



Radical Migrant Solidarity

*initiatives,
observations and ideas
from the struggle against the border regime*

Preface

This zine is designed to function as a basic point of reference for radical solidarity work with migrant communities.

While we focus on the specific issues that arise from working with undocumented migrants, the basic principles upon which we operate, and some of the tactics used, are likely to be transferable to solidarity work with other communities.

Here, we examine the concept of solidarity, explore potential obstacles to working within migrant communities, and suggest ways to overcome them.

We then consider some of the most significant challenges encountered by migrants across Europe, suggest approaches supporters can take to help address these, and outline a handful of radical initiatives for inspiration.

This theory and practice draws primarily from experiences of No Borders activists with migrants in the UK; and those in Calais working under the banner of Calais Migrant Solidarity (CMS). While we have sought to include examples of some inspirational projects elsewhere in Europe and overseas, it is safe to assume that we have neglected to mention countless others.

We hope that sharing these observations will lead to more effective work, in particular within communities of undocumented migrants, and that the steep learning curve we have experienced in Calais and elsewhere can be one which is shared with those new to this field of activism.

This zine is dedicated to Marie-Noëlle, the first No Borders activist in Calais and an inspiration to countless others. You had the courage to cry out in the darkness and to take on the forces of oppression alone. The spirit of your resistance lives on.

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1. Solidarity in theory

The No Borders movement operates implicitly on the anarchist principles of freedom, equality, and mutual aid. This forms the basis of our belief that people should be free to migrate where they want; that this freedom applies to all regardless of race or nationality; and that ordinary people should bypass the state to support those who do not have this freedom. This need is ever-pressing in view of the increasingly securitized, sophisticated, and lethal nature of global border controls¹ as industrialised economies struggle to fortify their disintegrating havens of wealth, and shore up a narrative that scapegoats migrants for politically sensitive issues.

No Borders recognises that the vast majority of the world's people, ourselves included, are exploited and oppressed by capitalism and the state. It is this recognition of common cause which allows for a culture of solidarity and mutual aid to emerge.

However, charity, solidarity's converse, does not rely on this recognition of mutual interest. In fact, charity serves to reinforce hierarchies and privileges as well as entrenching the existing socio-economic order. Charities work only within the spheres allowed them by governments, and, despite being the prevailing means of supporting oppressed communities, they can be part of the problem by legitimising the actions of the governments that have helped create the crises in the first place. The constraints placed on them by governments can easily become tools of oppression if they define oppressed communities' needs in accordance with state policies, rather than letting those communities articulate their experiences and wishes for themselves.

To realise social change, we thus have no other option but to work together in solidarity: in creating relationships of trust and respect, where we seek to challenge our own privileges and bridge the gulf between ourselves and 'others'.

Yet despite our commonalities, in the context of immigration, we also recognise the huge differentials of privilege between those with and without papers. Those who can engage in overt resistance and often get away with it; who can navigate the legal and bureaucratic systems with comparative ease; who speak the local language; who have the confidence that wealth and education bring. And those all too familiar with the dangers of fighting back or taking the necessary risks for survival; those

¹ A press review conducted by Fortress Europe found that 14,921 people died at European frontiers in the period 1988-2008, most of them drowned at sea.

scarred by war or torture; those who have given up on hope for a better life, after years of being shunted from one country and detention centre to the next.

Given the theoretical basis of No Borders, and the power imbalances that remain between those with and without papers, the way in which we operate is critical to subverting this dynamic and destabilising the boundaries that keep us apart. Where possible, we therefore strive to work through the horizontal model of solidarity rather than the top-down model of charity.

Empowerment

Solidarity is a two-fold process. Firstly, it is about facing up to the role we inadvertently play in perpetuating inequalities and engaging in a model of resistance that seeks to dismantle these hierarchies. Unfortunately, a capitalist ethos can spill over into our activism, as we see some supporters struggling to overcome their assumed role of 'service provider' or giver of charity, while those with whom they are working seen as passive consumers of support.

Secondly, solidarity encourages us to work in partnership with oppressed communities. We may for example, have to compromise on our preferred tactics for achieving change, insofar as it does not contravene our most fundamental beliefs.

To assume or insist upon a confrontational attitude with the police may sit well with radical anti-authoritarian politics, but is this necessarily putting the needs of those we are working with first? Its a tactic that has its place, but, as with all tactics, it isn't appropriate for all occasions. Bearing in mind the needs of solidarity, we should question how accessible this approach is to those with precarious immigration status. Although in Calais people are almost universally content with us resisting the police, there needs to be an understanding of the limits of what is acceptable. And at times sensitivity and compromise will be necessary.

To always insist on a 'no-compromise' stance, by which we mean culturally as well as tactically, far from being hardcore and cutting edge, has overtones of cultural imperialism and arrogance.

This is not to suggest that we should make value judgements on behalf of migrants or others about what course of action they want to adopt; simply that where we engage in joint projects which affect them as well they should always be consulted on the approaches we take, and that their needs as equals should be respected and that they may have much more to lose than those of us with papers.

Partnership

In the particular case of migrant solidarity, this should translate to flexibility and open-mindedness as to what resistance means and a recognition of how privilege can skew our understanding of it.

For example, in liberal democracies, many activists have fallen into a fixed pattern of using non-violent direct action in an (often vain) attempt to appeal to the mainstream media, believing that in getting the story into the public domain will eventually cause governments or corporations to cave in under the subsequent pressure of public opinion. This misconceived understanding of our ability to influence policy arises in part from many activists' backgrounds of relative privilege.

Consider this strategy from the perception of an Eritrean asylum-seeker. In their country of origin, where the press is severely gagged and peaceful demonstrations violently quelled, this non-violent, media oriented strategy, is simply not on the cards. They may therefore view this approach with scepticism. And with the imperative to remain hidden from public view, many will be hidden behind a veil of clandestinity, making public protest counter-intuitive.

There are of course countless examples where migrants have taken to the streets in protest - the *sans-papiers* demonstrations for regularisation in Paris being a good example. Yet for those in transit or migrants who have gone to ground, resistance may take more subtle incarnations. These include subversion via tactics of evasion; mutual aid through sharing skills, information and material resources; and collective defence strategies.

We can learn a lot from those who live incognito, and from the strength people draw from their cultures.

Activists in Calais have, for instance, been impressed by the incredible spirit, energy and camaraderie demonstrated by many among the Pashtun community, even though some will not have known each other prior to their arrival in the port town. The desire to sing, dance, joke and play despite the miserable circumstances is amazing.

Similarly, the great hospitality and generosity amongst those with so little to offer is heart-warming.

The solidarity demonstrated by migrants comes in many forms: there are those

who undermine the mafia² by helping others cross borders for free, despite the great risks to themselves; the adults who look out for unaccompanied minors; those who raise the alarm when the police raid their camps and in so doing, draw attention to themselves; and the camps where strangers are welcome to take refuge. All of these are things from which to take inspiration. Despite the conditions that are designed to break down bonds and give rise to violence and exploitation, many still strive to support those in a similar situation, regardless of whether they are known to them personally.

CMS activists have said that they have had their assumptions about activism challenged, and have had to re-conceptualise the term *activist* in recognition of the years many migrants have spent subverting the borders and helping one another in the face of state oppression.

As such, we believe we should be putting our energies into supporting the existing movement of resistance; providing tools to help resist control, whilst being clear about our politics and why we do such work.

Not only is it highly effective, but this approach is far more empowering than working *on behalf* of asylum-seekers – which is critical in view of the overwhelmingly disempowering nature of the asylum and immigration system. Treating each other as equals also fosters greater mutual respect than a condescending attitude such as that sometimes shown by refugee charities, or its converse, an overly-sympathetic, deferential one that treats migrants purely as victims and beyond reproach.

Working as equals

As mentioned, charity involves an implicit division between the givers and recipients of aid. It suggests a boundary that the recipients should not cross, that keeps them in their role as objects of philanthropy and leaves unchallenged our privilege as benefactors. The possibilities for finding common ground in such circumstances are slim, for those who engage in this work are setting themselves apart from those they work with. It may feel like we are 'doing something', rather than nothing at all - which serves to assuage guilt - but who other than those with an interest in maintaining the *status quo* could really be happy with this arrangement? Charity casts our interests against one another, instead of saying that we have a mutual interest in radical social change.

2 'Mafia' or 'agents' are the terms used by migrants to refer to people-smugglers

Despite this, some circumstances may give rise to a conflict between standing back and allowing migrants to take the initiative, and the need to act responsibly and safely. This can happen when working with minors, or when migrants put themselves at serious risk, such as with hunger strikes.

Hunger strikes inevitably present major challenges for supporters. In one case in which six refused Iranian asylum seekers went without food for 37 days, there was a major tension between wanting to persuade them to break the strike once they had achieved their first victory (getting a solicitor); and wanting to respect their wishes. These problems were compounded by a lack of alternative options to suggest; and since they were dissidents who had fled a country riddled with secret police, it was further exacerbated by a fear of jeopardising the trust we had built by coming over too insistent.

The challenge of striking the balance between intervention and respect for autonomy is further complicated by the concept of 'boundary setting', which is constantly advocated by charities and mainstream migrants' rights groups.

The idea that we should be clear about what we are doing, why we're doing it, and what we consider to be unacceptable behaviour when we see it, is clearly sensible; as is taking a break if you have been working intensively without any time out.

It can also be unwise to get involved in a sexual relationship with someone who has just endured a particularly traumatic experience.

On the other hand, it is immigration status alone which unites undocumented migrants. Although life is hard, they constitute an eclectic mix of human beings who have endured different experiences, and there is no reason why their legal status should determine what kind of relationship you have and how close you get to a given individual. In intense and emotional environments such as Calais, a few relationships have inevitably arisen between migrants and activists, which seem to have had the effect of strengthening our links.

Nevertheless, activists do need to be acutely aware of the myriad reasons why relationships might develop. Aside from genuine attraction, this might be triggered by grief (of dead, missing or missed relatives or partners); an irrational sense of awe for those who show kindness in an otherwise hostile environment; the perception that activists are a passport out of misery; the young age of many asylum seekers; and the comparatively liberated environment of Europe. With these factors taken into consideration, activists need to be cautious about what kind of responsibility and power they might have over a person and act accordingly.

One aspect of boundary-setting which should be thrown out completely is the idea that we can't be friends with those we are working with, as they're somehow too fragile to manage friendship, might end up being very needy, emotional, etc.

However, in Calais we've always viewed the majority of *sans-papiers* as comrades, and have developed closer friendships with a large handful. And when you are taking on roles such as a kind of surrogate parent for teenage boys, these emotions are going to manifest themselves regardless. It is simply not feasible to provide meaningful support whilst remaining emotionally removed.

Since activism in Calais is wholly dependent on our ability to communicate with the migrant population, and allow our work to be influenced by their ideas, it would be impossible had we not developed these relationships.

Charity work on the other hand doesn't necessarily need to cultivate trust, since volunteers often take it upon themselves to decide how best to respond to a crisis rather than engage with 'service users' to find out what they want.

A radical agenda

It is perhaps a cynical observation, but it is often said that it is in times of crisis that people are most receptive to new ideas, and most capable of extremities of behaviour.

Demonstrations of mutual aid in these situations can open up opportunities for creative acts of kindness and generosity in a cycle of reciprocity. We only have to look at the spirit of mutual aid shown by protesters in Tahrir Square during the Egyptian Revolution, once they had reclaimed public space and acquired a sense of ownership over their lives. Despite the tense atmosphere, it was widely reported that volunteers regularly cleaned the streets after the riots, provided healthcare to demonstrators, and distributed free food. The force of unity and empowering nature of solidarity are critical to creating this cycle of positive feedback.

Shared, high pressure and emotionally demanding experiences can also be powerful and memorable bonding sessions which can give rise to quickly formed, intense relationships. For example, people may pour out their stories or show unusual levels of openness, something to which we can only respond with a similar level of honesty. We may also experience collective hardships; poor living conditions, police harassment, assault, arrest, as well as defiance - all of which foster powerful feelings of comradeship.

It has been beautiful for us to discuss radical politics with Sudanese, Iranian, Iraqi and Kurdish dissidents in Calais, or hearing migrants refer to themselves as No Borders activists. Anti-authoritarian politics constantly simmers beneath the surface for many of those who have endured repression at home or who have been mistreated throughout Europe. When governments are responsible for the violence that forces people to flee, and when other states fail to offer protection, it will be remembered when ordinary people step in, and why they have taken it upon themselves to act should be made clear.

Practical solidarity work is therefore also an opportunity to build the larger and stronger movements necessary to bring about the long-term change required to tackle problems like migration control at their roots.

This exchange of ideas across cultures and development of cross-community resistance is critical to the work of No Borders, and is an area that needs more work by radicals generally. The only contact an Afghan asylum seeker may have had of Europeans may have been NATO raid on their home and being squeezed through the EU deportation machine. Demolishing the perception that all European people hold the same imperialist attitudes and pointing out that governments don't represent their people may resonate with them and help bridge the chasm that engenders racism and conflict.

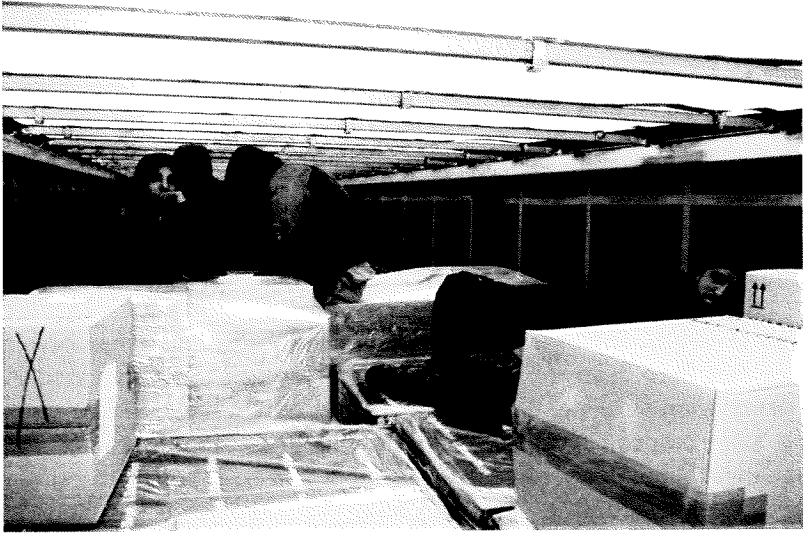
Commitment

Finally, solidarity is about commitment to long term goals and responsibility to one another; about persevering, countering the culture of personal struggle and building a community of resistance. Individualist consumer mentality can manifest itself in activism through passive involvement in campaigns with little desire to take the initiative; or 'activist tourism', i.e., brief consumption of an experience out of self-gratification or curiosity rather than a commitment to social change.

We need to be both committed to our long term goals and to the specific campaigns that aim to achieve them. It is devoting our time to the dull legwork as well as the adrenaline-fuelled action that will see results.

In summary, solidarity means that we work together as equals through radical means for radical ends. We don't just hand out tents, we help find abandoned buildings; we don't simply serve up food, we provide cooking equipment; and we don't just defend 'their' squats, we source the means for a united defence of shared spaces.

2. The borders between us



Borders such as Calais, France, and Athens, Igoumenitsa and Patras in Greece, are areas of concentrated migrant, mafia (people-smuggler) and police activity. Their geographical markers are ports or land borders, squatted camps and detention centres. They are key intersections on migrants' trails and smugglers' routes, and have therefore been a focus of solidarity work.

When Calais Migrant Solidarity began working in Calais in the summer of 2009, the numbers of migrants there had reached their peak, and the hurdles to working collaboratively were more challenging. There were approximately 2,000 people living in squatted camps at the time, with up to 800 Afghans living in one camp. The number of children and teenagers was high, with almost half of the 279 Afghans arrested during the eviction of the Afghan camp that September reported to be unaccompanied minors.

The British government was conducting a proxy war on the undocumented, which manifested itself in the continual harassment of migrants (as it continues to do

today). These activities are outsourced to the CRS³ and the PAF⁴.

The French state declared its intention to make the area a 'migrant-free' zone before the end of 2009, which it sought to achieve in the form of repeated arrests and the destruction of camps and squatted buildings. It was in this context that No Borders activists introduced themselves to those living there, explained their intentions, and attempted to overcome suspicions.

Assuming we are working on the basis of the principles earlier described, and have a relatively sound understanding of the situation we are involved in, there may nevertheless be a number of other potential barriers to working with undocumented migrants.

We outline four which we encountered in Calais.

i) Trust

As mistrust can be a key mechanism for survival for the undocumented, it is very important to avoid asking unnecessary questions. It can be tempting to do so, especially if you are new to a place and feeling awkward or nervous. Yet not only is it disrespectful, but it makes you look like a cop.

In Calais, trust was the biggest and most recurrent problem when we first started, for which there were a number of reasons.

As previously mentioned, there were larger numbers of migrants in the area at the time, and most were young Afghan men who spoke very little English. Communication across these linguistic and cultural hurdles was fairly difficult at times, and it took a while to develop individual relationships, especially in view of the changing population. Added to that was our own inexperience and the fact that the 800-person Pashtun (Afghan) camp was under the authority of the mafia, who frequently spread negative rumours about us. That it took us a while to even realise this is indicative of the depth of the communication problems.

Yet, understanding the context in which these kinds of issues arise, and not taking things to heart is important in attaining a very worthwhile relationship and reputation. We should always assume there is a lot more going on than we are aware of, and accept that we don't need to know it all. Actually advising people not to disclose more information than they need to can also be a quick way of building

3 *Compagnies Républicaines de Sécurité*, the French riot police

4 *Police Aux Frontières*, the French border police

trust.

As well as being overly-inquisitive, another way of aggravating mistrust is through the use of photography, or being seen to be working with journalists. As a result, in Calais we only use cameras to photograph the police, and this is clearly explained to migrants. To photograph undocumented migrants, especially when they are living on the streets, also further objectifies them and aggravates an already disempowering situation. Many sympathisers simply do not seem to understand this and activists shouldn't hesitate to explain why it's inappropriate to photograph or film people.

Similarly, we do not work publicly with journalists in Calais, even sympathetic ones, since we consider the risk to our relationships to be too great. We find that journalists, researchers, and photographers often try to use us as intermediaries, asking us to 'introduce' them to migrants, and we have had to battle with them to make it clear when migrants don't want to be interviewed, photographed, or filmed.

In the particular context of work with refugees, we have found that associating with photographers tends not to be compatible with our activism. Unless migrants have expressly sought media attention, our reasons for being there need to remain unequivocally clear to the evolving population.

ii) Privilege

We need to not only recognise our privilege and exploit it, but to do so in a way that challenges existing hierarchies. At times, it will be painfully apparent to all that there is a huge gulf between us, even though we're striving to create the conditions where hierarchies can be dismantled.

It's difficult not to feel guilty when you're the only one that remains at a camp-fire when whistles sound and everyone has run away. That we can retreat to a safe place to have a warm shower and a cup of tea when we feel tired, and can ultimately go home when we've had enough.

Some feel that the morally right thing to do is to show solidarity with those on the ground by staying with them, sleeping in jungles, eating the same food, and so on. This is an important part of our work in Calais, we can't forget that it's the fact that we have these privileges that makes some of our work even possible. However, it's not just the activists on the ground that make a difference, but also those who do benefit gigs, collect money and supplies, and publicise the campaign by organising info nights. Even though it might leave a feeling of 'not doing enough', it's still an

important part of the work – we couldn't keep an effective long-term presence without a place to stay or try address the charities' failures if we didn't have the money and supplies gathered by the people working back home.

It's not possible to renounce privilege, since you still have one or more of the traits that make you superior to migrants in the eyes of the authorities. What's important is to struggle towards a world without these hierarchies...and if we can use our position to subvert particular privileges, then why not?

Occasionally, friendships develop with huge practical inequalities. These can become complicated, particularly in terms of dependence. It is natural and wonderful not to police friendships in Calais, but it is important to bear some things in mind. You will leave, often leaving friends behind. If close friendships develop, it is easy to comfort yourself with the idea that they will get out at some point: surely the relationship can then continue on the other side of the border?

But what happens if you return two months later, and they are still there, depressed, disillusioned, or possibly even resentful of your freedom?

When the time comes to leave again, there are inevitable questions: *You are free...You can come here whenever you want - I have nothing, so why don't you stay here with me?*

When dealing with vulnerable people, especially if they are young, it is worth thinking about what effect such dependencies can have - if you can speak the same language and can talk about the difficulties of the situation, that's one thing, but in places like Calais it is easy to get to know people quite well with only very few words in common. Calling every few days is a way of keeping up a friendship, but the question remains as to the effects of a growing dependency if the person doesn't manage to cross the border for months if at all.

Every relationship is variable, communication and expectations differ vastly, and wonderful friendships can come about. But you cannot assume that someone will be gone before you are next there. Taking any relationship to a level where that might matter can lead to complications, but respecting people's vulnerability does not necessarily mean developing less mutually-supportive and beneficial relationships. However, given our privileged position, there is more onus on us to understand and respect the personal needs of people living through deprivation and sustained trauma.

While it is important to recognise privilege and evaluate its effects on our

relationships, it also is unhelpful, simplistic and naïve to bracket all undocumented migrants in a single class of underprivileged individuals.

It is unhelpful because it can lead to shame; deference, which ignores the humanity of those we are working with; and the reinforcement of divisions.

It is simplistic and naïve because privilege exists in various guises, such as male privilege. The camps in Calais are almost exclusively male; attitudes and socio-economic structures in migrants' countries of origin meaning that female compatriots are generally left behind or unable to finance and arrange their own journeys. Female migrants are therefore in a distinct minority in the jungles, and at greater risk on the streets if they get separated from their male companions, which is not unusual.

Further, many migrants in transit across Europe are comparably well-off in their own countries, as these journeys cost many thousands of Euros. There are also wealthy migrants who cannot get a visa for other reasons, as well as those who are making a profit from others at the border.

There is a certain strand of militant anti-racist discourse, in the US in particular, which suggests that all white people are inherently racist, with some, such as the 'European Dissent' collective, even arguing that those who want to fight racism should accept black leadership. This rhetoric is counterproductive and steeped in radical liberalism and the politics of guilt. The notion of inherent racism of white people and the suggestion that we should accept hierarchy because those in leadership are from minority/underprivileged groups, is not only patronising, but perpetuates distinctions based on colour as well as the broader and more fundamental problem of hierarchy itself. Whilst so extreme an analysis has not necessarily been encountered amongst No Borders activists in Europe, we have occasionally come across perspectives which overcompensate for privilege through reticence or inaction so as to allow for migrants to take the lead. While there is nothing wrong with making extra efforts to work as inclusively as possible, we should be wary of any approach which gives rise to overwhelming guilt or implies that to be privileged means that we should keep our opinions to ourselves. We are meant to be working as equals, not deferring to individuals on the basis of class or ethnicity.

Ultimately, it is important to realise that the undocumented are ordinary people in extraordinary circumstances, carrying their own baggage, cultural or otherwise, and we should therefore be cautious not to valorise them. While working as equals

means not talking down to people, it also means challenging disrespectful behaviour. If respect is not reciprocated and we carry on regardless then we are not being true to our beliefs.

Yet we should also be cautious of judging behaviour according to our cultural norms. For instance, while prejudice is rife amongst migrants too, suspicion, old animosities or ethnic tensions do not develop in a vacuum. Some Afghans' only encounters with Kurds may have been negative experiences. From mafia exploitation; robbery en-route through Iran and Turkey; or the kidnapping of unaccompanied Afghan children in transit in return for money from their parents: these experiences are not uncommon amongst undocumented migrants. Whilst it's good to challenge prejudices, any inter-ethnic hostilities should be read in this context.

iii) Cultural differences

Borders can be melting pots overflowing with opportunities for inter-cultural exchange. This remains one of the most wonderful and life-affirming aspects of migrant solidarity work.

The flip-side is that, while we are not of course expected to conform to migrants' cultural conventions when staying in communities, it would be naïve to assume that people haven't internalised any of the values prevalent in their countries of origin.

This means that female activists in particular need to consider conventions in these countries, and avoid wearing revealing clothing or hugging migrant friends publicly, as this sends out confusing signals. As much as we would like to see the simultaneous destruction of immigration controls and patriarchy, we need to accept these compromises if we are serious about engaging with migrants in a struggle for freedom of movement.

This suggestion has been criticised by some for being sexist. We agree that it *is* sexist, but that this is merely a reflection of prevailing attitudes in society, from which migrants are by no means magically immune. That some people, regardless of where they are from, will perceive a hug as a come-on, is a reality of life which we must work around if we are to tackle what is an already an incredibly complex and profound problem, and which doesn't need more confusion added into the mix purely to appeal to activists' radical sensibilities.

This topic raises another prickly question, which is that of responsibility to other members of our collectives. Those who choose to be affectionate and tactile with

migrants (friends or not) in front of others, need to consider the implications for other members of the group. Remember that quite a few people with limited English will see this and all they will have to go on will be our behaviour. This may affect the perception of the group and obscure our reasons for being there.

This is not to say that we should simply accept it when someone behaves inappropriately. Although relatively uncommon, in Calais, we have dealt with a number of incidents of inappropriate sexual behaviour or comments by discussing them with the perpetrators in the presence of other members of their community, clearly explaining what we are doing in Calais and why we felt that their behaviour was disrespectful. Other migrants have supported us in this.

It is also by example that respect is brought about. As mentioned, in difficult and desperate circumstances people can be open to new ideas, and many of the most committed No Borders activists in Calais are female.

Even scant research into custom in countries of origin may help understand why we shouldn't always anticipate the same reactions as we would from most Western Europeans. Afghanistan, for instance, operates a system of strict gender segregation, with women and men not interacting outside the family.

It may be tempting to spend more time with communities with whom we feel we have more in common, or feel greater cultural proximity. Being able to share some beers with the (predominantly Christian) Eritrean and Ethiopian migrants, means that we're probably going to bond with them more quickly than with some of the Muslim migrants, unless we consciously make an effort to reach out to other communities despite the greater work involved.

It is natural to be inclined to spend time with those with whom we share common interests, but we need to be careful not to fall into the trap of favouritism. Some communities may be getting hit harder than others, or may be coping with more difficult living conditions; and it is that which should ultimately dictate where we put our energies. We also need to make the effort to forge links across communities if we are serious about working beyond borders, even if attitudes can make that tricky at times.

Important too, is to remember not to unconsciously give preference to those with the skills to communicate with us.

We have experienced a number of incidents in which the interpreter has acted as spokesperson. On all occasions the migrants themselves grew frustrated, criticised

their translator, or used someone else, but were severely hindered in their ability to communicate due to their number and time constraints.

Similarly, working with any intermediaries should be considered very carefully, especially as is often the case, where they are not actually part of a particular community or campaign but possess some quality that enables them to appoint themselves as a kind of spokesperson. This was encountered recently during work by No Borders activists at the Dale Farm Traveller's community in the campaign against their eviction.

The importance of honour and shame in many middle eastern societies is often overlooked by charity workers who are too removed from those they are working with. It is worth remembering that some would rather go without food if treated with disrespect, as was illustrated when the rude and patronising treatment of Sudanese migrants by a charity in Calais led to a brief boycott of their food distribution programme.

The culture of honour is also another reason why an approach built on solidarity rather than charity is likely to lead to longer term and stronger relationships.

It is worth considering how our own culture acts as a potential barrier to working with migrants. For all the attractiveness and political resonance of DIY culture, it can be extremely exclusive.

We know of one migrant solidarity event designed to attract a couple of hundred Afghan asylum seekers with (literally) deafening punk music and beer. Unsurprisingly, only a handful turned up. Women walking around topless at the Calais No Borders camp is another example, and is arguably another sign of cultural imperialism.

iv) The mafia

The mafia are generally hostile to activists, since they need to maintain migrant dependency on them for profit.

In Calais, where we have sought to encourage migrant autonomy, the mafia clearly saw us as a threat. They exploited people's mistrust and fears as well as our language impediments in an attempt to damage relations. This included spreading rumours that we were working for the police, and telling people that female activists were prostitutes.

It is easy to brand all smugglers as exploitative, and many are. Though this is the

prevailing image peddled by the corporate press, the situation is considerably more complex than this, and we should accept that there is a lot of information about which we are not aware.

Firstly, the distinction between 'migrants' and 'mafia' is a blurred and messy one. The mafia operates an underground economy that can be resorted to when people remain at the border too long and run out of money, since other economic avenues are shut off to them. The web of migrants and mafia means that there isn't a group of feared and violent individuals, but an assortment of ordinary and desperate people with varying degrees of involvement.

Secondly, the mafia have been highly successful in distorting political borders and undermining immigration control. They have experience and operate highly organised, fluid networks. They have continually evolved and survived in the face of attempts by the state to take out individuals.

This is not to romanticise them, but to call for a more nuanced understanding of who the smugglers are, and their critical role in irregular immigration.

Once they get to know you, they will probably no longer see you as much of a threat. Perseverance, and not behaving in ways that might make people suspect that you're a journalist or working for the police (ie; asking lots of questions or taking photos), should mean that most problems go away with time.



3. Solidarity in practice

We have briefly examined a theory of solidarity, outlined major hurdles that can stand in the way of it, and hopefully suggested some ways to overcome these. We will now look at how principles of radical migrant solidarity can be put into practice.

In what follows, we present a number of key problems faced by migrants, and a handful of concrete examples of initiatives put in place to respond to these.

i) Housing

Accommodation is a problem for asylum-seekers and undocumented migrants throughout Europe. In the UK, refused asylum seekers generally have any support withdrawn from them and often find themselves on the streets.

NACCOM (the No Accommodation Network), is a scheme made up of various refugee support groups across the country who are able to provide temporary shelter for asylum seekers through a bank of host volunteers. People needing emergency shelter in the UK can contact one of its regional affiliates.

One of the more available, but risky options, is squatting. Yet for those stuck at borders it presents the only viable avenue for shelter. Creating stronger links between migrants and activist squatting networks is one area in which our work which could be valuably strengthened.

In the case of destitute migrants, social centres offer more than just shelter, but a way to live for free on the basis of co-operation rather than mere charity, surrounded by a supportive community. While there is the obvious risk of arrest in cases of new or especially precarious squats, and the often alienating nature of sub-cultures should be taken into account, we should nevertheless seize more opportunities for these links to be made.

Case Study: The Brussels occupations

Since May 2009, a collective of around 120 people, primarily sans-papiers and 'sans-revenues' (jobless), as well as artists and radicals, have occupied a series of large buildings across Brussels - a city with 20,000 - 40,000 unoccupied buildings.

There are a number of families (around half of the occupants are children), single male sans-papiers, people with permission to remain in Belgium but no housing, and European citizens - all united by their marginalisation and homelessness.

In their transnational squats, the occupants make decisions by general assembly, and new members must sign an agreement for a 'collective way of life' before being accepted.

Four buildings have been taken over the past two years, the latest of which is the Gesu monastery in Brussels. The collective is given practical solidarity from locals, such as donations of bread from boulangeries, and strong support by the regional tenants' unions, l'Union des Locataires Marollienne, & l'Union des Locataires de Saint-Gilles asbl.

In Calais, the police make it literally impossible for migrants to squat public areas and they are therefore in dire need of discreet shelters. Thus, with European passports and means of transport, Calais Migrant Solidarity activists are in a better position to scout out good buildings or land on which to set up shelter.

There, campaigners either:

- Let migrants know about good places to squat once they have been checked out;
- Squat a place, hand it over entirely, or live in it together; or
- Take a building together

The last option can be risky since it exposes *sans-papiers* to an unnecessary risk, and activists have tended to resort to it when the situation is particularly acute (eg: people have been evicted earlier that day, the weather is especially harsh or the police are arresting anyone on the streets). No Borders activists have also tended to work with migrants in opening a squat when it is quite far to walk and transport is needed. It should be remembered that being in transit in places such as in Calais requires substantial physical exertion – this includes running from the police, getting to the lorry parks, and making long walks back from the police station. However, it is risky in police hotspots such as Calais to be travelling with undocumented migrants in your vehicle, and people have been arrested for this.

If they are in transit, people will obviously need to live within a reasonable distance of the port/border, and not too far from various services, although places in town centres are inevitably less discreet.

In Calais, activists often open buildings under pressure and without much warning. Any lookout should remember that undercover police may be patrolling the area as well. It is risky, but squatting is a vital part of our solidarity work and one of the most powerful ways to help migrants.

Case study: SolAIDarity, UK

SolAIDarity is a collective which sprang from the UK in 2010. It was formed to provide logistical support to migrants and other activist groups in need of materials by salvaging tents, sleeping bags and other useful items from festivals and distributing them to those in need. These materials would otherwise go to landfill.

Over the summer 2010, activists took several vans to Glastonbury and Leeds festivals, packing all vehicles with good quality tents and sleeping bags, before taking them over to Calais to supply people with provisions to last them through the autumn.

Individuals with access to festivals have since been doing this work autonomously. Activists have been asked to give priority to collecting tents, blankets and sleeping bags over clothes and tinned food.

Case study: the Kronstadt Hangar, Calais

When the government relentlessly destroys anything vaguely resembling a shelter, the only option is to fight back in a dramatic and public way. This is exactly what we did in February 2010, with the opening of the Kronstadt Hangar in Calais (so-called because it was on Rue Cronstadt).

A very large warehouse, barely warmer than the freezing temperatures outside - with the exception of a few side rooms - the Kronstadt Hangar was rented by a French migrants rights group, SOS Soutien ô Sans-papiers, and initially run by No Borders activists. The hangar was to be a place where migrants could shelter from the harsh weather, as well as a forum in which to hold discussions, share information and work towards a stronger movement against the border regime. Ultimately, the space was where migrants, locals and activists could attempt to push out the wedge that the state drives between us.

After a few days of preparation, we discreetly invited various groups of migrants, who arrived in dribs and drabs over the course of the afternoon. When they returned after evening food distribution, they found that the road had been blocked on all sides by riot police.

Tension mounted...then one young Afghan began chanting "Freedom! Freedom!" in English. Others joined in, and tentatively started testing the human barrier. The chanting grew louder and stronger, with those of us with papers pulling from behind the police line, and sans-papiers pushing the police from the other. Eventually, to the

cries of “No Borders, No Nations!”, and with the help of a bit of Heras fencing, we linked arms and formed a corridor through which one by one, the crowd was able to bypass the police and sprint into the building. The same motions were played out at the police line at the other end of the street.

Inside the hangar on the other side of the police cordon, the mood was electric. Around 100 people, mainly Afghan, as well as Kurds, Iranians, Sudanese and Europeans, sat round heaters drinking tea and chatting most of the night through, with others keeping watch outside, before enjoying a rare lie-in (most raids take place in the morning). The energy and the noise was incredible.

The next day, we got to work, explaining that we wanted the hangar to be a space collectively run by those present through general assembly. People translated this statement into various languages and put the posters up for others to read.

Unfortunately, the experience didn't last long. The state panicked, and we were evicted later that day after everyone had left to go to food distribution. It was later occupied for a second time, but the police raided again, destroyed all our stuff, and sealed the building for good.

In France, the action succeeded in getting the situation in the town back into the headlines, and highlighting the absurdity of the criminalisation of migrant solidarity. With brutal clarity, the state showed how far it would go to prevent us bridging the gulf that keeps us apart.

The action also strengthened the bonds between us, and we remain in contact with a number of the migrants involved.

Case Study: Tsamadou 13, Athens

Located in the radical district of Exarcheia, Athens, social Centre Tsamadou 13 grew out of Greece's annual Anti-racist Festivals. The centre is host to political discussions, language classes, a collective kitchen, IT lessons, gigs, and legal workshops for migrants. In May 2010, against the backdrop of the general strike against austerity measures, the centre was the target of a vicious police raid. The space was trashed and members beaten up, but Tsamadou 13 continues to thrive.

Case Study: Immigrants' Social Centre, Thessaloniki

Founded in 2005, this social centre's strength arises in part from its fusion of a whole range of collectives and struggles.

The Anti-Racist Initiative of Thessaloniki is the primary user, and there are a number of migrant-specific schemes running at the Centre, such as language classes and the Network for Civil and Political Rights's legal briefings, as at Tsamadou 13.

The centre is also shared with around 15 other collectives, from the Conscientious Objectors Association and migrants unions, to the Thessaloniki Lesbian's Group and a prisoner support group. The centre also holds IT workshops, film screenings, gigs, exhibitions and book reviews.

ii) Other material needs

The provision of material assistance can be viewed as a continuum, with top-down, charitable projects at one end, and more egalitarian initiatives on the other.

On the charitable side are projects such as soup kitchens and clothes donations. Somewhere in the middle is the provision of ingredients and tools for people to cater for themselves - although unfortunately this is not always possible under certain conditions, for example if food and cooking utensils are regularly getting destroyed or taken in police raids.

Here we can also place the voucher exchange schemes which were set up in the UK. Before their replacement with the Sodexo-run 'Azure payment cards', destitute asylum seekers were supplied with vouchers to the value of £35 per week to spend only at designated supermarkets. These were provided on the condition that they agreed to return to their countries of origin once there were logistics in place for this. Schemes were run in which volunteers exchanged these vouchers for cash, enabling migrants to pay for public transport, and generally enabling them to have greater autonomy.

When it comes to useful, but nevertheless non-essential, items, it is clear in Calais that many feel uncomfortable accepting things for free. Some have insisted on paying us for certain things. While this creates a more egalitarian relationship of exchange between the individual buyer and seller, it gives rise to a different dynamic whereby an expectation to supply arises, as do conflicts over scarcity. Our reason for being there becomes obscured, and it is hard to charge different rates according to what people can afford, since this can lead to tensions. Where possible, it is suggested that selling stuff – even for cheap – should be avoided.

Further down the continuum are joint enterprises, where we source the food, for example through donations or getting food from supermarket bins, and everyone works together to prepare community meals.

Charity is, however, one way the local community can engage in supporting marginalised groups without much risk to themselves, and when supporting *sans-papiers* is criminalised, as it is in France, charity itself can become a radical act.

On mainland Europe, local businesses have shown support by supplying provisions, from regular sacks of surplus bread and pastries from bakers, fruit and vegetables from grocers, off-cuts of wood for heating in the camps, and venues for gigs.

At the furthest end of this spectrum are schemes which aim to maximise autonomy and self-sufficiency.

Whilst technically a charity, the UK-based Comfrey Project operates largely on the basis of self-help. Since 2002, it has worked to provide allotments across Tyneside for use by more than 80 refugees and asylum-seekers. The Project provides a space for people to grow vegetables of their choice; carry out construction and site maintenance work; socialise, and relax. It therefore seeks to not only help asylum seekers meet their material needs, but to promote mental well-being.

Similarly, the DEPROSU allotment project in Bolton is run by migrants, who give their surplus produce to locals who can't work for whatever reason. There are a number of similar projects across the country, often the result of cross-pollination between refugee advocacy groups and community gardens.

iii) Communication

Language can be another barrier to effective, concerted resistance to immigration control. While many undocumented migrants heading for Europe do speak some English, there are a substantial number who speak very little or none. If we are committed to working non-hierarchically, it is obviously essential to find people who can translate.

It may be worth learning some very basic phrases in migrants' languages to help establish initial contact with different communities. Arabic, Persian and English are the *lingua francas* of many migrants in transit.

It is also important to consider ways to maximise communication with migrants in our publicity and other materials. Avoiding the use of activist jargon, substituting phrases for those commonly used and understood by migrants where necessary, and including plenty of videos on our websites is a step forward. Helping people get their voices heard is another, as demonstrated by the collective migrants' blogs *Schengendangle* and *Birds of Immigrants*.

For CMS, maintaining contact with people once they have reached the UK, travelled elsewhere, or been deported, is critical. We may put people in touch with the necessary services, help them find a place to stay, provide emotional support - especially to children - and importantly, visit and support those in detention. Not only does it show that our solidarity doesn't simply end at the physical border, but will continue as people face what is for many simply the next phase of struggle; it expands the scope of the network and provides an opportunity for those who have reached their destination to help others - whether through helping trace separated families, supporting new arrivals, or providing translation.

It is wonderful to receive so many phone calls from people when they reach the UK. Sometimes however, this can lead to huge amounts of additional work as we help people through the difficult subsequent stages of claiming asylum and fighting deportation.

There has been a proposal to set up a signposting service in the UK, which would allow people to contact a single No Borders phone line if they need further help once they cross the Channel. Those operating the phone line would have access to regional directories of support groups and other services, which the caller could then be referred to. The aim of this initiative would be to act as a relatively trusted point of contact which can direct people to the services they need, without simply replicating the work of those services.

Similarly there are also plans to set up an office in Croydon, UK, near to where asylum applicants must go to file their claims. It is hoped that the reputation of No Borders in Calais will encourage applicants to come to us first to get basic but essential information on the process that lies ahead of them.



Language exchange is another form of practical support we can offer. In Calais, there have been regular English classes, as well as lessons in French and Dutch. These have tended to focus on essential phrases that might be used to claim asylum, buy stuff, or ask for directions and generally get by in their new country. Activists, in return, have also been given basic Arabic, Kurdish and Pashto lessons.

In addition to language classes, a qualified instructor has provided first-aid lessons, which went especially well as these skills are universally applicable and potentially important for survival. Ensuring adequate time and good translation is necessary for these kind of initiatives.

In the UK, many asylum seekers, and all undocumented migrants, are denied access to free ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classes. A few No Borders groups provide free English classes, and there are a number of other schemes that aim to fill this important gap which can help new arrivals feel less isolated and give them a basic tool to navigate the immigration system.

Case study: The Migrant English Project, Brighton

The Migrant English Project (MEP) aims to provide a non-hierarchical space for migrants to come together and offer one another support. They offer free English classes, meals, and a signposting service for legal, housing and health issues.

The group organises outings so that new arrivals can get to know their area, and have just started offering basic IT and gardening classes at the MEP allotment.

Case Study: Unity Centre, Glasgow

With an impressive array of projects, the Unity Centre is a hub of migrant solidarity. Established in 2006, run entirely by volunteers and financed by donations, the Unity Centre is situated near Glasgow's Home Office reporting centre, and is therefore in a good location for many asylum seekers who do not have the money to make an extra journey. It too provides free English classes on a weekly basis, with childcare on offer, enabling parents to attend.

Some of the other services available include:

- Women's drop-in service*
- 24-hour emergency phone line*
- Confidential Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender helpline, designed to give LGBT asylum seekers support without having to discuss their problems at the Centre*

- *Emergency campaigns to stop the removal of local asylum-seekers*
- *Monthly anti-deportation workshops for migrants with an outline of the asylum system and basics on how to fight deportation*
- *Unity World Café*
- *Provision of second-hand bikes to asylum seekers*
- *A cinema*
- *Unity in the Community Charity, which offers free clothing to those in need, including destitute asylum seekers and the homeless.*

Case study: Bildung für Alle ('Education for All') campaign, Zurich

In a similar move to the British government, in early 2008, the Swiss state cut all welfare provision to failed asylum seekers – with the exception of a very limited voucher scheme – on top of a ban on working.

In April 2009, activists occupied the empty Allenmoos School on the edge of Zurich, turning the premises into the Autonomous School Zurich (ASZ). Out of this sprang the Education for All campaign, which provides continuous free and tiered language tuition through a host of volunteer instructors, some of whom are themselves sans-papiers. Other classes available at the school include Arabic, teaching, java programming, drama, capoeira, and arts and crafts.

The police raided and destroyed the school, but the ASZ collective moved onto new territory. At the time of writing they occupy a building in a freight depot. The place is not assured however, and the situation remains precarious.

In recent months, the collective have had to deal with police ID checks in front of the school. This change in policy coincided with the vote over the so-called 'deportation-initiative', which was initiated by the right wing populist party (SVP), and which coupled the terms 'foreigner' and 'criminal'.

In addition to the police harassment, another major obstacle has been the lack of funding for public transport to enable people to attend.

Nevertheless, the project has been highly successful, with over 100 regular attendees and volunteers.

As far as communication through the mainstream channels is concerned, Calais Migrant Solidarity has put relatively little energy into press work. This is partly because the press overwhelmingly paints the issue of immigration in a negative light, and partly because when it is given positive coverage, there have been few

tangible results in contrast with work within migrant communities.

They have compiled a list of relatively sympathetic journalists, and numerous press releases have been issued, but activists have tended to bypass the press in favour of getting the information out via other avenues.

Workshops, presentations and film screenings appear to have been particularly effective in raising awareness and getting people to participate in solidarity work in Calais.

iv) Advice and information

One of the principal areas in which people always need support is their immigration cases. Immigration law is a minefield, especially if your grasp of the local language is poor. All too often, people are stuck with appalling or overworked solicitors who cause irreparable damage to their asylum claims.

In the UK, the 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act introduced the imprisonable offence of providing 'immigration advice and services' unless registered to do so, or working for a registered body. So when you are providing this kind of support, it might therefore be worth emphasising that you are giving information rather than advice.

As well as casework for individuals' asylum claims, the key work to be done in this area is the compilation, simplification, and if possible careful translation of existing legal information, ensuring that it is accurate and up-to-date, while making the format as accessible as possible to people on the move with little in the way of funds.

Someone who has lost hope about an aspect of their case – whether it's applying for asylum in a particular country, or pursuing their bid to reach their destination – is in all likelihood to have arrived at that point through months or years of experience. It can be hard not to give your opinion or advice, for example, encouraging someone to keep reporting at the police station, or to claim asylum in a particular country, especially if you have witnessed the consequences of non-compliance or seen the same boys on the streets for months or years on end.

Yet it is important not to give false hope. When someone chooses not to claim asylum but to go to ground, the chances are that they realise that they stand little chance of being given refugee status. We need to appreciate the psychological exhaustion that months or years of evading the police, confinement to detention

centres, or deportation entails, and not project ill-informed optimism, but stand back and allow people to make decisions about their own lives – even if it is against our better judgement.

It is true that some people are not well-informed about the true reality of life in Europe for migrants, but many understand that life for asylum seekers is hard, yet when faced with the risk of death in their own countries, consider it a risk worth taking. The times that we have heard people expressing regret about leaving their countries have been those who, in contrast to others, did not have it so hard back home – for example, there was no personal threat to their lives – or they had money. For some of these people, life in transit through Europe is a quite a leveller; they must live in appalling conditions alongside their poorer compatriots.

Despite all this, it is helpful to at least have the resources available for those who would like more information on their options. In fact one Iranian dissident who now has five years leave to remain in the UK, stated that it was legal information supplied to him while he was stuck at a border which made him realise he actually had a strong case, and motivated him to keep trying.

In Calais, CMS have supplied briefings on claiming asylum in France, and have produced and translated leaflets on the basics of the UK asylum system should people reach the other side of the border.

However, if you do not feel in a position to provide information on people's rights then don't; there are various organisations that are trained to do exactly that. A project that needs doing is compiling and updating directories of these, so that the information is more easily accessible.

As well as the provision of information, there is a continual need to do casework for individuals. This will involve calling publicly-funded immigration solicitors to arrange representation – in the UK, a rapidly depleting number since budget cuts came in. It may also involve doing half the work for them, as they tend to be overstretched. Presenting potential solicitors with a summary of the case, possible legal arguments, and telling them that you are willing to assist in whatever way possible is more likely to persuade them to take on the work.

The provision of state-funded representation for detainees in the UK has recently changed, with a select number of solicitors firms having been awarded the contracts for each detention centre. Detainees without funds now need to register their names on a list, often to be found in the centre's library, in order to see a solicitor during one of the bi-weekly advice surgeries.

Unfortunately, Duncan Lewis & Co have been awarded a contract for many UK detention centres, and should be avoided wherever possible.

Case study: Welcome to Europe/<http://w2eu.info>

Produced in four languages, this new transnational project is designed to provide an overview of the asylum system in all member states of the European Union, the rights of asylum seekers in these countries, and a directory of sympathetic organisations in those states.

Specifically, it addresses the Dublin returns policies in each country. The Dublin Regulation broadly states that asylum seekers should seek asylum in the first country of entry to the EU - and 90% of irregular border crossings into the EU reportedly take place in Greece, a state which refuses 97.2% claims. The EU's centralised fingerprint database known as EURODAC keeps the system operating, and when an asylum-seeker's presence is detected in another member state, they will most likely be deported back to South-Eastern Europe unless they had succeeded in evading the authorities there.

Migrants from across Europe and beyond also regularly send Welcome to Europe volunteers queries. More people are always needed to get involved with publicising the site to migrants as well as updating and translating the content.



Sans-papiers have also expressed an interest in having clear and comprehensive statistics about success rates of asylum applicants of various nationalities in different EU states available online before their departure, to enable them to make more informed decisions about which destinations to aim for, before their fingerprints get taken in another country in transit.

However, an asylum-seeker from Gaza who suggested this also pointed out that lack of internet access in some refugee-producing areas presented a significant problem in making well-informed choices about where to go. This information can sometimes also be misleading depending on the type of status awarded and whether this is granted at first instance or on appeal.

v) The police

"Police problem"; one of the phrases most commonly heard in Calais. The police harassment in the area as in the jungles⁵ in Greece and elsewhere is critical to the fortification of the border, since its effect is to make life there unliveable for undocumented people.

The police use tactics of attrition: relentless raids of squats; repeated arrests; beatings; evictions and destructions of shelters; destruction of essential food, water and property; sleep deprivation; and the desecration of the Bible and the Koran.

Activists from CMS try to use their privilege as EU citizens as a deterrent to this violence. Our tactics have at times been very effective in thwarting arrests, although less so in general terms, since the police tend to go elsewhere until they find enough migrants to meet arrest quotas.

It is believed that the presence of activists has brought about a significant reduction in the use of CS gas, and while there have been successful interventions in serious assaults, it's not possible to say whether the police would be more violent had a continual presence not been maintained in Calais.

Activists try to disrupt routine police harassment by visibly monitoring police activity through 'patrolling' the area with cameras and camcorders. This involves roaming around Calais during times of elevated levels of police activity (morning and evening), in vehicles or on bikes, and pre-warning migrants of the risk of arrest. The ideal scenario is to have the phone numbers of migrants in squats who we can alert without necessarily having to race the police. However, due to the transient nature

5 *Jungle* is a Westernisation of the Pashto word *dzangal* meaning forest, which Afghans use to refer to their squatted camps in Calais and elsewhere

of the migrant population there, the continually changing sleeping arrangements, and the fact that many people don't have mobiles, activists either aim and have bases in the various squats and jungles (when sufficiently numerous), or seek to beat the police to their targets.

The pace and energy this creates can however be quite effective, when chasing and filming the police in large numbers; drawing attention to them by making lots of noise; and alerting migrants. The success of this strategy however, is most likely in large part due to the arbitrary quota system of arrests in Calais.

An alternative to patrols is having European activists stationed in squats, or giving out whistles to migrants so that they can buy each other time to escape without reliance on campaigners. Migrants had their own defence systems before CMS became involved – in some communities, on occasion fighting battles with the police, in others, taking it in turns to stay up overnight and look out for the police – something that some communities continue to do. However, the shameful reality is that it does help to have Europeans present at the scene of a raid to intervene, and activists are therefore encouraged to stay in communities whenever possible.

Unfortunately, given the scale and duration of the problem, and the absence of mass opposition by the French or British population, it seems that legal action may be one of the few feasible means of addressing the crisis in the long term.

As a result, in addition to responding to the immediate crisis with direct intervention, campaigners have sought to keep an eye on the long view by methodically documenting human rights violations. This can be a counter-intuitive exercise when someone is being flagrantly harassed or violently assaulted, and the project met quite a bit of resistance, particularly from newer activists who hadn't witnessed the daily repetition of the same structural violence for months on end.

However, after liaising with a lawyer; producing witness testimony forms; keeping a careful arrest log; and getting some decent recording equipment, campaigners were able to amass evidence which they then aggregated in a report.

This was submitted to France's Human Rights Ombudsman who has launched a public inquiry into policing in Calais. While CMS doesn't hold out high hopes for the inquiry, it may be a step towards taking action in the courts. However, since the release of footage of police violence to the French media and the launch of the public inquiry, the levels of violence have diminished, although this may merely be a temporary period of respite until the investigation is over.

Case study: No More Deaths/No Más Muertes, Arizona

In the years 2005-10, the bodies of 1,119 migrants have been found on the border between Mexico and the state of Arizona alone.

In response to this crisis, the umbrella group No More Deaths was founded in 2004 to provide humanitarian aid to migrants and raise awareness about the lethal nature of the border. Although faith-based and reformist, they are joined by radical activists, all of whom expose themselves to state harassment and the harsh desert conditions to provide life-saving support to migrants on the border region.

No More Deaths carry out patrols to locate and help those trapped in the desert; leave water canisters out on migrants' trails; and operate permanent and mobile camps where migrants can get water, food and medical assistance.

On the Mexican side of the border, the group monitor some of the 1,500 daily expulsions of undocumented migrants, and have compiled a dossier of Border Patrol abuses. No More Deaths have to grapple with the same suspicion by migrants and rumours spread by smugglers ('coyotes'), as activists have in Calais.

vi) The power of everyday activities

Throughout Europe, every effort is made by states to deny the undocumented the ability to engage in the basic activities necessary for survival, such as freedom of movement itself, or simply taking shelter in empty buildings.

The result is to create maximum dependency on others, to induce shame, to reduce people to the status of passive recipients; all of which are critical to Europe's psychological war on undocumented migrants.

In the UK, whether denying asylum seekers the ability to work, tying them to one place by requiring them to report on a regular basis, and forcing them wait endlessly in order to find out whether or not they will get 'status': every aspect is choreographed to strip people totally of their agency and render them powerless.

The need is not therefore merely to facilitate overt acts of resistance, but to help create an environment where people can engage in subversively *normal* activities: cooking for themselves, playing instruments, reading, writing. All of these are all too often denied to undocumented migrants. Conditions need to be created that give rise to the activities which most of us take for granted, but which are the essence of what it is to be human and necessary to maintain sanity.

Many migrants have expressed their frustration about losing out on vital years in transit. In particular, Afghan boys calculate the time lost in education, which they will never regain. Chefs, academics, musicians; people recall their former lives with a yearning for the ordinary experiences not currently within their reach.

In Calais activists have sought to address this by giving out notebooks and pens to those who ask for them; running various classes; and sharing books, cooking utensils and instruments.

One of the most satisfying responses to the repression and denial of these basic activities is to party, which in Calais have now become legendary.

Case study: How to organise a secret festival

By Dariush Sokolov

"Dwelling, moving about, speaking, reading, shopping, and cooking are activities that seem to correspond to the characteristics of tactical ruses and surprises: clever tricks of the 'weak' within the order established by the 'strong', an art of putting one over on the adversary on his own turf, hunter's tricks, manoeuvrable, polymorph mobilities, jubilant, poetic and warlike discoveries." Michel de Certeau, "The Practice of Everyday Life"

"Everything is possible if people work together -- even stopping Calais from being Calais." Arnaud Borderer.

We actually did it: No Borders Calais organised a successful week-long music festival in Calais (6-12 September 2010), one of the shittiest towns in Europe, in the teeth of the French police and the local authorities, with no publicity at all, a few hundred euros, and little of what you could call organisation. And some of us say it was just about the best party we've ever been to.

It's safe now to let the cat out of the bag: anyhow there's a crop of videos up on YouTube already, and a few references to "Hafla bila Hudud / Festival Without Borders" have scattered themselves across the web. At the time, though, there was every need of secrecy. In February, when No Borders legally rented a warehouse (the "Kronstadt Hangar") as a social and sleeping space to be shared with undocumented migrants, it was raided and closed down twice in two days by French riot police. The immigration minister Eric Besson appeared on national television denouncing No Borders as "violent left extremists" and repeating his vow to make Calais a "migrant free zone". We knew that any public event would be met with gendarmes and

batons, so the festival was announced only by word of mouth and on closed email networks. Even so, around 100 international supporters came from all over Europe, from Ireland to Poland, to join migrants and local Calaisiens for a week of music, art, and festivity.

Since last November the number of migrants in Calais, trying to cross the channel, has fallen to perhaps less than 200. But if anything the number of police has increased: there is still the permanent presence of the notorious CRS (Compagnies Republicaines de Securite) riot police who make constant raids and patrols against migrants, and the PAF (Police Aux Frontieres) border police have become increasingly active alongside them. The grim everyday for Calais sans-papiers goes on: raids, beatings, arbitrary arrests, bedding and belongings destroyed and stolen, teargas in the water, pepperspray in the sleeping bags, etc. etc.

In Calais a party, a night out, a simple gathering of friends, is much more than just hedonism. A party in Calais is something extraordinary. A music festival is an insurrection. We held concerts in the park and in some friendly local bars, as well as at the camps ("jungles") and squats where people live. The first night in the park we were sniffed at by undercover police: but when they saw our numbers they had to back off, and through the week our numbers grew. Internationals and locals with papers stood in the street outside events ready to form protection rings around migrants if the police moved in to snatch. CRS looked on bemused -- where had all these pesky No Borders come from? -- and drove past empty handed. And that is what solidarity means -- that is what we can do when we simply stand together.

In Calais, cooking and sharing a meal together is an act of rebellion. The routine: philanthropic associations hand out tasteless food, truly reminiscent of Dickensian gruel, in a bare yard surrounded by barbed wire, overlooked by undercover cops, council inspectors, and racist charity bosses. The festival took place at the end of Ramadan, the Islamic fasting month, a particularly hard time in Calais with hunger and thirst compounding fear and exhaustion. And through Ramadan the police customarily raided at sunset to catch Muslim migrants gathering together to break their fast with heated-up charity slop. For the festival, the Dutch activist kitchen Rampenplan came to cook nutritious meals at lunch and sunset. We ate the evening meal together in the park, in the town square, and in the open space opposite the official "food distro" point. People with and without papers, sharing food with music, banners, laughter, comradeship.

Just a few highlights. The massive Eid (end of Ramadan) party in Africa House (the squatted ex-factory which is the home of mainly Sudanese migrants), which brought

together all the migrant communities of Calais -- Sudanese and Eritreans and Pashtuns and Hazara and Kurds and Iranians and more, eating and dancing together. Saturday night's final party in the park with Pashtun dancing and Kurdish singing, followed by a parade up the main street to a bar for sets from Combat Wombat (Australia) and WildKatz Project (Brighton). Rebel recording sessions in the jungles, and in our short-lived new No Borders squat which for two days became a cauldron of sound and visual creation. The "Food not borders" stall in Place D'Armes. Taking over the food distro yard for weekend picnics with klezmer music, football, and multilingual chalking everywhere.

"For a few days," said one sans-papiers, "I felt I wasn't in Calais." Yes, it was only a few days. The next Monday, the biggest police raid seen since February fell on Africa House, this time particularly targeting No Borders activists in a "revenge" attack. Since then, the daily grind of raids and brutality continues -- back to normality. But in those few energetic days we won something longer lasting: not just a vital breather, a glimpse of life beyond state repression, sweet sustaining memories, but the creation of new links of solidarity that we will continue to build on. That brief breathing space brought Calaisiens, visitors, and migrants from different, sometimes mutually suspicious, communities together like never before, creating new connections and relationships, deepening trust, knitting together our resistance. Not to mention: we learnt how to organise a secret festival. What next?

4. Burnout

It is very difficult to do long periods of intense solidarity work without feeling emotionally exhausted. Injustice hits you in the face again with every new case - each new person and their personal tragedy - every experience of war and torture; of police violence in Europe; of appallingly callous immigration decisions, of every friend and new acquaintance detained and deported.

Since grassroots solidarity requires a genuine emotional engagement with those we're supporting, it also exposes us to their suffering. We may always dismiss it as trivial in comparison, and while it's true that we may not be the ones experiencing the real violence (apart from the odd baton blow and pepper-spraying), what we do seem to be susceptible to are the *cumulative* effects of exposure to story after story, and the repeated personal failures to stop an arrest or deportation. What is difficult to sustain is the combination of an awareness of our own privilege and yet in spite of it, our inadequacy in the face of massive state power.

It is often apparent that there isn't much else in the way of available support:

someone may not have any family connections in the country and most will not have any form of legal representation. They will probably have language difficulties, are unlikely to know anything about immigration law and procedure, may be very young, and may be suffering from severe trauma.

Feelings of responsibility can be overwhelming, especially in view of the migrant – supporter ratio. Every case reinforces a sense of being engaged in an unrelenting battle. Anger and despair become increasingly recurring features of your life, a pattern that becomes completely draining.

The kernel of advice given to those approaching burnout is to take a break and engage in other activities, yet this isn't necessarily the most helpful suggestion. To take time off does not alleviate feelings of not doing enough; if there is simply no-one else supporting a child, how will taking time off help improve the situation, and your own mental state either? It is surely more useful for the person giving that advice to help find others to take over the work.

We also need to be cautious of implying that anger is an unhealthy state of being. While constant rage and depression is clearly not sustainable, anger is a very healthy response that reflects a real acknowledgement of the current state of affairs and should not be pathologised. Suppressing it is unhelpful as it often simply builds up in a personally destructive way. It is arguably better to acknowledge it and let it out or channel it in the appropriate directions rather than simply engaging in diversionary activities, as is often encouraged.

Finally, we can learn a lot from the subversive play and cheer that we see amongst many Pashtuns in transit. In addition to cultural tendencies, it is in part their hunger for a better existence and sense of solidarity that, in spite of the circumstances, keeps them in good spirits and gives them the determination to keep going.

And it's that same irrepressible desire and love that will drive us to continue and build the struggle alongside them.

5. Organisational tools and resources

The following is a list of communication tools, groups and other resources useful for migrant solidarity work.

Lists

A few notable national and transnational lists include:

- **Action 2**

A Europe-wide mailing list to share information on border enforcement and immigration policy in different EU states.

To join: mail.kein.org/mailman/listinfo/action2-l

- **UK No Borders national lists**

There are regional No Borders lists; a closed work list you can join if you are involved in organisational activities; and the announcements list for publicising developments in immigration, and movement-related news.

To join the UK No Borders announce list:

lists.riseup.net/www/info/noborders-uk-announce

- **No Border France**

lists.aktivix.org/mailman/listinfo/noborderfr

- **Welcome to Europe**

For those who want to work on this project:

lists.antira.info/listinfo/w2eu-info

Groups and Projects

- **Calais Migrant Solidarity**

calaismigrantsolidarity.wordpress.com

- **NACCOM (No Accommodation Network)**

naccom.org

- **SolAIDarity**

<http://www.atcoop.org.uk/drupal/node/210>

- **The Unity Centre**

unitycentreglasgow.org

- **Migrant English Project**
<http://mepbrighton.com/>
- **No More Deaths/No Mas Muertes**
www.nomoredeaths.org
- **Bildung für Alle ('Education for All')**
alles-fuer-alle.jimdo.com
- **Welcome to Europe**
<http://w2eu.info/>
- **Tsamadou 13**
www.tsamadou13-15.espivblogs.net
- **Network for Civil and Political Rights**
www.diktio.org
- **Immigrants Social Centre, Thessaloniki**
www.socialcenter.gr



What next?

The past few years has seen moves towards greater cross-border co-operation between grassroots European solidarity groups, closer contact with migrants in the region, and a more profound understanding of their situation. While we are still operating overwhelmingly on the defensive – continually responding to raids, arrests and deportations, for example – this increasingly united nature of the struggle across the divides of language, culture and privilege has been a notable gain.

So what next? Sadly, it is hard to keep up with the stockpile of new measures and policies, and the seemingly endless resources the state is throwing at border enforcement, both within the EU and at its frontiers. This will only get worse as the economic crisis really starts to gather pace and fears over competition for work and resources grow.

Schemes are being implemented to try and physically obstruct entry to the EU, such as the construction of a fence and ditch across the Greek-Turkish border at Evros, which is likely to force greater numbers to make the dangerous journey across the Aegean sea; and the deployment of FRONTEX's armed Rapid Border Intervention Teams (RABITs) to police that border.

Meanwhile, efforts are continually being made to increase the expulsion rate, with regular charter flights and the establishment of a 'reintegration centre' in Kabul, which will soon enable the British government to deport orphaned Afghan children back to the war-torn country. Norway has a similar project in the pipeline.

Clearly, there is much work to be done. In the absence of broader radical social and economic change, much more direct action and campaigning is needed to re-engage on the offensive and breach the narrow parameters of discourse on this issue.

Simultaneously, as far as possible, we need to undermine the borders placed between us and expand the scope of direct solidarity initiatives, in particular, those such as the Gesu monastery which emphasise the commonalities amongst all those marginalised by the exclusive and adversarial system that is capitalism.

Let us start by looking at what's already being done: riots in detention across Europe; mass hunger strikes; re-jigging of migration routes; the emergence of new jungles; and the continued penetration of Europe's borders.

The resistance is already happening: we need only join forces with those doing it.