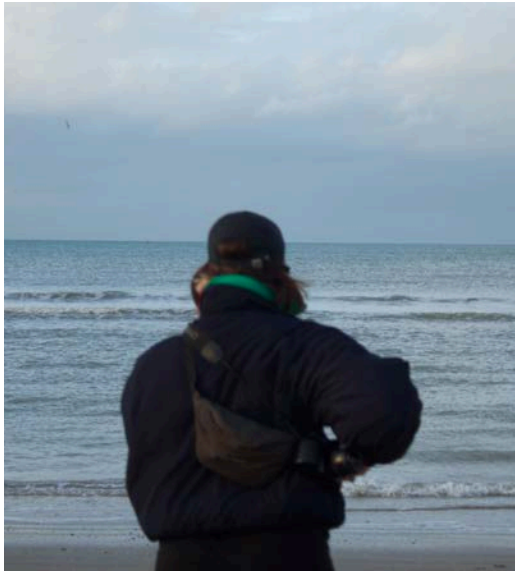


## BACK FROM THE BORDER



I have been to Grande Synthe twice. The first time, it was during summer 2022. I remember the heat, the dust, barely any water on camp, families and children, lonely men in groups, sometimes smiles on their faces. I remember the volunteers, the house we all lived in, the dinner in the garden and days off together.

The second time, in January 2023, the dust had disappeared, mud covered everything. The camp had changed already, it was not at the same location anymore. I know everything is different today, but the border has not disappeared, the violence against people in exile has not stopped, neither has grief, suffering and pain.

Everything Takes me back to Grande Synthe. Music we listened to at home, in the car, on the way to camp, with people at the border, a phone ringing during the night, wind and waves, specific hours, the light, also. Feeling imprisoned in one's own head, the same thoughts, memories and anger, all the time, unable to talk about anything else. People rarely want to know about what happened, about what is happening, to hear the violence and other's suffering. I found comfort in friendships, shared rage in collective memory, and tenderness in commemoration

It's hard, she told me. We know we are not to be pitied, but it's hard, in a certain way. Being back to normal life. Not being on the field, not being able to help. To be here and not there, to know and ignore what's happening at the same time. Is there still a present to be attached to, apart memories of witnessed violence? Pretending that everything is normal is hard, being with people who don't know , who weren't there is hard. It hurts, she told me. Leaving the other volunteers, everyone behind. Is there anything more important to do? Who to ask about what's happening? Who to be present for once we've left?

Last night, there was a shipwreck in the Channel. 110 persons on board, five persons lost their life, at least, how many are missing? The youngest was four. She died the same night Rishi Sunak celebrated the adoption of his law on the deportation of exiled people to Rwanda. M. texted me. The same anger, the same rage, an indescribable sadness flow into every cell of our being. Being present for each other, What else can we do?

By What name shall I call you?  
Had we known each other? Had we met?  
Do I need to be your friend to grieve your death?  
Do I need to be your friend to be angry?  
Do I need to be your friend to feel indignation to my bones?  
I only know your death, I have been told so little about your life. How could I recognize your face in my own memories?  
I know we are not friends, but I won't forget you.