented approach, centred around an invitation for the participant to describe a typical day in their life. Follow-up questions were used to explore topics emerging from the participant's account. It served to explore topics that had emerged during fieldwork in greater depth and to complement other sources of empirical material rather than constitute the primary source of data.

2.4 Analysis

After the fieldwork, the data were prepared for the data analysis. As the fieldnotes, including the participant observations and the informal conversations, had been written in one document and cleaned up periodically, no further steps were required for them. The interview recording was transcribed using the aTrain software (Haberl et al., 2024), which allows for the interview to be transcribed locally on my computer only. The transcription was then corrected for any errors and anonymised. The fieldnotes had already been anonymised during their writing, using an anonymisation scheme (as presented in ethics).

I then coded the prepared material using the Taguette software (Rampin & Rampin, 2021), which, like aTrain, also works only locally and doesn't upload information online. The first pass of the material was descriptive, I gave each segment a code telling what it was about, rather than what it showed. This produced 35 codes, of which three carried no analytical content and were set aside (positionality, memo, quotes). Their frequency was very uneven, ranging from codes applied to over a hundred segments to codes applied two to three times. A large code was a candidate for splitting on the suspicion that it had become an undifferentiated container. A small code was not treated as marginal, as it can be evidence that a phenomenon is extreme or difficult to talk about. This first coding pass refers to what Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (2011) call *open coding*, in which initial codes open the material rather than settle it.

I then reread every segment of every code and gave them a verdict on a single axis. The operative question I set was whether it was the conditioning bearing on people, which I labelled pressure, or something people did within it, which I labelled response. The axis came from the research question rather than from theory and functioned as a sorting question rather than as a set of categories specifying what the material contained. This second pass corresponds to what Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (2011) call *focused coding*, which refers to a second reading organised by an analytical interest that the first one did not have.

While I was going through the first big code, segments accumulated that were neither clear pressure nor response. This was, for example, music and dancing at a distribution point, weekly football, or a tent turned into a room with blankets and cartoons. None of this was conditioning, and putting it under "response" would mean turning ordinary life into a set of survival strategies. I therefore added a third pile, everyday sociality, for social reproduction that is neither pressure nor directed response, and retagged the earlier segments accordingly.

While I gave verdicts along the axis for each segment, I recorded a short sub-label naming the specific phenomenon, such as eviction history, informal community leadership, or ordinary social reproduction. These were developed through analysis rather than fixed in advance. I created new labels only when a segment showed something the existing labels did not cover, and otherwise applied an already existing label to the segment. This process followed subcoding as explained by Saldaña (2021). If a segment did two things at once, it was treated as such and counted in both piles, which Saldaña (2021) calls *simultaneous coding*. In Taguette, each sorted segment carried a child tag beneath its original code, while the sub-labels lived in a separate document to maintain tidiness.

I quickly realised I needed to set general rules for what I could count as evidence, rather than deciding on a case-by-case basis. I counted documented practice, reported experience and stated interior states as evidence. Theorising about why conditions were as they were was not counted, whether it came from participants or from me. As this, however, could still provide valuable insight, it was held in a separate memo outside the axis. I also had to be critical of my own notes, to separate what I observed from what I interpreted. If a note in which I concluded that the conditions were causing something had itself been counted as evidence, my own conclusion would have ended up supporting itself. This thinking of what I witnessed versus what I concluded follows Katz (2001).

The development of the findings did not begin only after all codes had been analysed. Rather, the analysis moved iteratively between individual codes, comparisons between codes and emerging analytical claims. I first worked through the coded material code by code, identifying what occurred, its observed or reported effects, the actors and practices involved, and differences across sites, situations and time. As the analysis progressed, I increasingly asked what each condition made possible, difficult, uncertain, costly, or impossible. This analytical structure became more precise over the process and was subsequently used to revisit previously analysed material.

Codes documenting related processes were then brought together into broader clusters, including policing and enforcement, evictions, withheld protection, crossing governance, informal economies and solidarity-based provisioning. Recurrence across codes was important, but frequency alone did not determine analytical significance. I also examined connections between conditions, contrasts between situations, variations in their consequences and instances that complicated emerging claims. Earlier interpretations were therefore continually tested against material from later codes. Also, the uneven distribution of the material was analytically relevant. The corpus documented the

production of hostile conditions much more extensively than direct responses to them, but this did not mean that responses were absent or that conditions determined conduct.

The concept of a horizon of action emerged during this process as a way of connecting heterogeneous conditions, without reducing them to a single effect. It directed attention to how these conditions structured which possibilities were available, how costly or uncertain they became and under what circumstances they could be pursued. Once developed, the concept was used to return to the material and examine three connected questions: how hostile conditions produced this horizon, how people conducted themselves among the possibilities it contained, and how everyday practices sometimes overlapped with, but were not exhausted by, responses to hostile conditions. These questions eventually formed the three principal findings. The interpretation was informed by the sensitising concepts developed in the following chapter. These did not function as predetermined coding categories but informed the questions asked of the material during interpretation. The analysis therefore remained dependent upon my interpretative judgment, while its claims were developed and tested through repeated comparison with the coded material.

2.5 Positionality and reflexivity

In the field, I was part of a group of primarily young and white European nationals that volunteered to support people on the move in the region. As my conversations with people showed, I was constantly readable as occupying this position. This position gave me access I couldn't have reached simply by presenting myself as doing research. My work in the solidarity organisation developed an insider position that allowed for a very high frequency of contact with people on the move. Through the work, I spent most time of the day in the community, providing services, as well as often just talking, listening, and discussing. This position also posed a challenge. While the primary reason to be involved in the field was the fieldwork for the research, I was still a worker in a humanitarian context whose aim was to provide the best support possible in the mandate of the work – and was thereby also perceived as such.

Through the work for the solidarity organisation, I had frequent, recurring and informal access to the population studied in this thesis. I encountered people at places that would provide a lot of data important for this work, at living sites, distribution points, and through the rhythms of solidarity work. This meant that beyond just doing observation and having some conversations, I would often meet people again and again, which often led to the formation of social relationships that were also useful, as my explaining this thesis to people sometimes led to continued conversations about one or several topics across multiple days. People thereby also became interested in the research and wanted to contribute.

The position I held in the field could be the primary topic of this thesis; the following should therefore be read as a reflection on it, rather than as an extensive analysis. Through my work, I sometimes had to organise limited distributions for very large groups that could exceed 200 people, with a very small team of four to five people, in a setting with scarce resources. This meant balancing the group's pressure to be among those who would receive resources, while ensuring their calmness, which was essential to set up the preliminary distribution site. This put me directly into a position of authority, as someone who could decide about resources. In light of the topic of this thesis, this position has particular analytical significance. I was not merely observing how people acted within the borderscape but was one of the actors to whom they conducted themselves. While I did not produce the scarcity confronting participants, my work mediated it through procedures that structured their possibilities for action. While our work aimed to alleviate hostile conditions, it also organised access to resources within them.

Participants were thereby interacting with me not in one role at a time, but simultaneously as a researcher and as a solidarity worker. It was not possible for me to simply turn off one role or the other. Therefore, someone expecting resources from me the same or next day could speak differently to me than to a researcher with no material role in their life. On the other hand, repeated practical contact could also produce familiarity and conversations that a conventional research encounter could never have generated. The data was therefore relationally produced through my position, rather than merely observed from it.

The methodological implication for this is that I was not a mere spectator observing the borderscape unfolding, but an actor within it. My role in mediating access to scarce resources influenced how participants encountered me. At times, participants also positioned me as a knowledgeable and trustworthy actor within the borderscape. This became especially apparent at a distribution point, when a participant asked me, "Should I stay in France or cross to the UK? Is it worth the risk?" This encounter made clear that participants could attribute to me knowledge and authority that I did not necessarily possess. While my presence influenced how participants spoke and behaved, my responses could further influence their decisions, potentially carrying life-influencing consequences. Taking both examples together, the material gathered throughout this thesis has to therefore be understood as shaped by participants' perception of my role, power, expertise and trustworthiness

The access produced through this position was therefore necessarily selective. Being embedded in solidarity work brought me into frequent contact with people on the move, but primarily in spaces and situations in which solidarity organisations were present or where their services were used. People who did not make use of these services, avoided organisations, or spent little time around distribution points were consequently less likely to enter the material. The same applied to practices deliberately kept outside the view of solidarity workers. During the fieldwork, I repeatedly encountered indications

that certain interactions, particularly around informal economic activities and the organisation of crossings, were not meant to be visible to us. My position could therefore create proximity while simultaneously producing boundaries around what could be seen. This also extended to everyday life within living sites. Although I regularly entered and spent time around them, much of my presence remained connected to distributions, service provision and other organisational activities. Private interactions, conflicts occurring away from these spaces, and periods of everyday life in which no solidarity organisation was present were necessarily less accessible. The material should therefore not be understood as an unrestricted view into life within the borderscape, but as one produced from a particular position within it. The same position that made repeated contact, familiarity, and informal conversations possible also shaped which people, spaces, and practices became observable and which remained peripheral or concealed.

2.6 Ethics

My special position as building primarily humanitarian-solidarity connections, where some are also used to collect data for this thesis, posed a challenging situation for the data collection with people on the move. While it was initially planned that data collection would be conducted only with other solidarity workers, due to safeguarding policies I set for this thesis, it quickly became clear that the lines for their application in the field were not as clear as expected. It appeared that the relationships with people on the move were closer than expected, as I spent a considerable amount of time with the community and lived and engaged frequently with community volunteers, who were highly interested in my research and open to engaging with it. Although I developed strong trust relationships, I decided to engage in research only with people on the move through informal data collection methods, as recording conversations and signing formal consent forms could lead to mistrust and retraumatise participants based on their experiences.

Because participant observation involved fluid settings, changing groups, and informal encounters, consent was treated as an ongoing, situational process rather than a single event (Klykken, 2022). When an interaction was to be used as research material, I introduced myself as a master's student, explained the purpose of the research in accessible terms and clarified that participation was voluntary. I further explained that declining participation would not affect access to assistance and that participants could ask me not to use an exchange. Consent was obtained orally across all methods used (including the interview), as written consent, especially in situations of legal precarity, could be harmful for participants and could create unnecessary records. Consent was renewed when conversations became extended or concerned sensitive experiences, and indications of discomfort, hesitation or disengagement were treated as reasons not to continue the interaction. While the above was implemented overall, it was not a single, overarching process. While it was crucial to "check the

boxes of the checklist", it was also important to do this in a natural and non-artificial manner. I chose informal conversations specifically to avoid making participants feel as if they were being interviewed, as if I wanted to extract information from them. This is not just a choice of method to obtain the best data possible, but a choice to let participants choose, lead, and direct the topics of our conversation, if they were relevant to this thesis or not.

Therefore, in most cases, as they evolved naturally, there was no clear line before a conversation whether it would count as a normal informal conversation or rather as data collection. This means that parameters set for data collection could not be fixed in advance and had to be handled situationally. The topics of interest to this study can, however, be traumatising, re-traumatising, and sensitive for the participants. Because of the setting and modality of this research, the data-collection methods were unprepared, ad hoc, and constantly evolving. Therefore, questions and topics could not be ethically vetted externally beforehand. Generally, conversations with participants who were on the move were not directed by me; instead, participants initiated and directed the topics. If topics elicited emotional responses, participants were always offered the option to end the conversation. Direct participants, meaning individuals with whom I engaged in conversations, were always over 18 (self-reported). Individuals appearing indirectly in observations, fieldnotes or accounts by others could also be under 18.

Often, people shared information highly relevant to the topic of this research. In some cases, this information was not collected for this research, as the situation in which the data was shared did not allow informed consent to be obtained in a dignified and harmless manner. This included, for example, situations of high distress, increased vulnerability, or work-based conversations based on short contact. While these examples seem like clear decisions, most of them were not black and white. Often, it just didn't feel right to ask for consent and to use the situation for data collection. While I was there as a researcher and as a worker, I was primarily there as a human. I remember evenings where we sat as a group of newfound friends at the beach, both on the move and not, collectively overwhelmed by the events of the week and the brutality we witnessed during the day, of course, all from a different positionality and with different impacts, yet we all shared experiences and feelings. While this resonates with the very core that this thesis aims to unravel, it was not, and should never be, treated as data. Working through my own emotions and supporting people as they worked through theirs was a big part of what characterised my time in the borderscape. I witnessed all ranges of emotions and situations, including anxiety, violence and death. This shaped my research process profoundly: my conversations, my questions, my perspectives. There is no objectivity, and there doesn't need to be. By developing such intimate bonds and gaining insight into how community members see the field, I may understand a bit better what lived experiences are. For me, this was about more than collecting the best adequate data to write a sound thesis. Spending hours with people daily in such an environment, the development of bonds was different to anything I had experienced on a

social level yet. Even with the high fluctuation, I encountered some faces of community members repeatedly almost every day: chatting, laughing, drinking tea together; listening, advising, referring. These are not data points; these are humans and their experiences. I will not forget any one of them, never knowing what their lives look like today.

Participant observation also took place in settings where it was not possible to approach every person individually. Their presence was not treated as consent to participate. Observations involving people for whom individual consent had not been obtained were therefore restricted to non-identifying descriptions of the setting and collective practices. Direct statements, personal experiences and individually attributed actions were only included where oral consent had been obtained. Particularly sensitive situations were excluded where meaningful consent could not be secured.

Attention was further paid to my simultaneous position within the provision of assistance. Since participants might have perceived me as holding influence over access to resources, I clarified that speaking with me or permitting the use of an interaction was unrelated to assistance. Nevertheless, this position may have constrained how freely refusal could be expressed and is therefore treated as a limitation of the consent process.

The insights generated through this research might reveal potentially sensitive information on behaviour and resistance that, if made public, could further endanger current and future populations living in the region. Current dynamics that have been observed during the fieldwork show an increased number of especially UK-based fascist, nationalist and further far-right individuals and groups going to the region to document, infiltrate, provoke, fight and hinder people from crossing who are on the move. Several French, British, and European (inter-)governmental bodies and agencies produce, to an extent actively and to a lesser extent indirectly, the conditions this thesis portrays.

In terms of anonymisation of collected data, this thesis will not collect data like names (as well of organisations), age, gender, or nationality. It must be further reflected that the borderscape is a small and densely documented space, to the extent that thorough anonymisation of spaces and events cannot be ensured. Rather than erasing every detail of collected data so that spaces and actions become unidentifiable to an informed reader, specifically sensitive data will be anonymised more strongly. It will ensure that when potentially sensitive information is shared, identifiable information like place or day is not, because it is recognised that an accumulation of fieldnote citations can reflect where the author has been that day. Therefore, fieldnote dates are sometimes generalised, and identifying details are omitted or altered where their combination could permit the identification of participants. Sensitive practices are sometimes further abstracted and generalised to avoid sharing details.

As the commonly known names of living sites don’t add to the analysis, they will be anonymised, while acknowledging that an informed reader may still identify them through minimal descriptive elements. The period of the data collection will be shared, as crucial events for the analysis would further allow for their identification. Fieldnote dates are sometimes generalised, and identifying

details have been omitted or altered, where their combination could permit the identification of participants

Lastly, notes were stored on a local, secured device with access limited to me; transcription and coding were conducted using software that runs locally on the my device and doesn't upload anything to external servers or clouds. Further, for the reasons mentioned above, it was important to ensure that, if data was collected, it happened in a non-exploitative and human-centred manner. Therefore, a system to safeguard its participants based on the do-no-harm principles was implemented.

2.7 Limitations

The research design chosen for conducting this thesis produces several limitations. Firstly, my position as an actor who could provide access to resources, as well as my being perceived at times as a knowledgeable and trustworthy actor, might have influenced how participants conducted themselves around me, how they behaved, and what they said. While I tried to mitigate these dynamics, including by ensuring that participation was not linked to access to resources, such mitigation does not erase them. The material therefore cannot be treated as if it had been produced independently of my presence and position in the field. As discussed through the reflection on positionality, the same position that enabled frequent and relatively informal contact also shaped which people and situations became accessible to me. The data collected throughout the research must consequently be understood as a situated account rather than as producing a holistic representation of life within the borderscape.

Secondly, the sensitive nature of the context led me to establish several rules concerning when and under what circumstances data should be collected. In some instances, I deliberately did not record observations or conversations because doing so would have meant making analytical use of situations in which people had approached me primarily through relations of trust, friendship or support. Other situations were excluded because participants were experiencing acute distress or because documenting them appeared ethically inappropriate. This necessarily reduced the amount of empirical material available for analysis and means that some aspects of life in the borderscape are less represented in the corpus than others. Importantly, what is absent from the material should therefore not automatically be interpreted as absent from the field. Some phenomena may be weakly documented precisely because the circumstances in which they became visible were those in which I considered data collection inappropriate. This produces an unavoidable tension within immersive ethnographic research between the analytical value of proximity and the ethical limits that have to be placed upon the use of that proximity.

Thirdly, while observations and emerging ideas were reflected upon throughout the fieldwork, the exploratory character of the thesis would have benefited from a second phase of data collection after the coding cycles and formulation of preliminary findings. The concepts developed in the

analysis, particularly the horizon of action, emerged through the systematic engagement with the material rather than functioning as categories that guided the initial collection of data. A second period in the field could therefore have allowed the preliminary findings to be examined more deliberately, including by searching for situations that contradicted them, following particular processes over a longer period, and collecting more targeted material on aspects that became analytically important only during the later stages of analysis. Such a phase could have strengthened the empirical grounding of the findings and provided greater opportunity to test their boundaries. Conducting it, however, would have substantially extended the temporal and practical scope of the research beyond what was possible within this thesis.

Fourthly, the language barrier remained persistent throughout the research. Although it was partly overcome through translation tools, occasional direct translation by others and communication in languages shared between participants and myself, these measures could not reproduce the depth and precision of communication possible in a shared fluent language. Particularly in informal conversations, the use of translation technologies could interrupt the flow of interaction, while some participants were unable to articulate more complex experiences or meanings in a language we shared. I therefore may not always have understood the nuances attached to particular formulations. This limitation is especially relevant for a study concerned not only with observable practices but also with how participants described their experiences and evaluated the possibilities available to them. The analysis therefore gives greater weight to meanings that could be documented with sufficient clarity and avoids inferring interior states where the material did not allow them to be established.

Fifthly, the empirical material is uneven in its form and distribution. Participant observation and informal conversations constitute the largest part of the corpus, while only one semi-structured interview was conducted. The findings therefore rely more strongly on repeated situated encounters than on systematically comparable interview accounts. This is consistent with the ethnographic design of the thesis, but it also means that some analytical themes are documented through numerous brief encounters across different sites, whereas others rest on a smaller number of comparatively detailed accounts. The amount of evidence attached to individual themes should consequently not be read as a direct measure of their prevalence or importance within the wider population. The research was designed to identify and interpret processes observable within the field rather than to establish their statistical distribution.

A related limitation concerns the unevenness of access to different people and spaces. Contact occurred mainly through living sites, distribution points and other locations connected to solidarity work. People who rarely used these services, avoided organisations, or spent little time in these spaces were less likely to become part of the material. The thesis also did not produce a demographically representative sample of people present in the borderscape. Differences of nationality, gender, age, family status, length of stay and migration trajectory could therefore not be systematically compared.

This places limits on how far the findings can be differentiated according to particular social positions. The thesis therefore does not claim that the horizon documented here was experienced identically by all people on the move, but rather identifies patterns through the encounters and sites to which the fieldwork provided access.

Finally, the fieldwork captured a relatively short period within a borderscape that was itself continually changing. People arrived and departed, living sites expanded or closed, policing practices changed, and crossing strategies and technologies developed during the research period itself. It was therefore rarely possible to follow individual participants over longer periods or to observe how their possibilities and conduct changed across different stages of their trajectory. The analysis provides a situated account of the conditions and practices documented during this particular period rather than a stable description of the France-UK borderscape as such.

2.8 Use of Artificial Intelligence

To ensure transparency, I'm stating that throughout the writing process I made selective use of AI-assisted writing tools. This use was strictly limited and did not exceed functions of rephrasing, improving clarity, precision and academic tone. The scope of this usage, as well as mentioning it here, is in line with university regulations (Université de Liège, 2025).

3. Theoretical orientations

This chapter introduces the concepts and thinking that have informed the lens through which I perceive the topic. As already argued, no thinking is purely inductive. Instead, through the core concepts that influence my thinking about the matter of this thesis, my thinking about what I perceive is preoccupied, whether I am aware of this or not (Bowen, 2006). While these concepts do not serve as analytical categories, nor define what I assume to find, they structure how I look at the world and determine what I look at in an empirically rich environment. These sensitising concepts, as Blumer (1954) called them, "give the user a general sense of reference and guidance in approaching empirical instances" (Blumer, 1954, p. 7). They therefore don't function as analytical categories in this thesis, but inform what I perceived and how. These concepts reflect an academic inquiry into the object of my study and are constituted by three questions I oriented my thinking around before entering the field:

1. What kind of place do people act in?
2. What shapes what people can do there?
3. How do I read what they can do?

The sensitising concepts answer these questions and will be presented accordingly in this chapter.

3.1 What kind of place do people act in?

Over the past three decades, scholarly readings of borders have undergone significant shifts. In the 1990s, research started to shift away from a static, territorial and state-centred reading of borders as defined by territorial dividing lines and political institutions (Brambilla, 2015). At the core of this processual shift lies a transition from the concept of border to that of bordering, which "allowed borders to be viewed as dynamic social processes and practices of spatial differentiation" (Brambilla, 2015, p. 15). Borders are here seen as the result of social production, which is constituted through processes of (de)stabilisation and manifests itself in and through practices (Wille, 2021).

One conception responding to this shift is that of borderscapes. Even though used before, the term was prominently shaped by Prem Kumar Rajaram and Carl Grundy-Warr (2007), who use it as an entry point to study the complexity and vitality of, and at, the border. A borderscape, on this reading, is the field of sites, practices and relations through which a border is made and lived, rather than the line at which it is drawn. For them, the border is mobile, relational and perspectival. It is mobile in that it is not fixed to that line, relational in that it exists through the connections between actors, sites and practices rather than as a thing in itself, and perspectival in that it appears differently according to where within it one stands. The perspectival dimension carries particular weight for this thesis because it allows experiences among people on the move to be approached as a situated perspective on the border itself, rather than merely as effects occurring at its margin. The concept enables the study of "practices, performances, and discourses that seek to capture, contain, and instrumentally use the border to affix a dominant spatiality, temporality, and political agency" (Rajaram & Grundy-Warr, 2007, p. x). It thereby makes visible connections and divergences obscured by inside/outside and order/disorder dichotomies of static interpretations.

The concept shaped where the fieldwork was conducted and what it recorded. Understanding the border as mobile and relational meant that the field could not be located at the crossing point. Fieldwork was therefore carried out across a set of sites that a conception tied to the line would have treated as context rather than as border, among them a hospital, distribution points, a day centre, a train station, squats, living sites and a bar, spread across Calais, Dunkirk and Grande-Synthe. Each fieldnote records the site it was written from, which made location a property of the material rather than background information. Within these sites, the concept sensitised the fieldwork to the different actors and practices through which bordering was enacted and experienced, as well as to variations between sites.

3.2 What shapes what people can do there?

While the concept of borderscape identifies the relational field in which action occurs, accounting for what shapes action within this field requires an analysis of power. This thesis therefore draws on Michel Foucault's relational understanding of power. In its simplest form, power is a relation in which one party seeks to guide the conduct of another. Foucault conceptualises this exercise of power, in the broadest sense, as government: the conduct of conduct, or the attempt to structure the possible field of action of others (Foucault et al., 2014). This approach does not treat power as a possession held by one actor and denied to another, but instead focuses on the relations through which action is shaped. Power is realised in its exercise, through practices that seek to affect what others do, might do, or are able to do (Foucault et al., 2014; Foucault & Lemke, 2021).

This understanding does not overlook the significant inequalities in capacity that exist between actors. Power relations can be highly asymmetrical, with one actor possessing legal authority, institutional support or material resources that another lacks. However, these inequalities alone do not account for how power operates. A relational perspective instead examines how such capacities are exercised to structure the conduct of others. Power may prohibit certain actions, but it can also make them more or less difficult, alter the risks or costs associated with them, encourage particular courses of action, or organise the conditions under which actions become possible (Foucault & Lemke, 2021). The exercise of power does not require that an action is rendered impossible. Rather, it can reshape the field in which possibilities are considered and pursued.

Important here is that power can only be exercised on free subjects, those who "have a range of behavioural, reactive or action options available to them" (Foucault & Lemke, 2021, p. 257, my own translation). Power can guide another's conduct only insofar as that person retains the capacity to conduct themselves. Freedom and power are therefore not opposites in Foucault's understanding. Freedom does not begin where power ends, but constitutes a condition through which power can operate. If conduct were completely determined, there would no longer be a field of possible action upon which power could act. This is why Foucault locates the "recalcitrance of the will" and the "intransigence of freedom" at the heart of relations of power (Foucault, 1982, p. 790). The possibility of doing otherwise may be extremely narrow, costly or dangerous, but some possibility of different conduct must remain.

This conception of freedom does not imply that subjects act autonomously or possess sovereign agency. In Foucault's terms, to be free does not mean having unrestricted control over one's actions or equal access to all possible options. The field in which conduct takes place is often already shaped by the actions of others. Some possibilities may be rendered highly costly, uncertain or difficult to sustain, while others become more accessible. What is central to the relation of power is not the

presence of unlimited choice, but that conduct is not mechanically determined by attempts to guide it. The exercise of power can structure conduct without prescribing its precise outcome.

This also means that the effects of power cannot be deduced solely from its intentions. When power acts upon the possible actions of others, those others may respond in varied ways to attempts to structure their conduct. A practice designed to discourage a particular action may result in one person abandoning it, another modifying their approach, and another persisting despite increased difficulty. The possibility of different conduct is therefore intrinsic to the exercise of power. Foucault characterises the relation between power and freedom as one of ongoing provocation, not a simple opposition between determination and resistance (Foucault & Lemke, 2021). Analytically, this shifts attention from presuming that governmental practices produce their intended subjects or behaviours to examining what possibilities they structure and how people act within them.

The concept of conduct is especially useful in retaining this openness. It carries a double meaning, referring both to the activity of conducting others and to the way in which a person conducts themselves (Foucault & Lemke, 2021). Government consequently concerns a relation between these two dimensions. Attempts are made to structure the actions of others, while those others remain acting subjects who conduct themselves within, against or through the possibilities available to them. This relational understanding therefore avoids conceptualising subjects either as fully determined by relations of power or as acting from a position independent of them.

Within such relations, Foucault uses counter-conduct to describe struggles over how conduct is directed. The concept emerged in his analysis of forms of resistance directed against particular ways of conducting individuals, rather than against power understood in the abstract (Foucault & Lemke, 2021). Counter-conduct does not originate from a position outside power, nor does it necessarily seek to end government altogether. It contests the manner in which one is conducted, including by whom, towards what end and through which procedures. It may therefore involve attempts to evade, modify, refuse or otherwise contest a particular form of direction without implying an escape from relations of power altogether.

Counter-conduct should, however, not be treated as synonymous with every exercise of agency. Its analytical specificity lies precisely in its orientation towards the way in which conduct is being governed. A person can act, make decisions, organise everyday practices or pursue particular aims without these actions necessarily being directed towards contesting how they are conducted. Classifying all action occurring within a relation of power as counter-conduct would therefore risk defining the meaning of that action through power in advance. The existence of a governmental condition does not by itself demonstrate that the conduct taking place within it is oriented towards that condition.

In this study, conduct and counter-conduct therefore function as sensitising concepts rather than predetermined analytical categories. They directed attention towards practices that sought to structure

the possible actions of people on the move, towards the possibilities that remained within these relations, and towards practices that might contest the manner in which conduct was being directed. At the same time, this perspective leaves the meaning and orientation of participants' actions as an empirical question. It therefore provides a way of analysing how power structures the conditions of conduct without assuming either that people's actions are determined by these conditions or that every exercise of their capacity to act constitutes resistance or counter-conduct.

3.3 How do I read what they can do?

The two preceding concepts describe the borderscape and the relations of power within it, but they leave open how the actions of people within it are to be interpreted. This study approaches that question through an anti-essentialist analytical orientation. Following criticisms of *groupism* and *migranticisation*, categories such as *migrants* are not treated as social groups who share common characteristics that would explain their conduct (Brubaker, 2004; Dahinden, 2016). Instead, participants' conduct is interpreted in relation to the situation and conditions in which it occurs, rather than explained by how they are categorised. This does not deny the legal and political effects of being categorised as a migrant. It rejects the use of that category as a self-sufficient explanation of what a person does.

This orientation is particularly important, as people on the move are frequently represented through predetermined subject positions. Humanitarian representations have rendered refugees as helpless and speechless victims whose experience must be narrated by others (Malkki, 1996; Rajaram, 2002). More recent resilience-oriented approaches can perform an apparently opposite operation by constituting refugees as self-reliant subjects responsible for adapting to adverse conditions (Ilcan & Rygiel, 2015). Although these figures differ normatively, both risk replacing situated practices and accounts with characteristics assigned to people from outside. Refusing the resilient subject therefore does not require returning to the passive victim.

This orientation meant that participants' actions were not classified in advance as passivity, coping, resilience or resistance. Fieldwork and analysis instead attended to what participants did and said in particular situations and to the possibilities and constraints under which they acted. How practices were to be interpreted therefore remained an empirical question, rather than being determined by a presumed subject position.

4. The France-UK borderscape

While the previous chapter introduced conceptual considerations that explained how the field has been viewed, this chapter establishes the broader contextual framing in which the research was situated. It will introduce the apparatus and its history, active at the border. The information in this chapter will be based on secondary literature as well as on my own collected data. While the border context in the northern France borderscape has a long-standing history, it is also currently evolving and mutating, whereby the fieldwork sits on this hinge.

4.1 Spatial configuration of the borderscape

The borderscape extends along roughly a hundred kilometres[3] of coast from Boulogne in the southwest through Calais, to Dunkirk and Grande-Synthe in the northeast, and reaches inland to the towns, living sites and service points behind it. The channel is at its narrowest along this stretch, a little over thirty kilometres between the French and English coasts. Two fixed crossing points sit here: the port of Calais, and the Channel Tunnel terminal at Coquelles a few kilometres outside the city centre, through which road vehicles, passenger trains and rail freight cross to England. Departures have recently extended past its northern edge; Belgian police report boats launching from beaches in Belgium and running along the coast, collecting people at several points, before crossing from French waters (Police Fédérale, 2026).

In the borderscape, numerous sites have been used by people on the move over the past years. Sites differ in all variables imaginable: size (both land and population), location, durability, function, nationalities, internal organisation, and the enforcement they draw. Some are, for example, situated closer to the beach and used only for a few days before crossing; others are in the city and provide better access to resources. Whether a site is active or not can change within weeks. A site counts as active when people live there continuously. Inactive sites are still used, but only briefly, as frequent police checks and evictions make longer stays impossible. Often, living sites exist in close proximity to one another. In some cases, the lines are blurry between where one starts and the other ends. In Calais alone, over 35 sites have been active over the years, scattered around the city. Of those 35, at the time of the data collection, 3 were active, with 1-2 other housing people sometimes, but being evicted on an almost daily basis (Fieldnotes). In the district of Dunkirk, the living sites are situated in a part of the city of Grande-Synthe, around 6 kilometres from the city centre of Dunkirk. Here, various, often larger, living sites exist in close proximity to one another, with the exact number unknown.

[3] This is estimated using the *Geofan* website: https://geofan.org/map-coastline-calculator

While these living sites are crucial to the everyday life of people on the move in the borderscape, they are only one part of it. Additional relevant sites include a day centre, a distribution point, and certain sites in the city, where people on the move roam relatively freely. In the following, all sites of interest for this thesis will be presented and described using descriptors used throughout the thesis. These sites are not interchangeable, as people experience them differently. Treating any one as representative would misdescribe this border, which is why the fieldwork moved between them. Distribution points sit at the entrance of each living site, where associations are present at specific times of the day, so they're treated as part of the site rather than listed separately.

Living site 1 (*LS 1*) is the largest in Calais, located inland from the city. The population fluctuated between roughly 700 and 1,300 during the fieldwork, shifting with evictions and new arrivals (Fieldnotes). Most residents encountered were Sudanese. Living site 2 (*LS 2*) is considerably smaller, located south of the city. It housed between 5 and 30 people during the fieldwork, with a wide range of nationalities. Living site 3 (*LS 3*) is located in the centre of the city, and houses only a few people periodically. Living site 4 (*LS 4*) is located in Grande-Synthe and is used here to refer to one of the living sites within the closely connected Grande-Synthe cluster. The population size is similar to LS 1, and nationalities vary significantly, with residents encountered being Kurdish, Iraqi, Iranian, Ghanaian, Afghani, and Sudanese. Here, a significant number of people met spoke fluent German. Solidarity infrastructure 1 (SI 1) is located near the port of Calais and is a day centre. It offers a space for people on the move, open for several hours a day, 3 days a week, where they can shower, get food, attend recreational activities, visit a doctor, charge their phones, and receive legal support. There is also a separate space here for women and children. *The train station* is the central station of Calais where people arrive and transfer to other sites of the borderscape. *The beach* is where people gather at night to attempt boat crossings. *The bar* is a venue in the city centre of Calais, used by people on the move, solidarity workers, and residents alike. *The park* is a green space in the city centre of Calais, where commemorations are held to honour those who died at the border.

Hicks and Mallet (2019) trace the term to the Pashto *dzjangal*, meaning forest or wooded area. It became a generic label for precarious migrant settlements (Agier, 2016), and was also used as a racist taunt by the French far right and police, telling people to go back to their jungle (Müller & Schlüper, 2018). The notion *living site* stems rather from humanitarian organisations, such as Human Rights Observers (HRO) (HRO, 2024), which coins a more positive meaning. This thesis will apply both notions, with one coming from the residents and the other from the organisations; neither is neutral. The figures used in this chapter come from prefectures, monitoring organisations, and the UK Home Office, each of which serves different purposes. As the French state publishes nothing comparable, the eviction figures exist mainly because organisations such as Human Rights Observers produce them. Human Rights Observers (HRO) is a monitoring project documenting evictions and

police practice at the Franco-British border since 2017 (HRO, 2025). Using figures of any of these actors does not mean adopting the categories through which people at the border are classified.

4.2 People on the move in the borderscape

The border people are trying to cross does not run along the territorial divide along the channel. Since the Sangatte Protocol of 1991 (UK & France, 1991)[4] and the Treaty of Le Touquet of 2003 (UK & France, 2003)[5], British and French controls have operated side by side at the same crossing points, a system known as juxtaposed control, with UK Border Force checking passengers and freight on French soil in Calais and Coquelles. Displacing the control inland means that the people it stops accumulate on French soil, in French municipalities and under French policing, while the decision that stops them is British. This arrangement was reaffirmed and extended by the Treaty of Sandhurst in 2018[6], under which the UK committed further to funding French border enforcement (UK & France, 2018). This line of treaties constitutes an externalisation of the British border to France, through a strategy coined the *politics of exhaustion*, designed to deter, control, and exclude those profiled as undesirable (Welander, 2020).

Several nationalities present in the borderscape are recognised at high rates once an asylum claim is issued in the UK. Of Sudanese applicants between 2020 and 2024, 99 per cent were ultimately granted asylum or other forms of leave to remain, along with 95 per cent of Eritreans and 83 per cent of Iranians (Jorgensen & Walsh, 2026). At the same time, however, no legal and especially practicable pathway exists to lodge an asylum claim from France. Three pathways exist, but in most cases they are not practical for people on the move residing in the borderscape. First, family reunification was suspended in September 2025, with a replacement announced for Spring 2026 but not yet in force, leaving only standard family rules open with a 29.000£ sponsor threshold (Gower, 2025). Second, the usage of visas to access the asylum system is growing, yet with the absence of specified visas, applicants need to rely on study, work or visitor visas (Jorgensen & Walsh, 2026). Using this authorised route presupposes prior authorisation. Applications must be made from the country where the applicant lives and require a valid passport or travel document (Home Office, 2026 paras. 28,

[4] What is commonly called the Sangatte Protocol of 1991 is formally the Protocol between the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Government of the French Republic Concerning Frontier Controls and Policing, Co-operation in Criminal Justice, Public Safety and Mutual Assistance Relating to the Channel Fixed Link

[5] What is commonly called the Treaty of Le Touquet of 2003 is formally the Treaty between the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Government of the French Republic concerning the implementation of frontier controls at the Sea Ports of both countries on the Channel and North Sea

[6] What is commonly called the Treaty of Sandhurst of 2018 is formally the Treaty between the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Government of the French Republic Concerning the Reinforcement of Cooperation for the Coordinated Management of their Shared Border.

34(5)). For someone irregularly present in France, without documents or a status that allows them to apply from there (e.g. being under a Dublin procedure), the route is foreclosed before eligibility is assessed. Third, under the pilot scheme in force since August 2025, for each person returned to France after crossing irregularly, one person in France with UK family ties may be admitted through a legal route. Admissions are thereby capped by returns, making a route whose capacity depends on crossings continuing (Cuibus & Walsh, 2025). Overall, this leads to unauthorised crossings constituting not an alternative to the asylum route, but the only entry to it.

Although the formal possibility of claiming asylum in France exists, the presence of individuals in the borderscape does not itself indicate a uniform orientation towards the UK. Davies et al. (2021) identify multiple trajectories among those present in Calais. Some individuals have lodged asylum claims in France but remain in precarious conditions pending accommodation, while others have previously entered asylum procedures elsewhere in Europe and continued moving after being denied protection or encountering conditions that rendered continued stay untenable. For others, the UK is the intended destination due to the presence of close family members or perceptions of Britain as offering safety, fairness, and improved future prospects (Davies et al., 2021). The presence of people in the borderscape therefore reflects a range of legal and migratory pathways, rather than a single, linear movement towards the UK.

4.3 The role of the state

In 1999 the French Red Cross opened a reception centre in Sangatte, close to the Eurotunnel entrance in Calais. It was closed at the end of 2002 after sustained pressure by the UK government (Hicks & Mallet, 2019; Reinisch, 2015). What followed was the dispersal of people into subsequent informal jungles and squats around Calais and the region, on whatever ground was available, from forests to buildings (Hicks & Mallet, 2019). Small evictions ran continuously between 2002 and 2016, with three large-scale demolitions occurring in 2002, 2009 and 2016, whereby each clearance was followed by re-formation elsewhere (Hicks & Mallet, 2019). From 2015 onwards, the municipality cleared squats across Calais while tolerating a site at *La Lande*, where the Jules Ferry day centre was established with European Commission emergency funding (Hicks & Mallet, 2019). What emerged here was a structure far more sophisticated compared to the previous, forcibly only short-term jungles – people built “restaurants, shops, places for Muslim and Catholic worship, a school and French language training, a kindergarten, a library, a theatre, and even a nightclub“ (Hicks & Mallet, 2019, p. 12). By October 2016 estimates of its population ranged widely, with French President Hollande citing 9,000 residents ahead of the clearance (Hicks & Mallet, 2019). In January 2016, a fenced container camp with turnstiles and a palm-print entry was installed on site, and demolition followed in two stages: the southern half in February and the northern section in late October of the same year, with

residents transported to centres across France (Hicks & Mallet, 2019). Since 2016, the policy changed its target, rather than removing concentrations once they formed, it aims at preventing them from forming at all under the doctrine of *zéro point de fixation*. Repeated dismantling has dispersed people across many small, short-lived sites along the coast (CNCDH, 2021).

Evictions in the borderscape happen regularly and repeatedly. In 2025, across Calais and Grande-Synthe, 645 evictions were enforced, with 4487 tents and tarps seized and 382 arrests during the evictions carried out (HRO, 2025). When an eviction is conducted, CRS forces (Compagnies Républicaines de Sécurité) secure the site in the early morning. Officers therefore wear riot gear, equipped with helmets, shields, and batons, and carry tear gas. Afterwards, a so-called *cleaning team* contracted by the state is deployed to remove tents, sleeping bags, and personal belongings (Fieldnotes). While these operations are required to, by law, preserve and produce inventories of belongings removed (Gouvernement français, 2012), in practice this is done inconsistently and people can lose possessions (Fieldnotes). Evictions are conducted under the *enquête de flagrance*, a procedure available when an offence is being committed or has just been committed (art. 53, Code de procédure pénale), premised on urgency, to interrupt the offence and prevent destruction of evidence (HRO, 2025)

Evictions can also proceed under an *ordonnance sur requête*, a temporary ruling made by a judge without the other side being heard, in cases where the applicant is entitled not to notify them (art. 493, Code de procédure civile). Here it is obtained by the landowner from a judge and is immediately applicable (HRO, 2026b). In May 2026, both routes were in use at once, with ten operations carried out under court order and five under flagrancy (HRO, 2026c). In LS 1, a first order covered January until 8 April 2026, and a new one was issued on 29 April. Although the inhabitants had declared themselves through a lawyer precisely so they would be notified of any proceedings, they were not informed before the operations that followed, and the order was handed to their lawyer only on 2 June, after the evictions it authorised had taken place (HRO, 2026b, 2026a). Between 11 and 19 May, LS 1 was evicted five times; the first time it had been targeted on consecutive days (HRO, 2026c). The regularity of these operations is not a side effect, but the way this policy works.

Beyond evictions, the ground itself is altered. At LS 1, deforestation and rockfill were observed over several months, rendering some zones entirely uninhabitable, and on 19 May the soil was dug out by an excavator and removed in a skip while inhabitants watched (HRO, 2026a). On 26 June, around thirty rocks were placed at the entrance of a living site at the request of the town hall, restricting inhabitants' movement, preventing associations from reaching the site, and cutting off access to clean water (HRO, 2026b). HRO describes these practices as part of the zéro point de fixation policy, alongside fences, walls and levelling, with the aim of making spaces inaccessible so that people cannot settle durably (HRO, 2026b). Unlike an eviction, which must be repeated, modified terrain is applied once and lasts.

The state provides very little of what people need to survive in the borderscape, and access to what exists is tightly rationed. Emergency shelter through the Service Intégré d'Accueil et d'Orientation, the state's integrated reception and orientation service, allows women and newly arrived families one night, reduced from three until 2022, and is not available at all to men who are alone. The Centres d'Accueil et d'Examen des Situations (CAES), reception and assessment centres, recorded 546 refusals of lone men between 3 November 2025 and 29 March 2026. Withholding and offering is thereby operative simultaneously. Evictions are presented by the authorities as humanitarian interventions offering shelter, with buses provided to the CAES, but according to testimonies collected by HRO only a few people were offered this at all, and the centres are reserved for those intending to claim asylum in France, which most people at this border are not (HRO, 2026a). The centres are further far from the coast, leaving people without the means to return. At the eviction of 2 June, no shelter buses attended, so no accommodation was offered despite eviction procedures requiring it (HRO, 2026b). HRO concludes that this succession of interventions shows the authorities failing their duty to protect people on the move while producing more precarious living conditions (HRO, 2026a).

In the absence of sufficient state services, most of what people need is provided by associations rather than by the state. An exception is organisations with a state mandate, such as AUDASSE (Association Unifiée pour le Développement de l'Action Sociale, Solidaire et Émancipatrice à Arras), which is responsible for housing people during evictions. Most daily provisions, such as food, water, shelter materials, charging, information, or legal support, are provided by grassroots organisations and solidarity workers, distributed at points set up at the entrances of living sites (Fieldnotes, 02.04.2026). Associative work in the borderscape is itself constrained. The obstruction of associative activity at Calais has been documented over an eighteen-month period of systematic observation by the Ligue des droits de l'Homme (LDH, 2024). Solidarity workers were subjected to 18 identity checks and 10 vehicle checks in the first months of 2026 alone, and two HRO observers were arrested in April 2025 and held for 16 and 17 hours before being discharged in May 2026, when the court accepted that their monitoring function warranted protection comparable to that of the press under Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights (HRO, 2026c). Access is also restricted physically, with evictions taking place further from the city centre behind walls and barbed wire, and rocks placed at site entrances preventing associations from reaching people (HRO, 2026b, 2026c). Such pressures on everyday solidarity at this border have been analysed as a form of insidious harassment (Hagan & Bachelet, 2024). Provision by solidarity organisations is therefore not a correction to the absence of state services, but a condition that absence relies on.

4.4 Consequences for people on the move

Enforcement in the borderscape is dense, technical, and paid for in large part from across the Channel. Policing is continuous rather than tied to eviction operations alone, extending to identity checks, vehicle checks, and surveillance of public transport, where police and drivers have been observed sorting passengers and restricting access to buses on the basis of appearance (HRO, 2026b). At the port and the tunnel terminal, security infrastructure has accumulated over a decade to include vehicle-scanning equipment, thermal-detection cameras, extended control areas, freight search teams and dogs, video surveillance and fencing (Hicks & Mallet, 2019), with two drones carrying thermal imaging cameras identified as surveilling the tunnel as early as 2016 (Madörin, 2020). Aerial surveillance continues to be used, with helicopters flying over living sites during eviction operations (HRO, 2026c) and drones over the beaches and at evictions (Fieldnotes). The apparatus has followed the crossing rather than preceded it, hardening each route as it comes into use. Much of this is funded by the United Kingdom under successive bilateral agreements. In late April 2026, a new three-year cycle was agreed (which was mid-fieldwork), committing 662£ million between 2026/27 and 2028/29, of which 501£ million goes to strengthening existing controls in northern France and 161£ million to new tactics, against 541€ million under the previous three-year deal of March 2023 (Gower, 2026; Home Office et al., 2026).

The crossing itself has changed shape. Early Franco-British cooperation was directed at security around the Channel Tunnel and the ferry terminals, and at preventing people from crossing hidden in vehicles. Since 2019 it has focused on small boats, which have been the predominant recorded method of irregular arrival in the UK since 2020 and accounted for 89 per cent of detected irregular arrivals in 2025 (Gower, 2026). This shift was produced, as the onshore fortifications at the port and surveillance systems in the tunnel installed in Calais have directly contributed to increasing attempts to cross the Channel by boat (Davies et al., 2021). In 2025, 41,472 people arrived by small boat, a 13 per cent increase on 2024, with the rise attributed in part to more people travelling in each boat following disruption of equipment supply chains (Gower, 2026).

Since the beginning of 2026, French police have operated under a new policy permitting them to intercept and immobilise so-called taxi boats, which collect people at several points along the coast rather than launching fully loaded, and at least six boats had been stopped by April (Gower, 2026). This in turn led departures to move in response, with 32 launch attempts being made from Belgian beaches between January and April 2026, against two in the whole of 2025, a shift some attribute to the heavier police presence in northern France (Gower, 2026), and also the Belgian Federal Police report that crossings increasingly depart from the Belgian coast (Police Fédérale, 2026). Each hardening of a route has therefore displaced departures rather than ended them.

Death is a documented and recurring feature of this border. In April 2026 alone, six people died in the borderscape, four in two shipwrecks on 1 and 9 April and one after being wounded with a bladed weapon (HRO, 2026a). On the night of 2 May, a shipwreck off Hardelot killed a woman and a sixteen-year-old boy and left seven people hospitalised. On the same night, a person died in Calais following an assault, and a man was run over by a truck near Marck at the end of the month (HRO, 2026c). Deaths here are therefore not confined to the water. Over the longer run, at least 487 people have died at this border since 1999, at least 89 of them in 2024, the highest annual figure in twenty-five years (Galisson, 2025). The IOM's Missing Migrants Project, counting the English Channel route more narrowly, records at least 82 deaths in 2024, including 14 children, against 10 in 2018 and 50 in 2019 (ECRE, 2025). HRO attributes these deaths to the policies carried out at the border and to the absence of safe and legal pathways (HRO, 2026c). Alongside this mortality, the crossing is criminalised for those who make it. Of at least six boats intercepted under the new French interception policy in 2026, five people were sentenced to imprisonment and deportation from France as facilitators (Gower, 2026). French courts have convicted *passeurs* who attempted to cross and steered the boat in lieu of paying for passage, sentencing them to prison and an *interdiction du territoire français* (La rédaction, 2022). In the United Kingdom, the offence of illegal arrival introduced in 2022 has been used against small-boat arrivals identified as having steered: of those prosecuted after arriving by boat, 332 were identified as steering, and by January 2026 more than a thousand people had been convicted (Taylor, 2026). The border therefore does not end at the crossing.

5. Data analysis

The fieldwork repeatedly moved between very different situations in which material was collected: police checks, evictions, distributions, preparations for crossing, periods of waiting, conversations, conflict and moments of sociality. What initially appeared as a dispersed set of observations gradually raised a common analytical question: what do these conditions do to the possibilities through which people conduct their lives? The following analysis develops from this question, moving through empirical material before returning to its broader implications.

5.1 The horizon of action

The material collected across the French-UK borderscape indicates that the conditions people on the move face do not merely constitute a series of individual hardships. These conditions instead form what I call a *horizon of action:* it establishes which actions become possible, under what circumstances they can be performed, what potential consequences they might trigger, through whom and by what these possibilities are influenced, and how these possibilities can change over time and space. The

material highlights three dimensions of the horizon of action. First, the horizon establishes itself by forming a field of action that people on the move are subjected to. This is the most empirically load-bearing dimension, as it comprises elements that develop the horizon's central aspects. Second, the horizon comes into being not through one single source, but through an interplay of different actors, practices and infrastructures. Third, the horizon is not static; it is constantly transforming as actors, technologies and strategies change.

5.1.1 Conditional availability of possibilities

On my first day of fieldwork, I arrived in Calais by train. I was, though, not the only one arriving. On my train, there were several groups of people with big suitcases and heavy bags. Some of those travelling appeared very young, while others travelled in groups that appeared to be families, including adults and young children. However, I had no way of knowing why they were travelling to Calais or whether they were "on the move". When the train arrived at the central station, several of the people who travelled in the same carriage left the station before me and headed to the bus stop. Police officers were standing inside the station, watching the group pass without approaching them. At the same time, another group entered the station and boarded a train running west along the coast (Fieldnotes, 01.04.2026).

Some days later, it was my first time in LS 1. We offered our services at a field road. There were a lot of people coming to access them; my colleagues and I estimated between 300 and 400 already waiting for our arrival. We were, however, not the only ones; there were also other organisations offering services: food, tea, phone charging, and information. One of them had a state mandate and offered breakfast. There was also a police car close to their distribution, observing the line the people had formed to get the food. All of the other organisations were non-governmental and can be attributed to the solidarity movement. A lot of people were standing in line. Others were sitting across the space, on benches charging their phones and watching videos on them, on the pavement eating their breakfast, dancing in groups close to a music box or standing around an information desk, talking to solidarity workers.

What stood out for me here was that the space was not only used to meet immediate everyday needs. Some people had collected multiple portions of food, while others were charging several power banks at once. At the information desk, people also asked whether that night there would be a window – an arrangement of weather conditions like wind speed and wave height considered suitable for a crossing attempt (Fieldnotes, 6.4.2026).

The significance of these resources extended therefore beyond immediate consumption; they could form part of the material preparation through which a crossing attempt became practically possible. A later conversation with a former resident of LS 1 elaborated on this preparation aspect: he

explained that you need to have your phone battery fully charged before crossing, as you need the GPS function to understand and potentially navigate where you are going (Interview). This illustrates how crossing was not simply an option that was either available or unavailable. Its practical availability depended on assembling and maintaining the resources and capacities required to attempt it. Food, a charged phone and information about a potential window therefore formed part of the conditions through which crossing became practically possible. More broadly, the horizon distributes possibilities unevenly: actions may remain possible, but their practical availability is conditional on the resources, information and capacities required to undertake them.

While some possibilities could be actively enabled, others depended on institutions or actors whose support could not be relied upon. One participant described having a bicycle accident outside a bar, flipping forwards over his bike and lying on the ground for several minutes unable to move. Police officers sitting in a nearby police car watched the scene unfold but did not approach to assist him; neither did any of the guests of the bar. Although the police were not medical responders, the experience contributed to his sense that official support could not necessarily be relied upon in situations of harm (Interview). Similarly, two other participants described situations involving physical fights, gunshots and sexual violence in which, according to their accounts, police did not intervene, while surveillance through drones continued (Fieldnotes, 27.5.2026). These accounts show that access to formal support and protection could become unreliable or effectively unavailable. For the horizon of action, this means that an option may exist formally while not being practically available as something people can depend upon.

Some possibilities depended on another actor to become available and therefore remained partly under that actor's control. Several participants explained that boat crossings were mediated by smugglers who controlled key conditions of departure, including timing, location and capacity (Fieldnotes, undisclosed date). Participants frequently reported that more people arrived at departure points than could board the available boats, leaving some behind (Fieldnotes, undisclosed date). Access to a place on the boat was also controlled through payment according to prices set by smugglers. Participants described cases in which people without sufficient money were pressured or forced to work in informal shops, while steering a boat could provide a reduced-price or free place on the crossing (Fieldnotes, undisclosed date). While the earlier example showed how people could prepare materially for a crossing, preparation alone did not make the possibility available. Access remained conditional on actors who controlled crucial conditions of departure.

The availability of possibilities was further influenced by the resources available. Participants described different possibilities for crossing the border, which varied in their perceived difficulty, likelihood of success and resource requirements. Some possibilities were regarded as more difficult but less dependent on financial resources, while others were perceived as more viable but required substantial funds (Fieldnotes, undisclosed date). The available routes were therefore structured by a

trade-off between financial resources and the perceived likelihood of successful passage. The field of action was consequently unevenly distributed: different levels of resources made different crossing possibilities practically available.

The practical availability of actions also depended on people's bodily and psychological capacities, as actions that were theoretically possible could become difficult to undertake or sustain when these capacities were reduced. The bicycle accident mentioned above illustrates this: the participant sustained injuries that restricted his movement for several days. Beyond such acute limitations, bodily and psychological capacities could also change through prolonged exposure to the borderscape; this process will be examined later in the analysis.

Taken together, these examples show that the horizon does not simply divide actions into possible and impossible. Rather, possibilities are unevenly distributed and become practically available under particular material, bodily, informational, relational, and institutional conditions.

5.1.2 Uneven costs and consequences

In my third week, I visited LS 4 for the first time. We parked on a bare, dusty area next to the road where the distribution point was also set up. Several other organisations had set up their operations there as well, offering medical services, distributing clothes, tents and sleeping bags, and giving out information. It was a sunny and hot day. One organisation set up several canopies so people had shade, with stations underneath to charge phones and even TVs showing a movie in German. Many people sat under the canopies, mostly groups of men, charging their phones and chatting. Next to the TVs were benches, where women and small children sat. Many of the children spoke German and seemed to enjoy the movie being shown. On the other side of the street, there were some trees, and behind them, participants reported, was one of the living sites. Next to the distribution point were small huts built from pallets, wood, and tarps, making them weather-resistant, and one could not look inside. Participants reported that these were informal shops, where people could buy food, cigarettes and life jackets. During our time there, there were several reports of a gunshot being heard, but as it seemed to have been further than 100 meters away, the distribution continued as planned. Around half an hour later, there was an incident at the distribution point where two men got into an argument, in a group of men standing under one of the canopies. One of the two started to get increasingly aggressive, shouting loudly, pushing and beating the other. A solidarity worker approached and tried to calm the situation down, yet with little success. The man started shouting even more and took rocks lying on the ground, throwing them at the other man. After throwing three rocks without hitting his target, he took out his phone and called friends for backup. Due to the incident, the organisations abandoned the distribution. While we packed our material, we saw a group of small children throwing rocks at each other, imitating the aggressive man (Fieldnotes, 20.04.2026). The episode illustrates how conflicts

within these spaces could escalate rapidly from verbal confrontation to physical violence and the use of objects as weapons. This made proximity to, and potential intervention in, such conflicts carry substantial bodily risks. Actions remained possible, but their consequences could become difficult to anticipate as situations escalated.

Bodily risk was, however, not limited to conflicts between people living in or using these spaces. Encounters with enforcement could themselves become a source of physical danger. One group described returning from playing football when a CRS van stopped next to them. According to their account, the officers initially greeted them before opening the door, spraying the group with tear gas, and driving away while laughing (Fieldnotes, 29.4.2026). The encounter shows that moving through public space remained possible but could expose people to sudden bodily harm through enforcement itself. Police intervention therefore not only restricted action; it could also attach physical danger to actions that remained available.

The consequences attached to encounters with enforcement were not limited to immediate bodily harm. Speaking about police conduct, or attempting to leave situations under police control, could itself be perceived as carrying possible repercussions. Volunteers of organisations reported that they often had challenges with collecting testimonies from people on the move, as they would be hesitant to share incidents involving the police, fearing repercussions (Fieldnotes, 1.4.2026). Similarly, during evictions, people are hesitant to leave the space, as they fear being arrested by the police (Fieldnotes, 9.4.2026). Both examples show that the costs attached to an action could operate through anticipation: the possibility of repercussions could make otherwise available actions difficult or risky to undertake.

These consequences were not confined to distribution points or encounters with enforcement. In public space, there were several instances in which people on the move reported facing hostility from local residents. These ranged from locals deliberately ramming them with bumper cars, resulting in minor injuries (Fieldnotes, 14.05.2026), to being called racial slurs in a bar (Fieldnotes, 09.04.2026). In another instance, a participant reported hostile treatment by a nurse in a hospital, who told him that he was in France and had to learn English at least (Fieldnotes, 08.05.2026). Moving through and making use of public and service spaces therefore remained possible, but could expose people to verbal hostility, discriminatory treatment, and, in some cases, physical harm. The costs attached to action thus extended beyond living sites and encounters with enforcement into everyday participation in the wider city.

The consequences attached to action could, however, become considerably more severe during attempts to cross the border. Several participants reported that, during attempts to board boats for crossing the Channel, police cut the boats with knives in order to deflate them. Participants further described cases in which police boats circled around departing boats, causing them to capsize (Fieldnotes, 20.04.2026; Interview). One participant described the crossing itself as “a life-

endangering journey without sure outcome" (Fieldnotes, 23.04.2026). During the period of fieldwork, I recorded reports of deaths on six separate occasions at the border, four of which occurred during boat crossings (Fieldnotes, 15.05.2026). Reported circumstances included people drowning after being pushed beneath boats during boarding, suffocating on overcrowded boats, and, in one case, two people suffering heart attacks during the crossing. Crossing therefore remained a possible course of action, but one to which severe injury, trauma and death could be attached as potential consequences.

Taken together, these examples show that the horizon not only distributes possibilities unevenly; it also attaches highly unequal costs and consequences to actions that remain available, ranging from anticipated repercussions and hostility to bodily harm and the possibility of death

5.1.3 Recurring practical necessities

One day, I was visiting LS 1. It was a day when the police were doing evictions in various small parts of LS 1. When driving to the living site, we saw several big vans stationed at a field road, with around 30 to 40 CRS officers nearby, wearing army boots and helmets, holding riot shields in their hands, with batons on their belts, and some with tear gas on their backs. Residents reported that considerably more officers were present elsewhere and had formed perimeters around parts of the living site. I saw the 4 CRS officers entering the living site. Often, trucks with people in yellow vests would pass by, with big empty containers equipped on the trucks. It was already the third eviction that happened in the living site that week, and it was only Wednesday. I encountered a man who was sitting not too far from our distribution point by himself in the grass, drinking tea. He seemed upset, so I went to him, and we started to talk. He told me that he was not okay; he was stuck in Calais. His big goal is to go to the UK, but how should he do that? He needs a large amount of money to cross, but there is no work, so he has to rely on begging. Every day he is occupied most of his time with going to look for food, coffee, tobacco, money and so on. Often, he spends most of the money he earned through begging on this. Then the evictions happen; he loses stuff and gets frustrated. He doesn't even have shoes (Fieldnotes, 13.05.2026).

This account shows that the field of action was structured not only by what could or could not be done, but also by what had to be done repeatedly. Securing the conditions of everyday life itself occupied time, energy and attention. The account further highlights the loss of belongings through evictions. Other participants reported that, during these evictions, belongings of residents, like bags, sleeping bags, or tents, are taken by a cleaning team (Fieldnotes, 13.05.2026). Normally, the police are expected to take inventory of what has been taken so that people can get their items back after the eviction at collection points. Solidarity workers report that it is common practice that this is not done, and people therefore lose belongings, sometimes of high value (Fieldnotes 9.4.2026). Two residents of LS 1 reported that the police further destroy tents and other items (Interview; Fieldnotes, 3.4.2026).

Because tents and sleeping bags are scarce, people on the move often have to wait several weeks to obtain one from solidarity organisations (Fieldnotes, 6.4.2026). Obtaining and collecting items like sleeping equipment and belongings, and building up liveable structures in living sites, becomes therefore risky, as they might be destroyed or taken away only a short time after. Replacing tents and sleeping bags can take several weeks, during which residents may experience cold and wet weather conditions (Interview; Fieldnotes, 15.05.2026). The delayed replacement therefore leaves them without adequate equipment for the conditions in which they live. These accounts show how obtaining crucial items such as tents and sleeping bags is not necessarily a one-time task. Time and effort invested in obtaining them can be undone through eviction, making their acquisition necessary again. The horizon therefore produces recurring practical necessities: maintaining the basic conditions of everyday life requires resources and material stability to be repeatedly secured and restored.

5.1.4 Temporal and spatial unevenness

One day I was in a living site. We built up the distribution point at the entrance of the living site, on an open patch of ground. The mood was nice, like every other day. As the living site is not so big, it is always nice with the people, as we have the chance to have a good time in a small group. This day, there were around 30 people there, most of them men who were in small groups, but also some lone women and families, so there were also around 5 children. It was sunny, and people were in a positive and happy mood. It was like every other day; we had good and interesting conversations, laughed a lot, and were happy to share that together. We drank tea, played football, and the children played board games with some adults – generally, people seemed to have a good and relaxing time.

Then, very suddenly, someone announced there was an opportunity to cross, and they had to leave now. The calm mood quickly changed. People quickly finished their tea and cigarettes, looked around, shouted to gather their friends, children, and other family members, and rushed to their tents to gather their belongings. Some frantically asked around to get a life jacket. During this process, people repeatedly shouted, “Hurry up, we have to leave.” A somewhat chaotic scene unfolded, with people running in all directions, shouting names, and packing their things. Once everything and everyone was gathered, the group left in a hurry. From what the life jackets indicated, a majority, but not all, of the people held them in their hands to cross via boat over the sea. My group and I gathered our things and left some minutes after the group. When we drove away, we saw the before-so-fast-acting group standing at the bus stop – waiting again (Fieldnotes, undisclosed date).

The episode shows that action was not distributed evenly through time. Long periods structured by waiting could be interrupted by short moments when an opportunity emerged, and action had to occur rapidly. Action does not only alternate between periods of waiting or acceleration; its temporal course could also be interrupted from outside. Several participants recounted being stopped randomly

while walking on the street, having their ID checked, and being arrested even with legal papers that would allow them to stay in France (Fieldnotes, 9.4.2026). In other cases, participants explained, the police would come into the living site in varying instances and take people away (Fieldnotes, 9.5.2026). When they had no legal papers for staying in France, in some cases they were taken to the detention centre, or would receive an order to leave the country. In most cases, however, people were released after a few hours or a day (Fieldnotes, 9.4.2026; 9.5.2026). These interventions could abruptly disrupt planned activities and the day's temporal course. Plans and movements therefore remained liable to sudden interruption, making the time available for action itself uncertain.

The horizon of action is not only differentiated temporally, but also spatially. The observations showed that the borderscape is characterised by a high visibility and presence of state actors like the Gendarmerie, national police, CRS, border police, anti-crime brigade, and in one case also Frontex personnel (Fieldnotes, 9.4.2026; 13.5.2026). Police vehicles and unmarked vehicles carrying uniformed officers are seen around the clock patrolling the streets, at key movement points like the central station or the beach and dunes, and almost daily at gatherings around distribution points for some time to observe (Fieldnotes, 12.05.2026; Interview). At the central station, a police car was parked with officers inside every time I passed it, which was almost daily (Fieldnotes, 14.5.2026). Also, all public gatherings I observed, including commemorations, were accompanied by police (Fieldnotes, 11.05.2026). Police presence was therefore not evenly distributed across the borderscape but concentrated around particular spaces of movement, gathering and crossing. Being visible or moving through these spaces consequently carried a greater likelihood of observation and possible intervention than in other locations.

The significance of these spaces did not derive only from where police were physically present, but also from the extent to which movement and activity could be observed through surveillance infrastructure. Participants described cameras around the city, as well as drones with cameras and heat sensors flying over living sites (Interview; Fieldnotes, 27.04.2026). On and around the beach, I observed drones and small planes circling the area (Fieldnotes, 06.04.2026). Surveillance therefore extended observability beyond encounters with physically present officers, making people's movements and activities potentially visible across spaces in which direct police presence was absent.

The spatial organisation of the horizon also extended to settlement itself, as not all locations were equally viable places in which to remain. Evictions recur across the borderscape and have led to the closure of several living sites under sustained pressure. Before LS 1 became the largest site in Calais, another living site held that position, which prior residents said closed at the end of 2025 under the same pressure (Fieldnotes, 14.05.2026). Prior residents, solidarity workers and locals described the same sequence in at least four further living sites (Fieldnotes, 29.04.2026; 11.05.2026). Police forces regularly check closed living sites and, if new people have settled, evict them (Fieldnotes, 11.05.2026). This makes the living conditions in the living sites unstable, leaving some residents with

a fear of having to relocate (Fieldnotes, 13.05.2026) and eventually leading to the closure of the site (Interview). We can see here that evictions therefore make settlement possibilities spatially uneven. While some living sites remain temporarily viable, others are repeatedly cleared, making them difficult to establish or maintain as places of residence.

This spatial differentiation went beyond the relative stability of different living sites. Practices of government were not applied uniformly across them. Several participants have reported that only a small number of living sites were evicted regularly by legal decisions, while this might be changing in the future (Fieldnotes, 09.04.2026). In LS 3, participants reported that evictions were carried out against the living sites, but also against the informal shop infrastructure in close proximity to the distribution point, targeting the informal economy rather than the living infrastructure of people on the move (Fieldnotes, 01.05.2026). Further, participants explained that evictions carried out in LS 1 were sometimes only targeting small spots of the living sites where only a relatively small number of people lived, rather than bigger and more central concentrations of tents and living infrastructure (Fieldnotes, 13.05.2026). For the horizon, this means that it was locally configured, rather than constituting one territorial regime that would be simply reproduced everywhere.

Spatial differentiation therefore extended beyond varying levels of police presence or settlement stability. Particular sites were characterised by differing configurations of enforcement, including differences in whether, where and against what eviction practices were directed. The horizon was consequently not distributed uniformly across the borderscape, but the possibilities available, and the conditions attached to them, depended partly on where people were situated.

5.1.5 The relational production of the horizon

The eviction at LS 1 can be read differently when attention shifts from its effects to the actors and practices through which it was carried out. At first glance, the horizon of action at the eviction might seem to be determined by the police forces, showing a big presence and establishing a perimeter around the area targeted for eviction (Fieldnotes, 13.05.2026). While it is true that they are a dominant actor in this, it was not enacted by themselves alone. The cleaning team loaded the items of the living site into the intended containers on trucks and removed them from the location of the living site. Most residents present were not physically detained or removed by police during the period I observed. They roamed around the place, were standing in groups talking, or could be seen eating and drinking tea. One solidarity organisation was also at the site and tried to document the eviction that was happening. Other solidarity organisations were at distribution points in close proximity to the living site, offering tea, phone charging, and information. A state-commissioned organisation was also there and gave out food (Fieldnotes, 13.05.2026). What this episode made visible was that the situation was not produced by a single actor or practice. Police established and controlled the eviction perimeter,

while the cleaning team carried out the removal of belongings. At the same time, solidarity organisations and a state-commissioned provider maintained forms of everyday provision around the site. The field of action that residents encountered therefore emerged through practices that operated simultaneously but in different directions: some displaced and dispossessed, while others sustained access to basic resources and support.

The relational production of the horizon was not limited to moments of eviction. The possibility of crossing itself emerged through the interaction of several actors, infrastructures and conditions. As shown above, smugglers controlled the timing, location and capacity of departures (Fieldnotes, 11.4.2026; 20.04.2026; Interview); state actors securitised crossing routes and sought to prevent crossing attempts (Fieldnotes, 20.04.2026; Interview); material resources were required both to access a place on a boat and to maintain the bodily capacities necessary for the journey (Fieldnotes, 2.4.2026; 6.4.2026); and environmental conditions shaped whether a window for crossing was considered open (Fieldnotes, 6.4.2026). No single actor or condition therefore determined whether a crossing became practically possible; this possibility emerged through the convergence of state controls, smuggler organisation, material resources and environmental conditions.

The different forces producing the horizon did not, however, always operate in the same direction. Some practices responded to or partially compensated for consequences produced through others. As described above, belongings removed during evictions were supposed to be inventoried so that residents could retrieve them afterwards. Where this procedure was not followed, and belongings were effectively lost, solidarity organisations became an important means through which items such as tents and sleeping bags could eventually be replaced (Fieldnotes, 06.04.2026; 09.04.2026). Their provision therefore partially reopened material possibilities that had been narrowed through eviction and failures in the retrieval process. More generally, solidarity organisations provided food, clothing, phone charging and information in contexts where these resources were otherwise insufficient or difficult to access. The horizon was therefore produced not only through practices that constrained or removed possibilities, but also through practices that responded to these effects and partially restored the conditions for action.

Taken together, these examples show that the horizon cannot be attributed to a single actor, practice or infrastructure. Rather, it is relationally produced through interactions between multiple state and non-state actors, material resources, infrastructures and environmental conditions, whose effects may reinforce, mediate or partially counteract one another.

5.1.6 The reconfiguration of the horizon

One day I went to LS 2, and I had been there plenty of times before, but this day was different. Two days earlier, a person was stabbed here during the night. He was found by two residents, who called

an ambulance. While he was successfully resuscitated, he succumbed to his injuries a day later in the hospital. There was a faded pool of blood, close to where we set up our distribution point in the dusty ground. Most of the people who were there on the day we visited had newly arrived, just one day after the stabbing. They did not know about the stabbing. Two residents who were there that day were already living on the site when the stabbing occurred. Around 20 people in total attended the distribution that day. Normally, as residents explained, the police would come by once a week in an unmarked car, standing at the entrance of the living site for some minutes, and then leave, but this day was different. Some 20 minutes after we arrived, two black unmarked cars approached and parked close to our distribution point, located at the entrance of the living site. Getting out of the cars were two women and two men in civilian clothes. During a brief conversation with us some meters away from the distribution point, they openly announced they were police and were investigating the stabbing. Afterwards, they disappeared into the living site. Around 30 minutes later, two uniformed national police officers went by our distribution point, patrolling, and also disappeared into the living site. In the following days, the police presence in LS 2 intensified significantly. Residents reported that police vans would come several times this week in the early morning hours, just before sunrise, going into the living site, waking people up, taking some into custody, and letting them leave after some hours without being charged. Other times, one police van with officers in military clothes would drive into the entrance of the living site, stand there for some minutes, and then leave. The police would further conduct several walks through the living site, separately from potentially specialised investigators seen searching the perimeters of the living site.

The episode shows that the horizon was not a stable set of conditions. Within days, the policing of the same living site had changed in intensity, timing and form. A space previously subject to brief and relatively predictable police visits became one in which investigations, patrols, early-morning entries and short-term detentions occurred repeatedly. The possibilities and risks attached to being present in the living site were therefore reconfigured without the physical location itself changing.

Such reconfiguration did not occur only abruptly in response to particular events; it could also accumulate over longer periods. As shown above, repeated evictions contributed to the closure of living sites, redistributed settlement, and altered which locations remained viable (Fieldnotes, 14.05.2026). In this way, repeated interventions gradually reconfigured the spatial field itself, as places that had previously been available for settlement ceased to remain so.

The horizon could also be reconfigured adaptively, as information generated through previous movements was reported to inform later security interventions. Large stones and fencing were present at numerous locations around the France-UK borderscape, including places previously used as living sites. One participant explained these interventions as part of an adaptive process of securitisation: according to his account, people arriving in the UK were questioned about the locations and routes they had used, after which security measures at those locations were increased. Another participant

similarly reported that phones and geolocation data were checked after arrival in the UK (Fieldnotes, 06.04.2026). In participants' accounts, bordering practices therefore appeared to develop through information generated by previous movements: places that had been usable at one moment could subsequently be physically transformed in ways that narrowed their future use.

Changes in the horizon were not limited to the external organisation of the borderscape. Prolonged exposure could also alter how its possibilities were experienced and evaluated. One participant, reflecting on people who had repeatedly attempted to cross unsuccessfully, described this change as follows: "They always try again and again, but they don't succeed to cross. This situation affected them psychologically, and they became aimless and without ambition, and then they went crazy" (Interview). The account links repeated failure to a loss of orientation and ambition, suggesting that continued unsuccessful attempts could alter how future possibilities were perceived and valued. A similar cumulative effect appeared in accounts of everyday living conditions. One participant described having worn the same clothes for weeks, repeatedly being wet and dirty, and eventually feeling "disgusting" (Fieldnotes, 3.4.2026). His account points to how prolonged exposure could accumulate bodily and affectively, changing not only the conditions in which action took place but how those conditions were experienced. Taken together, these accounts suggest that the horizon could also transform through prolonged exposure itself. Repeated failure and deteriorating living conditions could accumulate psychologically, bodily and affectively, reshaping people's expectations, orientations and evaluations of what remained possible.

Taken together, these processes show that the horizon is provisional rather than fixed. It can be reconfigured abruptly by events, cumulatively through repeated practices, adaptively in response to earlier movements, and through changes in how people themselves perceive and evaluate the possibilities within it.

5.2 Agency as conduct within the horizon

One day I went to a living site and ended up talking to two participants, who shared with me their life story and confided in me about what they experienced in the borderscape. In the last months, they had tried to cross numerous times, each time unsuccessfully, often having their boat cut by the police. The police had also controlled them randomly on the street several times and taken them into custody for up to two days without explanations, without charging them. They told me, "The jungle is different at night, but "jungle is a fitting word – there are all types of animals in it" (Fieldnotes, undisclosed date). They reported that at night people get drunk a lot; it becomes very dangerous, and they shoot weapons into the sky. They shared an incident that occurred some nights prior to our meeting. They were lying in their tent and could hear that in some tents further away, a woman was raped. They turned to me

and asked: “What should we do? Be the fucking heroes? They would kill us!” (Fieldnotes, undisclosed date).

Their question captures the problem at the centre of this section. The participants did not present themselves as having no conceivable course of action: intervention was imaginable, but they evaluated it against what they understood to be its possible consequences. Their decision not to intervene can therefore not simply be read as passivity or an absence of agency. Rather, it was conduct within a horizon of action in which intervention could, in their assessment, result in their own deaths. Agency therefore becomes visible in how people conduct themselves within a horizon of action that structures, but does not determine, what they can do. The analytical question that arises through this horizon is: what forms of agency emerge within this horizon?

My initial analysis organised much of the material along an axis of pressures and responses. The horizon developed above emerged from the first side of this distinction. Turning to how people acted within this horizon, however, the category of response proved less straightforward. While many practices were clearly oriented towards dealing with the conditions people encountered, a substantial body of material concerning everyday sociality could not be adequately understood through this framing alone. I first turn to those practices that were more readily understood as responses to the conditions of the borderscape, before examining the forms of everyday sociality that complicated this distinction.

5.3 Navigating constrained possibilities

One recurring way in which people responded to constrained access to resources was through small tactical manoeuvres within existing distribution procedures. At several distributions, I observed people attempting to improve their position in queues, entering lines more than once, or otherwise working around the procedures through which scarce resources were allocated (Fieldnotes, 03.04.2026; 22.04.2026; 06.05.2026). At one food distribution, for example, some people returned to the queue for a second portion in order to obtain an additional portion. Similar practices occurred during SIM-card distributions, where some participants repeatedly entered the line or attempted to access services through eligibility categories (Fieldnotes, 22.04.2026). One participant referred to such manoeuvres as “Zigzag”, a term he used for practices he described as “illegal”. He referred to attempts to move forward through the queue as *Saroukh* (صاروخ, “rocket”) (Interview). These practices did not alter the provisioning system itself. Rather, people used the limited room for manoeuvre within it to expand their own access to resources. Agency here took the form of tactical adjustments within procedures whose rules and scarcity remained largely outside their control.

Besides these small tactical manoeuvres to obtain resources, people also acted to maintain the material conditions of everyday life. As discussed above, keeping a phone charged was important not

only for communication, but also because it could be needed for GPS during a crossing attempt (Interview). A participant further reported how he would work out in advance where and when distributions would take place the following day (Interview). Observations at living sites showed that people further built stoves out of stones and created communal spaces, storage areas and shelter from wood, tarps and ropes (Fieldnotes, 14.05.2026). These actions show how agency also took the form of maintaining and creating the practical conditions needed to continue everyday life and pursue future action.

Maintaining everyday life also depended on access to money, and some participants tried to obtain it through small-scale economic activity within the living sites. I, for example, encountered people selling SIM cards that had originally been obtained through solidarity organisations, as well as cigarettes sold at lower prices than in regular shops (Fieldnotes, undisclosed date). In both cases, available goods were turned into a source of income. Agency here took the form of identifying small economic opportunities within the borderscape and using them to generate monetary resources.

Another set of responses concerned how people dealt with police presence and enforcement. These actions varied considerably. Some participants reported avoiding places where police presence was expected at all, or, for example, by looking for alternative spaces to obtain services (Fieldnotes, undisclosed date). Others hid when police approached, while some did not visibly react at all (Fieldnotes, undisclosed date). In one case, a participant directly approached a suspected plain-clothes police car rather than withdrawing from it (Fieldnotes, undisclosed date). People also acted collectively, for example by discussing where to relocate after an eviction or by adjusting how and where support was accessed in order to reduce exposure to police attention (Fieldnotes, undisclosed date). In another case, participants sought information about where they could obtain legal support against repeated police detentions, showing that response could also take the form of seeking institutional redress (Fieldnotes, undisclosed date). Taken together, these examples show that police presence did not produce a uniform response. Rather, people conducted themselves differently within the same horizon, ranging from avoidance and concealment to collective coordination, seeking redress, non-adjustment and confrontation.

Responses were also organised collectively and through relationships between people living at the sites. One participant reported that when someone was sick and unable to queue for food, other members of the group sometimes queued several times in order to bring food back to them (Interview). At distributions, people also organised queues themselves, while at one living site I repeatedly observed a participant taking on an informal organisational role, including running music and welcoming newly arriving families (Fieldnotes, undisclosed date). These practices show that dealing with the conditions of the borderscape was not always an individual activity. Agency also took collective and relational forms, through which people organised access, cared for others and helped structure communal life.

Crossing practices formed another field in which agency became visible. Participants described gathering and interpreting information, drawing on accumulated knowledge, and assessing different possibilities before deciding when and how to attempt a crossing. Their decisions also incorporated expectations about how enforcement would operate (Fieldnotes, undisclosed date). Agency here took the form of evaluating available possibilities, reducing uncertainty and acting on the knowledge available to them.

Responses were not only directed towards obtaining resources, avoiding police or pursuing crossing possibilities. They also concerned how people dealt with the experience of prolonged waiting itself. One participant described how people often talked with friends while waiting in distribution lines, explaining that this helped them "never thinking about the time" (Interview). Social interaction therefore not only accompanies waiting but could also make prolonged periods of waiting easier to endure. Agency here took the form of managing the experience of suspended time through social interaction. At the same time, this example already complicates the distinction between response and everyday sociality. Talking with friends was a way of dealing with waiting, but it was also simply part of the social life taking place within the borderscape.

5.3 Everyday sociality beyond responses

Beyond such responses in which social interaction helped people endure the situations they were in, much of the everyday sociality I observed was oriented toward leisure, enjoyment and spending time with others. Listening to music together, dancing in big groups, and playing football were recurring features at distribution points and day centres. At several distribution points, small and big groups played or juggled with a football, while others stood nearby watching and cheering particular plays (Fieldnotes, 03.04.2026; 07.05.2026). Music was similarly present at several sites and the day centres. Large speakers allowed people to choose their own music to play, around which often big groups of 50+ people regularly gathered to dance together (Fieldnotes, 03.04.2026; 20.04.2026). These activities took place in spaces otherwise organised around the provision of aid, but were not reducible to that function. People also inhabited these spaces as places of leisure and social interaction. At the same time, leisure and response were not necessarily separate. One participant described how people "have fun when they listen to music and dance and talk to their friends", but added that they were often also "distracting themselves from what they have experienced" (Fieldnotes, 20.04.2026). Music and dancing could therefore simultaneously be oriented toward enjoyment and social connection while also helping people deal with difficult experiences caused by the horizon and beyond.

Other forms of leisure were less directly connected to dealing with the conditions people experienced. On Sundays, a larger group regularly gathered on a public football field, where people played in rotating teams while others watched, talked and spent time around the pitch. One person

took on an informal organising role, keeping time, coordinating substitutions and refereeing the games (Fieldnotes, 10.05.2026). Similar forms of social life appeared in parties, film screenings, bars and public parks, where participants danced, drank, watched football, played games or simply sat together in the sun (Fieldnotes, 09.04.2026; 24.04.2026; 08.05.2026). What connected these activities was not simply an attempt to navigate or alter the hostile conditions of the borderscape. They were activities oriented toward leisure, enjoyment and social interaction in their own right. Agency therefore also became visible in how people actively shaped and sustained social life within these spaces. Taken together, these examples show that sociality could help people deal with the effects of the horizon and other challenges, but its meaning was not exhausted by this function.

Everyday sociality was also expressed through the relationships people created and maintained across the borderscape. At one living site, several residents had constructed a communal space between their tents, where they sat together, drank tea and prepared food. When we arrived, they invited us to eat with them. Residents explained that, for them, food should be shared and that nobody should eat alone because otherwise it did not taste good (Fieldnotes, 14.05.2026). Eating therefore involved more than meeting material basic needs. It was organised as a social practice through which people spent time together, shared what they had and extended hospitality to others. Agency here took a relational form. Residents not only used available resources to meet individual needs, but also organised everyday life towards sustaining social relationships and forms of living together.

Relationships also extended beyond groups of people living together. At distribution points and day centres, I repeatedly observed participants maintaining contact with relatives and friends through their phones, including video calls with family members elsewhere. They sometimes also introduced them to people they had met, like people they were living with together, even if only through the phone (Fieldnotes, 11.05.2026). Familiar relationships also developed with solidarity workers. At several sites, participants greeted returning solidarity workers warmly, asked about their families and spent time talking beyond the immediate provision of services (Fieldnotes, 04.05.2026; 07.05.2026). In public spaces such as parks and bars, people on the move also socialised with local residents and solidarity workers (Fieldnotes, 24.04.2026). These interactions show that participants' social worlds were not confined to relationships among people on the move or to the institutional roles of aid recipient and provider. Agency here became visible in how people maintained existing relationships, created new ones and extended social ties across the different spaces and groups that made up everyday life in the borderscape.

Another part of how people conducted themselves in everyday social life was visible in practices of appearance and self-presentation. At distribution points and day centres, I often observed people wearing carefully chosen clothes, having their hair cut by fellow residents, and taking group photographs together (Fieldnotes, 23.04.2026; 04.05.2026). At some distribution points, one person would set up a chair and cut hair with electric clippers while others waited nearby for their turn

(Fieldnotes, 23.04.2026; 04.05.2026). These practices show that bodily appearance remained an object of attention and care within everyday life. Self-presentation also extended into digital spaces. Participants frequently filmed one another at distribution points, particularly during music and dancing, and uploaded videos to platforms such as TikTok. Some participants described having substantial numbers of followers, while others livestreamed gatherings or posed together for group photographs (Fieldnotes, 23.04.2026; 04.05.2026). Through these practices, participants did not only take part in social life locally, but also produced and circulated representations of themselves and their relationships to audiences elsewhere. Agency therefore also took the form of shaping how one appeared to others, both within the immediate social environment and through wider digital networks. These practices cannot be reduced to the management of material needs, but formed part of how people presented themselves and participated in social worlds within and beyond the borderscape.

Everyday sociality was also visible in how people inhabited and shaped the spaces available to them. This was particularly apparent in the living sites. One participant described how a tent could be made to resemble a room by arranging blankets, cardboard and other objects inside it: “you put some stuff carton, you make it look like a room” (Interview). Although the tent remained a temporary and precarious form of shelter, people did not necessarily use it only as protection from the weather. They also arranged it as an everyday living space, customised to their liking. This extended beyond individual tents. Across living sites, residents had created communal areas between several tents where they sat together to talk and prepare and consume food (Fieldnotes, 05.05.2026; 14.05.2026). A similar process was visible in spaces established for the provision of aid. As the examples above show, distribution points and day centres were also used for football, music, dancing, haircuts, photographs and prolonged social interaction. Their institutional function therefore did not fully determine how these spaces were used. People inhabited them in ways that introduced other activities and meanings alongside the provision of services.

Everyday life also extended into public and commercial spaces elsewhere in the city. Participants spent time in parks, returned to particular restaurants and bars, and interacted there with friends, solidarity workers and local residents (Fieldnotes, 09.04.2026; 24.04.2026; 08.05.2026). The borderscape was therefore not only a field of enforcement, waiting and aid provision, but also a space that people inhabited through ordinary routines and social practices. Agency here became visible in how people made use of the spaces available to them for purposes that exceeded their immediate or institutionally defined functions. A tent could become an everyday living space, an aid distribution a place of social interaction, and parts of the city familiar places for leisure and social life.

Taken together, the practices examined in this section show that agency within the horizon was performed in a multiplicity of ways. Some actions were directly oriented towards the conditions people encountered. Participants worked within distribution procedures to improve access to resources, maintained material capacities necessary for everyday and future action, navigated police presence

and tactics in different ways, organised care for others, and evaluated possibilities for onward movement. Many of these actions were not necessarily oriented towards contesting or transforming the conditions that constituted the horizon. Rather, people exercised agency by identifying, navigating and making use of the possibilities available within it.

Yet, not all analysed forms of agency can be understood as responses to the horizon of action. Everyday sociality showed forms of conduct whose meaning could not be adequately understood only according to their relationship to hostile conditions. People played football, danced, maintained friendships and family relationships, shared food, shaped their appearance, produced social media content and inhabited spaces for purposes extending beyond their immediate functions. Such practices remained situated within the horizon, but were also oriented towards enjoyment, relationships, belonging, self-presentation and everyday ways of living.

The distinction between response and everyday sociality was therefore not absolute. The same practice could carry several orientations at once: talking with friends could make prolonged waiting easier while also simply being part of friendship, just as music and dancing could involve enjoyment and social connection while also providing distraction from difficult experiences. What therefore matters analytically is not whether an action can be classified as adaptation or resistance. Such lenses read the subject's action primarily through its relation to the structural conditions. Whereby adaptation risks producing a victim reading, as a subject largely determined by structural conditions, resistance risks privileging a hero reading, as a resilient actor capable of transcending them. Instead, the focus here lies on how subjects conduct themselves within the possibilities available to them and what their actions are oriented towards. This allows a subject to emerge that is neither determined by the horizon nor resilient over it but acts within a horizon of action that structures the possibilities through which it conducts itself.

Agency therefore becomes visible in the conduct of life within the horizon. The horizon structures what can be done, at what cost and under what conditions, but it does not determine how people conduct themselves. People navigate constraints, sustain material capacities and pursue onward movement, while also maintaining relationships, organising collective activities, seeking enjoyment and pursuing concerns that exceed the border itself.

6. Discussion

Following the empirical line *conditions – horizon of action – agency*, the analysis has produced three interrelated but analytically distinct findings. First, hostile conditions in the borderscape produced a non-determining and fluid horizon of action that structured which actions become possible, are worth pursuing and under what conditions. Second, agency became visible in how people conducted themselves among the possibilities that remained. Participants were neither determined by the horizon

nor sovereign over it, while their continued capacity to act should not be interpreted as evidence of resilience to its hostility. Third, everyday sociality revealed the limits of the horizon as an explanation of conduct. Although hostile conditions shaped the circumstances in which participants acted, they did not exhaust the meanings and orientations of their actions.

6.1 Structuring the horizon of action

The analysis identified that hostile conditions in the France-UK borderscape produced a fluid horizon of action. This horizon structured which actions became possible, worthwhile or costly, without determining how participants acted within it. As the analysis showed in Section 5.1, the borderscape was produced across a range of sites, including living sites, distribution points, stations, and crossing routes, and through heterogeneous practices, infrastructures and relations, among them evictions, policing, the withdrawal of protection, aid provision and informal economies. These were not merely conditions surrounding the border, but practices and relations through which it was produced and lived (Brambilla, 2015; Rajaram & Grundy-Warr, 2007). The borderscape was thereby mobile, as practices and processes, such as evictions, displacements, or resource availability, repeatedly rearrange the field. It was relational, as the horizon emerged through an interplay of relations among state authorities, humanitarian organisations, smugglers, residents, resources and information. It was also perspectival, as possibilities differed according to location, information, money, resources and relevant social relationships. The borderscape perspective hereby identifies the dispersed and relational field across which these conditions were produced. It does, however, not fully explain by itself how they became consequential for conduct.

Foucault's account of power as the conduct of conduct (2021), offers a way of addressing this question. By conceptualising government in the broadest sense, as the structuring of the possible field of action of others, he directs attention to how particular practices make actions easier, more difficult, riskier or more costly without determining the resulting conduct (Foucault & Lemke, 2021). This was visible, for instance, in the use of security technologies around the tunnel. These made truck crossings appear more difficult and boat crossings comparatively more likely to succeed, thereby guiding participants' evaluation of the available possibilities. The latter nevertheless required substantial financial resources, meaning that surveillance and access to money jointly differentiated which crossing possibilities were practically available. Similarly, access to tents and SIM cards was organised through distribution schedules and eligibility criteria, directing participants towards particular sites, procedures and periods of waiting. Not every condition shaping the horizon, however, constituted an attempt to guide the conduct. Material scarcity, the loss of equipment and direct physical constraints also structured what participants could do.

I use the term horizon of action to specify the situated form of what Foucault refers to as a possible field of action. The metaphor of horizon thereby emphasises that possibilities were not equally or stably available, but appeared differently according to participants' positions, resources, information and relations, while changing as the borderscape itself shifted. The topographical image of a field, by contrast, suggests emergence through the sum of potential choices, with relatively fixed boundaries. The horizon therefore names a fluid and perspectival space of possibilities rather than a fixed set of available choices.

Read together, the two perspectives show how the borderscape became consequential for action. Possibilities shifted across sites and relations and appeared differently depending on participants' positions within it. The borderscape therefore formed a fluid and differentiated horizon that structured what could be done, under what conditions and at what cost.

While literature on borders and migration does not explicitly, to the best of my knowledge, produce a holistic approach to conceptualise the horizon of action, it does crucial work in identifying particular mechanisms that produce the horizon. De Genova's account of the relationship between the autonomy of migration and tactics of bordering provides a broader frame for understanding many of these mechanisms. Border controls are understood as heterogeneous and repeatedly recalibrated attempts to respond to, channel and constrain forms of mobility that they cannot completely control (De Genova, 2017).

Drawing on fieldwork in the France-UK borderscape, Marta Welander develops the notion of *politics of exhaustion* to describe harmful (micro) practices and strategies that seek to deter, exclude and control through the mental and physical exhaustion of individuals (Welander, 2020). The material analysed shows substantial convergence with the practices she identifies, particularly in relation to dispossession and forced mobility. Repeated evictions destabilised living sites and involved the confiscation or destruction of shelter equipment and personal belongings, while replacements could require several weeks of waiting. Recurring police checks and short-term arrests further made movement and plans liable to interruption. These practices were recurrent across the borderscape and repeatedly increased the material and temporal demands attached to shelter and movement. The material therefore documents practices consistent with a politics of exhaustion, but it does not by itself establish that they formed a unified strategy, nor that participants experienced their cumulative effects specifically as exhaustion. Because the analysis focused on how conditions structured practised possibilities, rather than on participants' expressed mental and physical states, it cannot assess the extent to which exhaustion occurred. The horizon of action adds an intermediate analytical level between these practices and the strategic effects attributed to them. Even when exhaustion or deterrence could not be established, repeated dispossession, displacement and interruption altered the conditions under which participants acted by making particular possibilities more costly, uncertain or difficult to sustain. These practices therefore structured conduct without determining a uniform

response or demonstrating that their intended outcomes were achieved. The horizon also shows that the practices captured by the politics of exhaustion formed only part of a wider configuration produced through multiple actors and relations.

One way in which these practices reconfigured the horizon was by repeatedly disrupting the infrastructures through which everyday life could be sustained. Tazzioli (2021) conceptualises this as a mode of *choking*, encompassing heterogeneous and often opaque political technologies that cramp people, disrupt their movements and dismantle infrastructures of liveability without necessarily killing or letting them die. The material most clearly supports the disruptive dimension of this account. Repeated evictions, the confiscation or destruction of shelter equipment, replacement delays, police checks and the instability of living sites disrupted movement and the establishment of liveable spaces. The horizon of action qualifies this conception by specifying how these interventions altered the conditions of action. Sustaining shelter depended on renewed access to equipment, while replacement and continual reorganisation consumed time and resources, without producing a uniform response.

Alongside these proactive interventions, hostile conditions were also produced through forms of state absence. Davies, Isakjee and Dhesi (2017) conceptualise this mechanism as *calculated necropolitical inaction*, through which the withdrawal or deliberate insufficiency of provision exposes people to preventable material and bodily harm. The material partially supports this account. State institutions were highly visible through policing, surveillance and eviction, but remained unreliable as sources of protection and provision. The material documented situations in which police did not intervene when people were injured or in danger, while food, water and shelter equipment were largely secured through solidarity organisations and remained scarce or unevenly accessible. It was yet documented that there was one organisation with a state mandate among the providers of food. The confiscation or destruction of equipment during evictions, combined with replacement delays, further exposed participants to harmful material conditions. However, the analysis does not establish that provision was deliberately withheld as a calculated strategy, nor does it document the bodily deterioration central to Davies, Isakjee and Dhesi's account (Davies et al., 2017). The material is therefore consistent with elements of necropolitical inaction but does not fully demonstrate it. The horizon of action adds an intermediate level between state inaction and necropolitical harm by showing how unreliable protection and provision reorganised the field of possible action. Securing safety and basic resources became dependent on other actors and uneven forms of access, without necessarily producing bodily deterioration or a uniform outcome.

Not all forms of enforcement had to be enacted to become consequential for the horizon. De Genova (2002) uses the concept of *deportability* to describe migrants' susceptibility to deportation. Its power lies in the possibility of removal, which can have disciplinary effects even though most deportable people are not deported. This susceptibility is also unevenly distributed. The material contained neither deportations nor direct accounts of deportability. It more clearly supported De

Genova's (2019) related concept of *detainability*, which refers to susceptibility to detention. Repeated checks and short-term arrests made participants' movement and time liable to sudden interruption, even when detention did not culminate in removal. The material did not, however, consistently establish whether participants anticipated detention or altered their conduct before it occurred. The horizon situates this vulnerability within a wider configuration of material conditions, sites and relations, showing that susceptibility to intervention was one of several conditions structuring possible action rather than the organising principle of everyday life.

Taken together, these works identify different but overlapping mechanisms that produced parts of the horizon. Reading the material through Welander's (2020) politics of exhaustion showed how repeated dispossession, displacement and interruption made certain possibilities costlier, less certain and harder to sustain. Tazzioli's (2021) concept of choking highlighted how recurring evictions, dispossession and police checks disrupted movement and the maintenance of liveable spaces. Davies, Isakjee and Dhesi's (2017) necropolitical inaction drew attention to the contrast between the visibility of state institutions in enforcement and their unreliability in protection and provision, which left participants largely reliant on scarce and uneven solidarity-based support. Finally, De Genova's (2019) concept of detainability showed how repeated checks and arrests disrupted participants' movement and time without resulting in removal.

These mechanisms, however, do not by themselves account for the full configuration within which participants acted. Each isolates a particular operation of border government, whereas the horizon brings their overlapping consequences together with material resources, social relations and differences between sites. It thereby adds an intermediate analytical level between mechanisms and responses. At this level, hostile conditions did not prescribe a particular response but differentially structured what could be done, under what conditions and at what cost. The horizon therefore conceptualises a structured but non-determining field of possibilities without assuming that the strategic or harmful effects identified in the literature were uniformly realised. Having established how this differentiated horizon was produced, the discussion now turns to how participants conducted themselves within it.

6.2 Agency within the horizon

In his conception of the conduct of conduct, Foucault places the "recalcitrance of the will" and the "intransigence of freedom" at the heart of power relations (Foucault, 1982, p. 790). This means that although power may produce an extremely narrow and costly field of possibilities, it does not determine how subjects act within it, since power relations presuppose the possibility of acting otherwise. While the horizon of action is therefore crucial for understanding which possibilities emerge and under what conditions, the analysis must also turn towards how people conduct themselves

within it. This reveals a limitation of much of the literature examined above. These works illuminate how a restrictive field of action is produced by focusing on the effects of power and what particular mechanisms seek to achieve, but they leave less visible how people act within that field.

This does not, however, mean that every condition within the horizon of action leaves scope for action. Arrests, crossing interdictions, and the confiscation or destruction of equipment may directly foreclose particular possibilities. Such moments cannot be fully understood through the conduct of conduct because they operate through material constraint or direct coercion. Yet their significance for the horizon extends beyond what they immediately prevent. Their anticipation structures conduct beforehand, while their consequences shape what becomes possible afterwards. Agency therefore does not consist in sovereignly choosing one's course but becomes visible in how people conduct themselves among the possibilities that remain.

Taking these orientations as a starting point, the following part will discuss selected academic reflections on the question of agency. It is therefore not aimed at reconstructing the entire agency debate in the social sciences; this would not be within the scope of this study, nor adequate, but rather at situating and discussing what the analysed material has brought forward so far.

Laura Ahearn (2001) provides a provisional definition of agency that, as she says herself, leaves many questions open. She defines agency as " the socioculturally mediated capacity to act" (Ahearn, 2001, p. 112). Ahearn nevertheless stresses the importance of defining what agency means in a particular analysis, as the concept risks becoming a "synonym for free will or resistance" (Ahearn, 2001, p. 130). Even sophisticated structure/agency accounts carry this risk. As Vicki Squire argues, that can contribute to the "legitimisation of wider assumptions about the culpability and/or victimhood of people on the move" (Squire, 2017, p. 255). Squire consequently proposes moving beyond the structure–agency framework towards an analysis of acts, interventions and effects. This study does not abandon the concept of agency, but responds to her criticism by refusing to treat agency as a measure of how freely participants acted. Agency refers here to participants' situated capacity to conduct themselves through the possibilities structured by the horizon. The analytical question is therefore not how much agency participants possessed relative to constraint, but how their conduct took shape among possibilities that were differently available, costly and liable to foreclosure.

Another proposal in this debate comes from Henrik Erdman Vigh (2009) through his concept of social navigation. With it, he describes how people move through environments that are themselves moving. Navigation directs attention to the interaction between the movement of actors and the ongoing transformation of their social environments. People orient themselves towards present possibilities and envisioned trajectories, adjusting their strategies and tactics in relation to how they experience and anticipate social forces. Planning and action are therefore not separate and sequential, but remain in continuous dialogue as people attempt to actualise trajectories within changing environments (Vigh, 2009). This perspective closely corresponds to how agency appeared in the

material. It was shown that participants did not act in relation to a fixed set of constraints but within a field repeatedly reconfigured by evictions, police interventions, resource availability and changing crossing conditions. They developed small tactical manoeuvres within existing distribution procedures, considered plans to relocate after an eviction, or avoided places and looked for alternatives. Agency therefore appeared as an ongoing process of orientation, pursuit and readjustment within a changing field, rather than as an isolated choice made before action.

Vigh's concept nevertheless differs from the horizon of action in analytical terms. While social navigation primarily concerns how people act within a moving environment, the horizon of action specifies how bordering practices, material resources and social relations make possibilities differently available, costly and liable to foreclosure. Importantly, Vigh's concept does not presume complete knowledge, strategic mastery or successful movement. Navigation can involve "muddling through" uncertain environments, while the capacity to manoeuvre remains situationally defined by social positions and relations of power (Vigh, 2009, p. 424). The horizon of action additionally draws attention to moments in which direct coercion or material loss forecloses particular possibilities altogether, as well as to how these interventions structure action before and after their occurrence.

Migration scholarship has similarly challenged accounts in which border control acts upon passive subjects. Mainwaring (2016), for example, conceptualises the "border from the bottom up" as a contested site of negotiation among migrants, smugglers and border guards (Mainwaring, 2016, p. 289). She thereby shows how migratory passage is negotiated among differently positioned actors, rather than governed unilaterally through sovereign control (Mainwaring, 2016). The material analysed echoes this relational understanding. Some participants avoided particular sites, relocated and sought information in ways that responded to or circumvented particular manifestations of control. Mainwaring's analysis, however, primarily foregrounds conduct oriented towards negotiating migratory passage and migration control. Practices concerned with maintaining the material conditions of everyday life proceeded through distribution procedures, resource availability and social relations without necessarily being oriented towards contesting or circumventing control. Although such practices might also be described as forms of negotiation, doing so would continue to make their relationship to control their principal analytical feature. Mainwaring's conception is therefore useful for making migrant agency visible within border relations, while the horizon of action accommodates conduct that unfolds through conditioned possibilities without necessarily negotiating, circumventing or transforming the conditions involved.

The emphasis on negotiation and circumvention also raises the question of which actions are recognised as expressions of agency. Mahmood (2006) criticises approaches that treat agency as synonymous with resistance and tie its recognition to a liberatory telos. She instead understands agency as a capacity for action, that may be created and enabled by historically specific relations of

subordination (Mahmood, 2006). Agency therefore cannot be recognised only through opposition to relations of domination.

Safouane, Jünemann and Göttsche (2020) developed a related critique in migration research. They problematise the conflation of agency with resistance or emancipatory political agendas and advocate an immanent and non-prescriptive approach. Migrants expressions of agency are understood as pragmatic attempts to reappropriate norms within constraining social contexts (Safouane et al., 2020). Their argument therefore supports an interpretation of participants conduct that does not make resistance or transformation the criterion through which agency is recognised. Yet, uncoupling resistance from agency should not result in interpreting participants' continued capacity to act as resilience. Ilcan and Rygiel (2015) use "resilience humanitarianism" to describe governance that constitutes refugees as self-reliant subjects responsible for adapting to and surviving crisis (Ilcan & Rygiel, 2015, p. 334). Although their analysis concerns humanitarian governance in camps, it cautions against treating participants' improvisation and continued conduct as evidence that they could absorb hostile conditions. The fact that participants could act did not make the horizon less harmful or the institutions producing it less responsible.

While this cautions against interpreting situated action as evidence of resilience, Scheel (2013, 2017) raises a more fundamental objection about the concept of agency. He criticises structure-agency approaches for analysing structures and forms of agency separately and sequentially. As an alternative, he conceptualises embodied encounters through a "conflicting dialogue of actions" that reciprocally impact one another (Scheel, 2013, p. 282). Based on this, he locates that "what the notion of agency fails to capture is what we often find on the ground: an intricate entanglement of practices of government[7] and subversion (Scheel, 2017, p. 394). This criticism bears directly on the organisation of the analysis and present discussion of this study. The horizon of action cannot be understood as a set of conditions that is first constituted by border power and subsequently confronted by an acting subject. Such a reading would reproduce precisely the sequential separation between structure and agency that Scheel criticises.

The concept of the horizon of action therefore needs to be amended by a reciprocal element. Hostile conditions structure which possibilities are available, sustainable or worth pursuing, but actions undertaken within these conditions can themselves alter what subsequently becomes possible. This was visible, for example, when sickness affected a person, and their friends gathered food to support recovery. The possibilities facing the sick person were consequently different because of the actions of others, while those providing care simultaneously altered their own immediate possibilities by orienting their conduct toward their friend. What was possible for any one participant therefore

[7] When Scheel writes of government, he understands it in the Foucauldian sense as explained above (Scheel, 2013, p. 281).

depended partly on what others around them did. Food, time, information, mobility and practical support could be shared, withheld or redirected, thereby changing the immediate conditions under which subsequent action became possible. The horizon should consequently not be imagined as an individually encountered range of options, but as relationally constituted, as the possibilities available to one person could be generated, sustained or constrained through the conduct of others.

This also introduces a temporal dimension to the concept. Actions do not merely select among possibilities existing at a particular moment; they may alter the conditions from which later actions proceed. A possibility taken up at one moment may sustain another possibility, foreclose an alternative or make an option available to somebody else. The horizon is therefore continuously reproduced through conduct rather than remaining stable while action occurs within it. This does not imply that participants could simply transform the hostile conditions structuring the borderscape. The asymmetry remains crucial: a person sharing food may change what their friend can do without changing the scarcity, policing or instability through which that need arose. What changes is the situated configuration of possibilities within those conditions. The horizon therefore was not simply imposed from the outside and then navigated individually. It was continuously affected by relations and actions taking place within it

The expository separation of the analysis conducted in this thesis, further, should not be understood as an ontological division between structure and agency. The horizon names a changing configuration of possibilities produced through practices and relations in which participants were already acting. Scheel's focus on the reciprocal relationship between government and subversion avoids treating bordering practices and migrants' actions as separate domains, and therefore provides an important corrective to a sequential understanding in which border power acts first, and people on the move subsequently respond. Nevertheless, this relationship cannot be assumed to account for the orientation of all conduct taking place within the horizon. Scheel's analytical focus is principally on practices insofar as they are oriented towards practices of government, whether through appropriation, circumvention or subversion. This raises a limit when moving from an analysis of border struggles to the broader question of how people conduct their lives within the borderscape. Actions remain entangled with governmental conditions without being oriented towards them. Recognising this limit raises a further question. If actions within the horizon are not necessarily organised as responses to its conditions, through which other orientations does the conduct of life take shape?

6.3 Beyond response: the orientations of conduct

Once conduct is not identified solely through its response to the conditions of the borderscape, the everyday sociality in the material becomes analytically significant in its own right. The material repeatedly showed that a single practice could have several overlapping orientations. Conversations

with friends could make prolonged waiting more bearable while also expressing friendship and interest in one another. Music and dancing could distract from difficult experiences, but they were also practices of enjoyment and social connection. Similarly, building and maintaining living spaces responded to material deprivation, while also creating spaces in which social life could occur. The same practice could carry several *orientations*, understood here as the concern towards which conduct was directed. They cannot be separated completely from the horizon, but neither can they be fully explained as adaptations or responses to it.

Das's (2024) description of the "mutual absorption of the violent and the ordinary" helps here to interpret everyday sociality as occurring neither outside hostile conditions nor simply as their effect (Das, 2024, p. 7). In the material analysed here, these conditions entered everyday life, while practices such as friendship, music, and dancing also carried orientations not directed towards them. This interpretation also resonates with critiques of research that treats migration, and consequently borders, as an overarching explanation of social life. Malkki (1995) shows how the category of the refugee can abstract people from their particular histories and social relations, while Dahinden (2016) argues that migration research may reproduce migration-related categories when it assumes migration in advance to explain its object. Therefore, interpreting friendship, enjoyment and collective activities exclusively as coping, adaptation or resistance would similarly reduce participants' conduct to their position within migration control. The relevance of border power to these practices must therefore be established empirically rather than presumed.

Decentering border power as an exhaustive explanation does not mean minimising its devastating consequences. As the analysis has shown, it produces degrading, violent and at times deadly conditions. Tazzioli's (2021) concept of infrastructure of collective liveability is useful here, because it shows that border violence disrupts not only material conditions but also "spaces of collectivity and sociality" (Tazzioli, 2021, p. 5). Yet, the sociality that took shape within these spaces was not solely oriented towards sustaining life under hostile conditions. It also involved friendship, enjoyment and shared concerns that cannot be exhaustively understood as responses to border power.

The material analysed here suggests that conduct may respond to, evade, or even, to a limited extent, shape practices of government, but cannot be exhaustively understood as taking any of these forms.

The empirical example of the participant who cared for sick friends makes this visible. He obtained items they needed and reorganised his own actions around caring for them. These practices unfolded within possibilities conditioned by the horizon and could themselves alter what was possible for those involved, yet their immediate orientation was towards caring for a friend rather than towards the governmental conditions within which that care took place. The distinction, then, is not between conduct that is entangled with government and conduct that is not, but between the conditions through which conduct becomes possible and the orientations through which it takes shape. The horizon of

action therefore does not presume that all conduct must be classified according to how it responds to border government. It asks how conduct unfolds through a conditioned but non-determining field of possibilities, without assuming that its orientation or meaning derives from those conditions. The horizon consequently remains relevant to the conditions of conduct without necessarily becoming its object or organising orientation. The concept of agency is retained to name participants' situated capacity to act within this field, without defining the meanings of their actions through border power

The importance of this finding lies in the limits it places on the borderscape as an explanatory framework, thereby addressing one aspect of the "theoretical and methodological vagueness" identified by Krichker (2021, p. 1224). Not every practice whose orientation exceeds border power is therefore analytically significant. Such practices become relevant where the gap between the conditions under which conduct occurs and what that conduct is oriented towards reveals the limits of border power as an explanation. Everyday practices are relevant here not because they should themselves be redescribed as bordering practices, nor because every mundane action is relevant just because it is performed by people on the move, but because they show that border power conditions the possibilities through which conduct unfolds without organising all its orientations or meanings. The horizon therefore allows the analysis to trace where border power becomes consequential while also marking where it ceases to provide a sufficient explanation.

What emerges through this conception is a reading of the subject that is not bound to a dualism, neither determined by structures nor sovereign over them. This finding reveals something more intricate about border power than how it could be described through a structure/subject thinking. The power of the border identified here does not lie simply in the creation of frontiers and hostile conditions that people can either submit to or revolt against; it rather structures life through the horizon of action. This distinction is crucial because power over the conditions of conduct does not necessarily amount to power over its orientations. Žižek's (2016) discussion on Lacan illustrates this distinction. In it, he described how an unhappy child on a Sunday afternoon is forced by its father to visit the grandmother, instead of playing with friends. He interprets that in this case, the situation of the child is not dire, as it can retain its inner freedom through the ability to rebel against the fatherly authority later on. In contrast to this, he poses the message of the "postmodern", anti-authoritarian father, who tells the child that its grandmother loves it so dearly, and doesn't want to force it, but should only go if it really wants to. Behind this appearance of free choice, he analyses, lies an even more tyrannical demand, not only an implicit command to visit the grandmother, but also to do so voluntarily, of one's own free will (Žižek, 2016, p. 45, own translation). Žižek's example thus points to a form of power that does not merely structure what a subject can or must do but seeks to organise what the subject wants to do. Read against the material analysed here, this helps distinguish between power over the field of conduct and power over its orientation. The horizon of action captures the former without presuming the latter.

The important finding for this study is thereby that conduct at the borderscape can exceed the reach of this intrinsic function of border power. Border power should therefore not be treated as analytically totalising, as not everything a subject does can be read as resistance, coping, adaptation, endurance or some other form of response to it. The limits of border power are therefore not an outside in which subjects become free of power, but a limit to border power's explanatory reach. The findings of this study therefore suggest a differentiation between power over the field of conduct and power over the orientation of conduct. Rather than asking whether the child obeys or resists the visit to its grandmother, the horizon asks how the child conducts itself once the visit forms part of the field within which it acts, and what the conduct becomes oriented towards.

7. Conclusion

While this thesis initially asked how people on the move in the France-UK borderscape respond to hostile conditions, it emerged that asking purely for response did not account for the complexity of the action of people on the move established here. The analysis found that hostile conditions structured people's conduct by producing a fluid and uneven horizon of action. The analysis showed how the hostile conditions were produced through a number of mechanisms, including repeated evictions and dispossession, policing and interruption, scarcity and dependence on provisioning, securitisation of crossing routes, uneven access to information and resources, as well as informal economies and intermediaries. These mechanisms did not simply prohibit action; they changed the conditions under which different courses of action became possible, costly, uncertain, and lastly worth pursuing.

The analysis thereby complicates an understanding of agency as either the capacity to resist border power, or the capacity to overcome restrictive conditions. Participants exercised agency through the possibilities available to them, including possibilities that had themselves been conditioned by border government. Choosing between crossing strategies, waiting, relocating, obtaining resources, avoiding particular spaces or relying on others did not require escaping the horizon in order to constitute agency. Agency was exercised within this uneven field, rather than outside it.

The third finding places an important limit on how the horizon of action should be understood. Everyday practices of sociality unfolded within possibilities that were themselves conditioned by the borderscape. Where people spent time, what resources were available, and how stable particular forms of social life could become (e.g. going home after playing football) were affected by policing, evictions, scarcity, and the continual possibility and dream of onward movement. This, however, does not mean that the meaning or the orientation of these practices can be derived from those conditions. Caring for a sick friend, cooking and drinking tea with others, may take place within a horizon structured by border government without being undertaken as a response to government. The horizon

of action therefore concerns the conditions through which conduct becomes possible rather than providing an exhaustive explanation of why people act as they do. This distinction also prevents agency from becoming analytically synonymous with resistance. If conduct taking place under hostile conditions is interpreted according to its relationship to those conditions, ordinary practices risk being redescribed as coping, resilience or resistance even where border power is not their organising orientation.

The horizon of action approach positions itself as a conceptual tool that could advance the study of borders. Going beyond reading people on the move's actions as necessarily responding to the conditions of the borderscape, it opens a new way of understanding agency in border contexts. While the study of resistance and resilience can be useful, especially as a way of constructing counter-narratives against stigmatising public discourses on migrants, academic analysis should go beyond reproducing such dualisms to pay tribute to actions of people on the move that go beyond normative classifications. This step is crucial, as it allows us to develop perspectives that account for the manifoldness of actions to be observed at the border. The empirical examples in this thesis have shown that people on the move are indeed subject to the hostile conditions produced at the border, including the suffering and sometimes mortal consequences this brings forward. This, however, does not mean that their actions are determined by it. Moving away from an analysis focused on responsive conduct allows us to perceive a space that emerges within the borderscape between the structuring of possibilities and the conduct that unfolds through them.

This space opens up an investigation of difference in action, within a space that produces similar possibilities. The empirical data has also shown that people act differently when confronted with similar hostile conditions. When in contact with police presence, some might avoid, others might confront, and still others might remain, comply or continue with what they were doing. Likewise, scarcity, repeated eviction or uncertainty around crossing did not produce uniform responses among participants. Similar conditions could lead to different judgments about what was possible, worthwhile or necessary at a particular moment. Understanding this variation requires attention not only to the conditions under which action takes place, but also to resources, situated projects, relationships, obligations and evaluations through which particular possibilities gain significance.

What opens up here is a field of study of government that focuses less on the mere construction of a field of possible actions and more on how people conduct themselves within a similar field of actions. This avenue of research is interesting not only for advancing understanding of how people conduct themselves within hostile environments, but also for the study of border government itself. Once border power no longer exhausts the explanation of people's conduct, the question arises as to which forms of conduct border government seeks to act upon in the first place. Are forms of conduct that remain outside its apparent orientation simply not targeted, are they tolerated, or do they fall outside what is rendered governable within the borderscape? This shifts attention towards the

selectivity of government, through the practices, movements and forms of conduct that become objects of intervention, and those that remain comparatively untouched.

While this thesis constitutes a starting point for this thinking, the limitations outlined in the methodology chapter show that further studies are needed to fully develop this approach. What has been brought forward here rather offers a situated account of how hostile conditions structured conduct within the particular sites and encounters documented during the fieldwork. One important avenue concerns the temporal dimension of the horizon. The fieldwork captured particular configurations of possibilities at particular moments over a course of six weeks, while the concept itself suggests that these configurations may shift considerably over time. Repeated or extended data collection periods following people over longer periods could examine how horizons change as knowledge is accumulated, relationships are formed, resources are gained or depleted, and previous experience alters how particular courses of action are perceived.

A second question concerns the unevenness of the horizon. While the material showed that possibilities were not distributed equally, the present thesis cannot systematically account for the sources of this differentiation. Further research could examine how access to information, material resources, social relationships, previous experiences and individual circumstances interact in producing differently configured horizons within the same borderscape. Such work could clarify whether it is analytically useful to speak of a shared horizon produced by a governmental configuration, or whether horizons should be understood primarily through certain groups sharing similar characteristics.

Finally, the analytical reach of the concept remains to be tested beyond the particular border context studied in this thesis. The France-UK borderscape combines concentrated policing, repeated displacement, humanitarian provisioning, informal infrastructures and an orientation towards onward movement. Other borderscapes organise possibilities differently. Comparative application of the horizon of action could therefore help to establish which dimensions of the concept are specific to particular bordering arrangements and which provide a more general vocabulary for analysing the relation between government and conduct.

Most importantly, further development of the horizon of action would require research to pay closer attention to what occurs between the availability of a possibility and its translation into conduct. The present study has shown that similar possibilities do not necessarily lead to similar actions, but it has only begun to explore how people on the move evaluate, prioritise or dismiss the options available to them. Further work could therefore examine more closely how particular possibilities become meaningful, urgent, acceptable or undesired in relation to people's experiences, relationships, obligations and future orientations. This would help to specify more precisely how conduct emerges within a structured horizon, without being reducible to the structure of that horizon itself.

The initial scene presented in this thesis exemplifies the dynamics explored throughout the study. The sudden possibility of crossing reorganised the afternoon, transforming conversation, play, and waiting into hurried preparation, before a return to waiting once movement failed to materialise. This sequence shows how quickly the relevance of particular possibilities shifts within the borderscape. An apparently ordinary afternoon could be restructured within minutes by the emergence of a potential crossing. At the same time, the absence of movement redirected individuals to forms of waiting and sociality that were always intertwined with the prospect of movement. These moments represent not merely successive reactions to the border, but elements of a more intricate conduct of life in which immediate opportunities, relationships, routines, and future-oriented projects intersect. Neither the preceding relaxed sociality nor the subsequent urgency can be fully understood in isolation. The border's influence lies in its ability to structure the horizon through which individuals organise their lives, yet existence within that horizon encompasses more than mere responses to the border.

8. References

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