

# "CHILDREN OF CALAIS": PRECARIOUS LIVES BETWEEN FRENCH AND ENGLISH BORDERS

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**experice**

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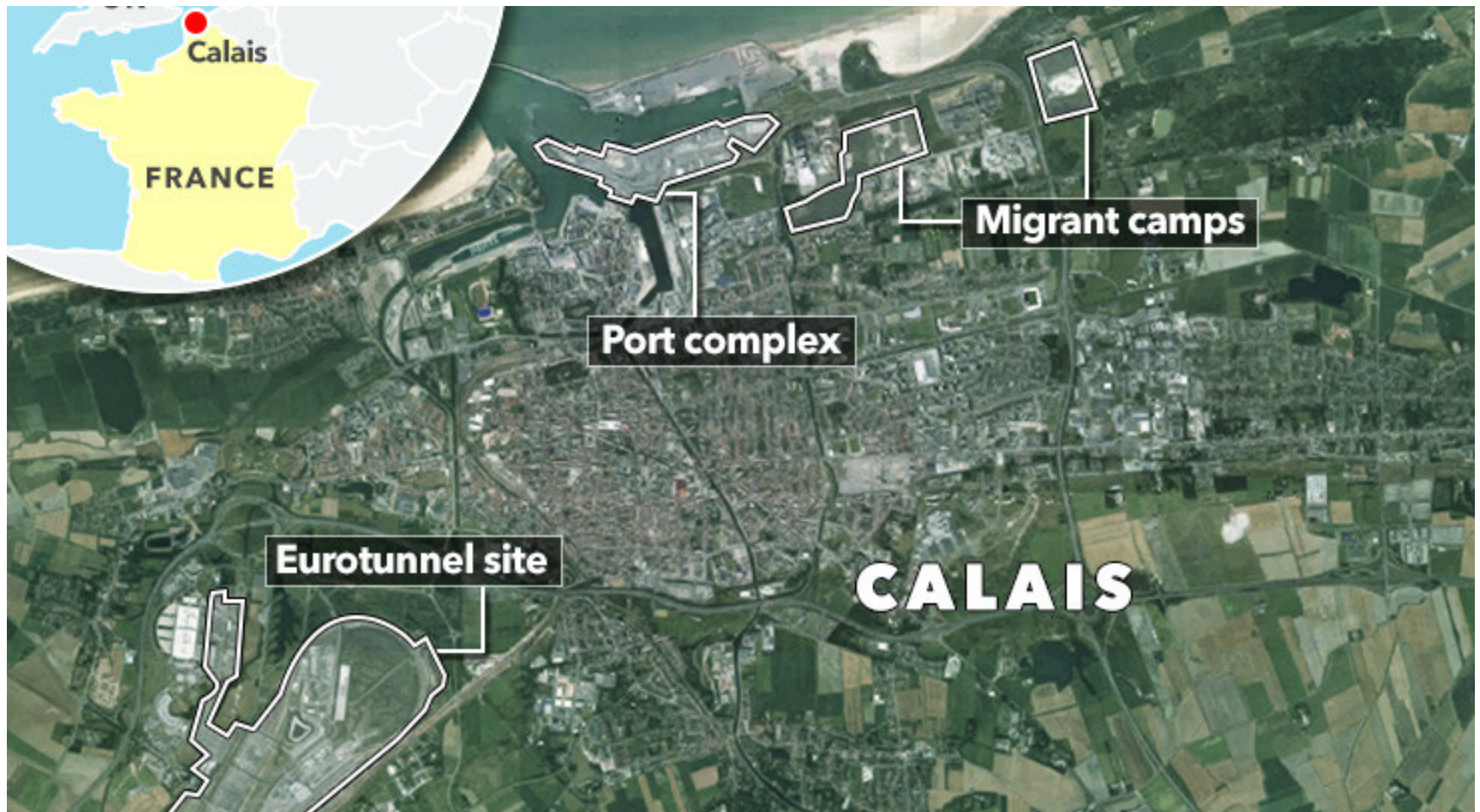
RN4 Sociology of childhood & children

# A paradoxical category (ASC/MIE)



<https://www.childrenofcalais.org>

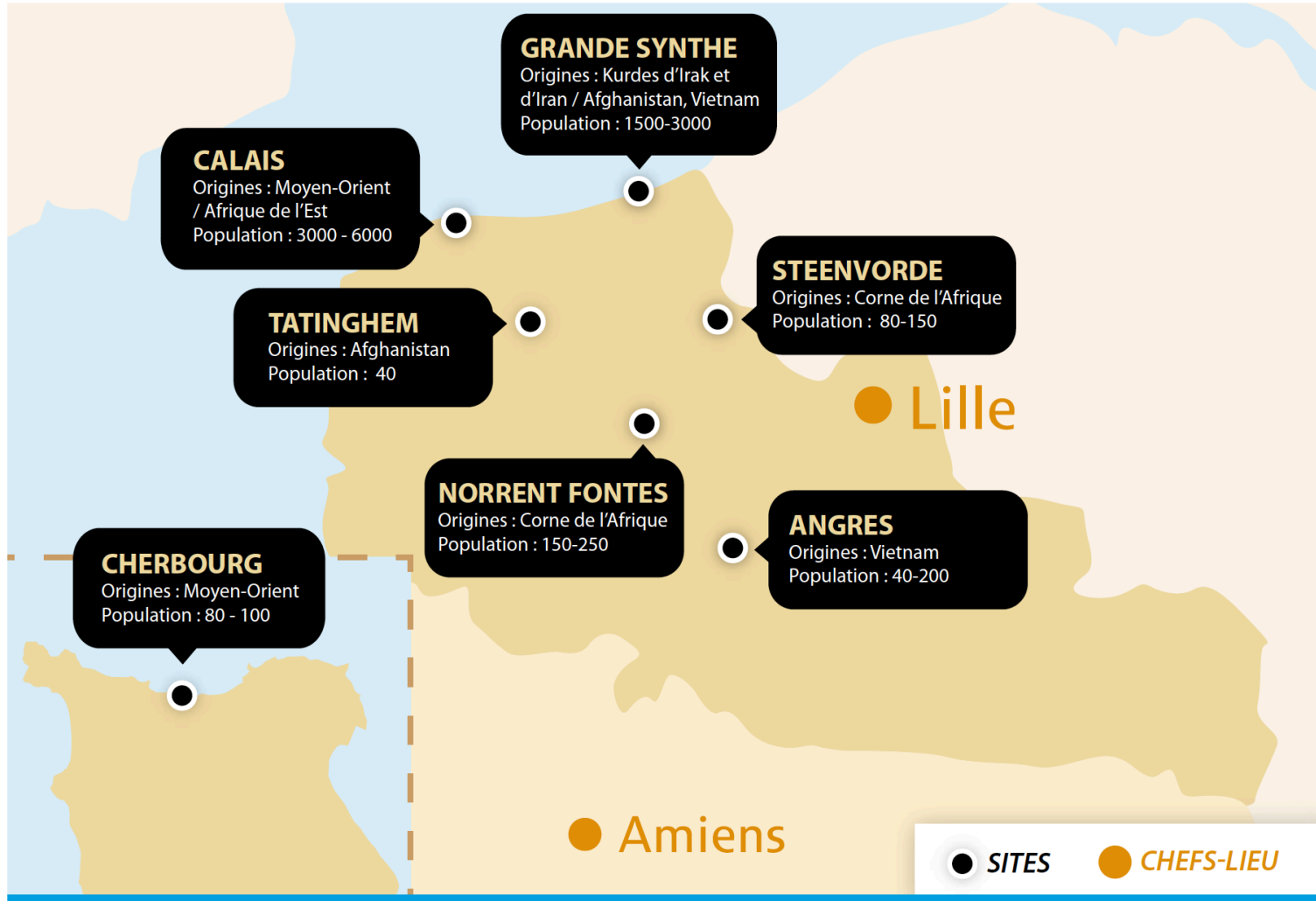
# Migrant Camps CALAIS



# The « Jungle » violence and what follows

- ⇒ **CALAIS** : multiple violence and failures of the French assistance / 2.000 minors; UK : Dubs amendment (2016) / restrictions
- Mediatization (the spectacle of the suffering : distance and implication / action ([Boltanski, 1991](#)))
- Mediatization of the destruction of the jungle (dec. 2016)
- ⇒ The **CAOMI** (centers for reception and guidance for unaccompanied minors)
- Dispersion : Places outside France and French laws for children's protection (ASE : Social service for childhood): identification (5 days / months).
- A place for waiting : poor and “infantilizing” conditions/ claims, hunger strike, suicide, leaks
- ⇒ **Back to CALAIS** : a place for gathering : visibilities of the bodies in public spaces ([Butler, 2015](#)) : a place for collective claims

# Calais and Northern France (Unicef, 2016)



# In Southern France (Unicef, June 2017)

## Children's accounts of Push-Backs when attempting to cross the border between Ventimiglia and Menton

*'It's dangerous to walk, because at night it's dark and you don't see. Especially when you go on the mountain, you don't know the way and you get lost.'*

17 M, Mali

*'If you are white it's ok, but if you're black it's not easy to live in Europe. There are lots of police. I got to Nice and was at the station trying to get a ticket to Marseille where my brother lives, and the police caught me. They put me in prison for three days. Then they sent me by bus to Taranto.'*

16 M, Guinea



*'The walk towards the border is five or six hours long, so we walked more than ten hours back and forth for three days in a row because the Italian police would not carry us back by car.'*

17 M, Ivory Coast

*'I tried to cross twice by train since I arrived. I do not want to walk because I don't know the way on the mountains and it is dangerous. Both times I tried to cross, the French police stopped me at the border in Menton and handed me over to the Italian police, who made me walk back to Ventimiglia along the street.'*

17 M, Guinea

# From violence to a claim of justice

- Sociology of critique as theoretical framework
- The question of « test » (épreuve) and liminality
  - ▣ Liminality of space and belonging
  - ▣ Liminality of time/age
- Discussion
- Conclusion

# A pragmatic sociology of critique

- Ref: Boltanski, [Denunciation \(1984\)](#); [On Justification \(2006\)](#); [On Critique \(2011\)](#): a “complex exteriority” / critique.

Analyzing the case as a socio-historical construction of an political « affair » ([Garnier, 2014](#)), involving numerous actors (individuals & collectives), with a wide range of “disputes”

Q1 : Who are the “victims” ?

Q2 : Who is “responsible” ?

Q3 : Who has to improve the situation ? (CRC ONU, nov 2016)

Q4 : What are the constraints of normality of the claims ?

Q5 : Between Justice / Affects (« heart/reason »)

- **Q1 and the question of « tests » (épreuves) of children**

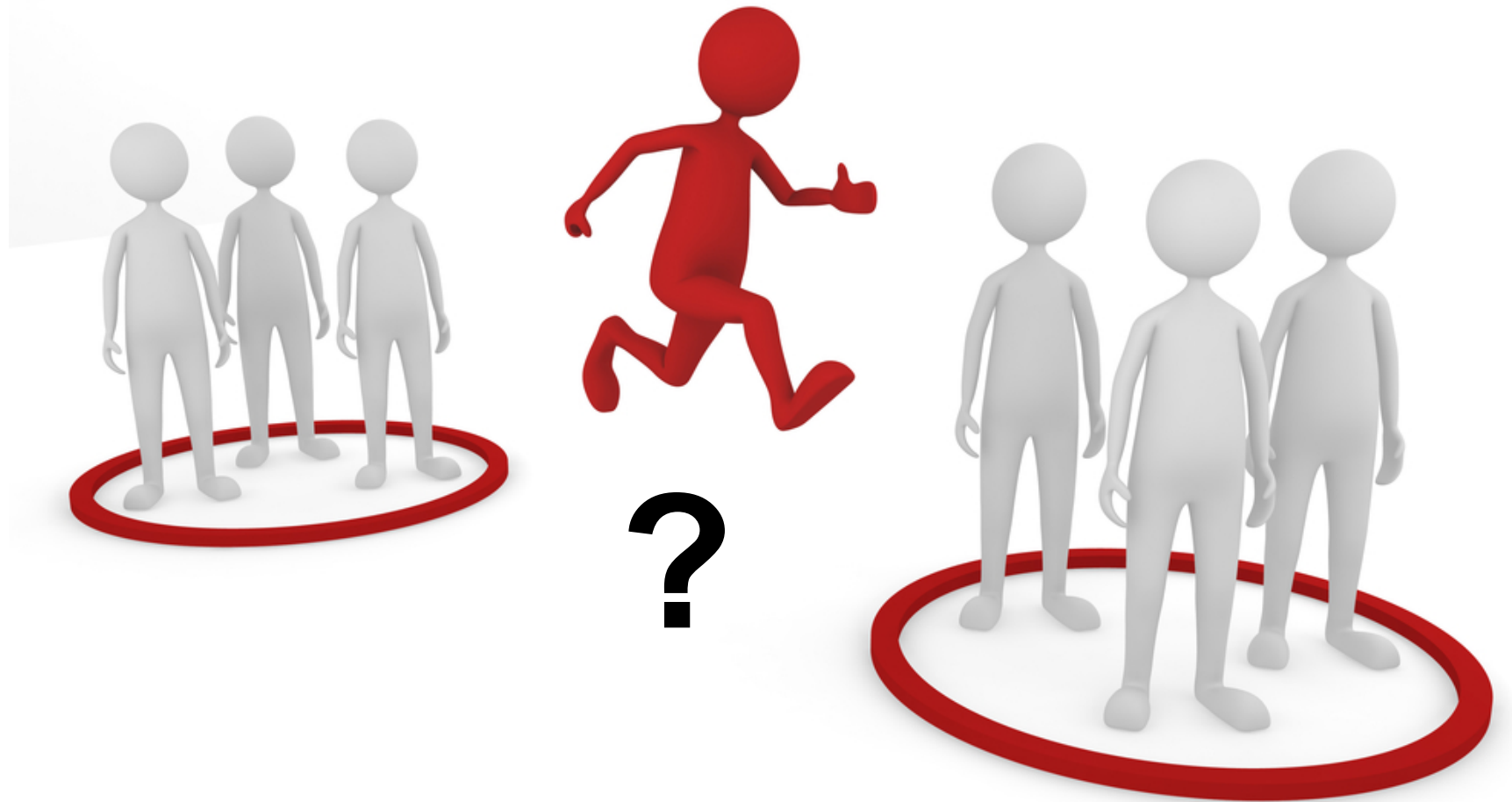


# Tests (“épreuves”) and liminality

Disputes involve discourses & 3 kinds of **tests** (Boltanski 2011) that define the “reality” as a social construction of the “world” or flux of life.

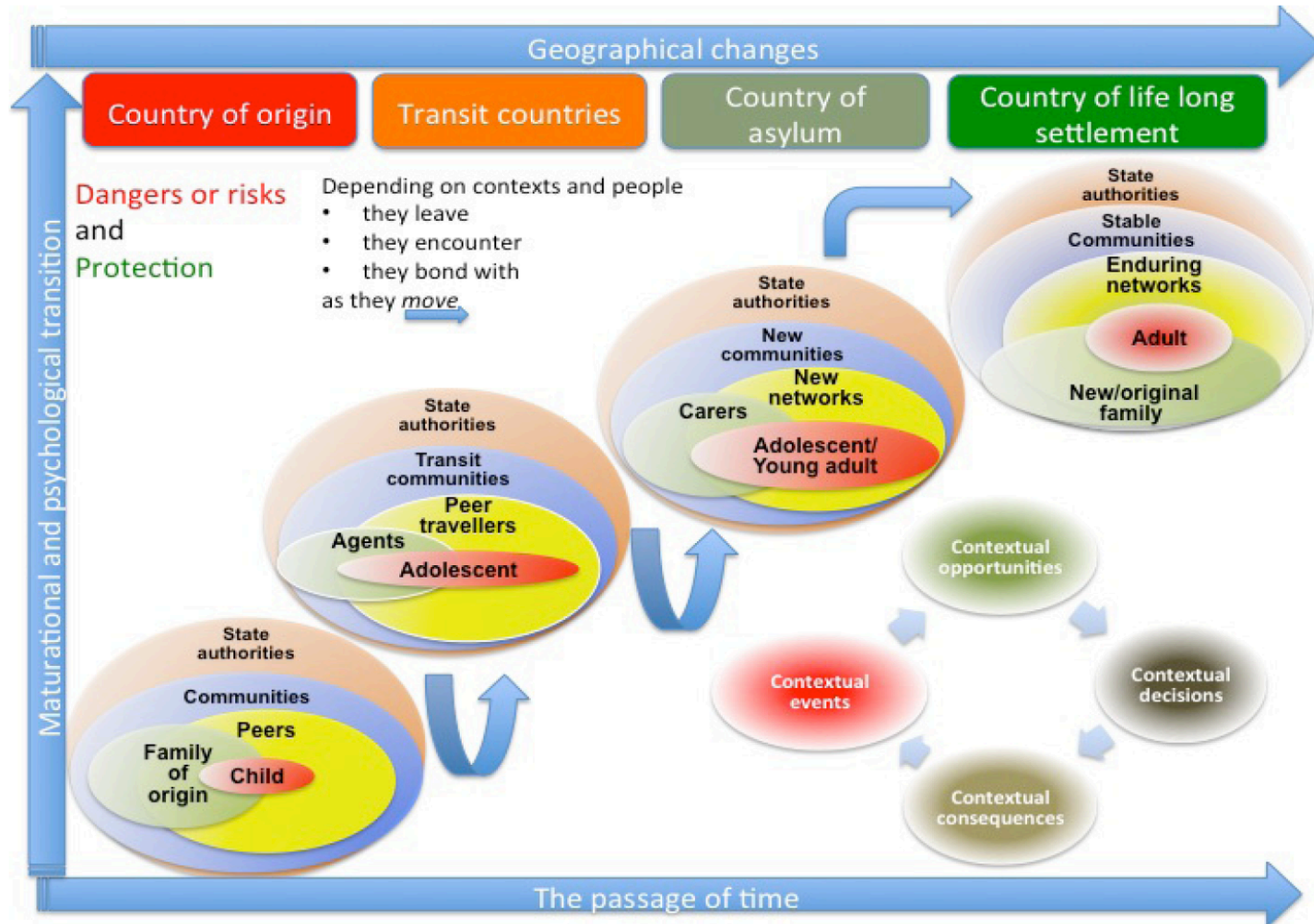
- ✓ **“Tests of truth”** (conservative) : instances of confirmation, based on conventions already institutionalized
  - ✓ **“Tests of reality”** (reformist critique) : instance of reform between what is and what should be (“in fact”)
  - ✓ **“Existential tests”** (radical critique) : *“it refers to what provoke suffering, experiences of injustice or humiliation what affects the person, at the “margin of reality” (“subjective” : social relationship between me and myself)*
- ⇒ uncertainty of the qualification : **liminal phase of rites de passage between Separation & Agregation (Van Gennep, 1909),**
- ⇒ **Dialectical relation between Structure and anti-structure (Turner, 69).**

# Liminality : uncertainties and ambiguities of identities between norms/categories

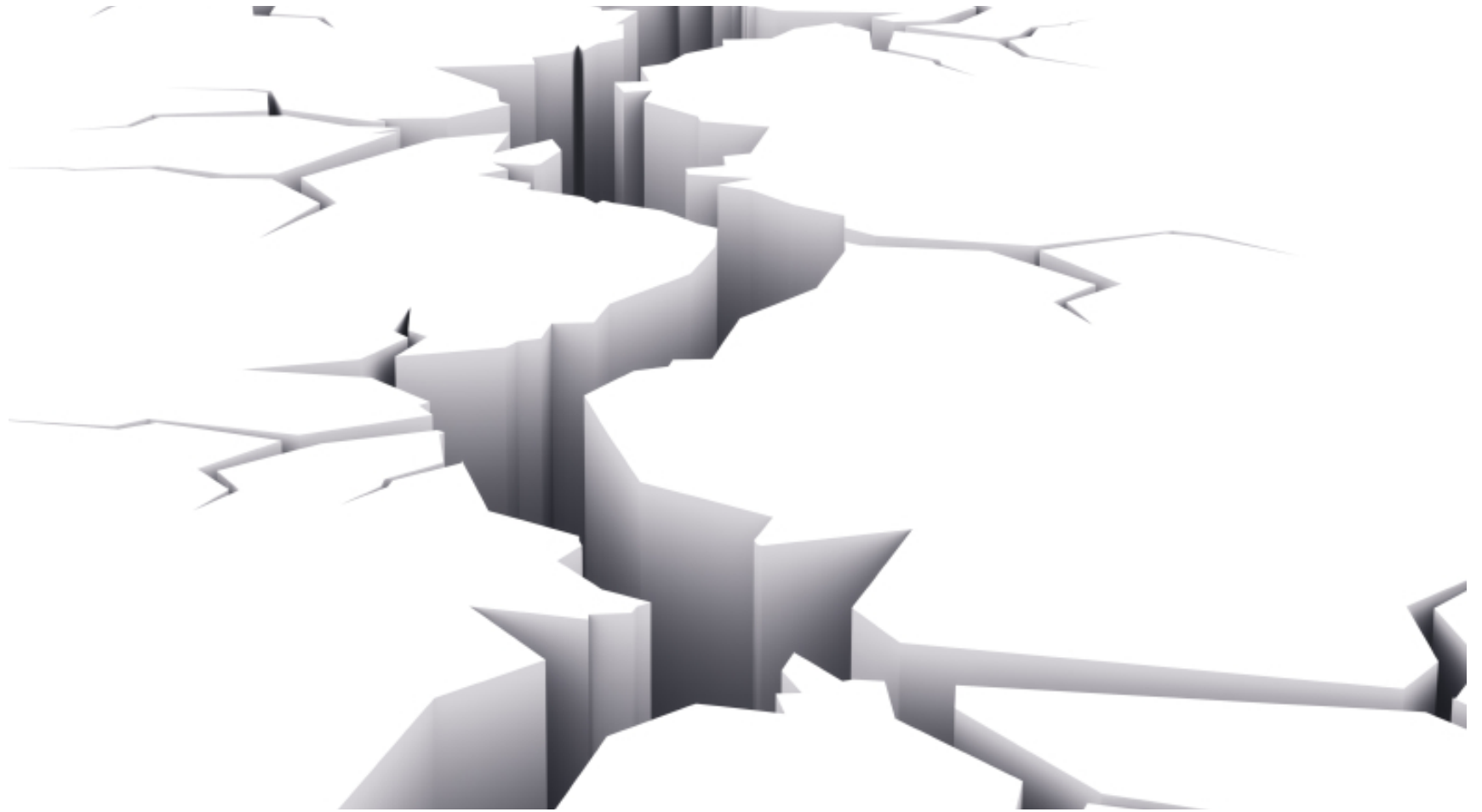


# Children's moving : a linear model ? (Kohli 2014)

Figure 1: Movement in the lives of children seeking asylum



# Liminality : a perilous passage



# Liminality of space and belonging

- **Between French and English borders** (camps / lines)
  - In and out of France // In and out of UK;
  - Touquet agreement (2003): Calais as an “enclave” border or a “borderland” or a “no man’s land”
  - Ex : “zone mineurs” in Paris CdG Airport ([Perrot, 2015](#))
- **Between with and without a “family”** (“mineurs isolés, non accompagnés” : unaccompanied or separated or isolated)
  - Meanings of “family” : Parents (Western), “Uncle”
  - Meanings of “being a child” : dependant from adults
  - Inheritance of social, national, ethnic identities... : children’s qualifications linked to their belongings & generations

# Liminality of age : Child/Adult

- **Age assessment** : 18 : Conv<sup>o</sup> on the R of C/life course): European/Comparative international report, inc. F&UK (Sedmak M. & al., 2017)
- Age as **convention** : “papers” = ID document (disputes about authenticity).
- Age as a matter of **tests of realities** : the body
  - Disputes about the physical appearance : surface (visual evaluat<sup>o</sup>)
  - Disputes about the medical tests : inside
  - Disputes about the cultural meanings of age : outside+inside
- Age as matter of **experiential tests**
  - Age as performance / norms
  - Age as lived experiences and form of positioning of children
- **Binary Tensions** : Adults’ moral and political responsibility toward Children both as vulnerable victims and as agents.

# « Child » & « Unchildlike child »

(UK) Crawley, 2009, p. 95 & 101.

- *“Last time I went to the Home Office I told them that I am now 16 and they looked at my hands and say : “no you are not 16”. But I am not like a British child. They don’t work. My fingers and my hands, they have all got hard and old and soiled by work. That’s why it’s different. » (Bekham).*
- *“Your immaturity was accepted as an indication of your age but also make unlikely that your were politically involved (in Iran) as claimed. (...). We regard his claim that he helped the people to topple the statue... as no more than youthful bravado and to be unworthy of belief” (Immigration judge/ Erbil).*

(F) Bailleul C., Senovilla D. 2016, p.12.

- *“It surprises me, because I bring here my birth certificate, but I didn’t understand the quotation. Here the whites, they don’t know the blacks, if you are major or not. They don’t know if you are minor or major” (Ibrahima).*

# “Vulnerability in resistance” (Butler & al, 2016)

The “*chiasmatic structure of agency and vulnerability*”

Collective mobilisation and interdependancies



Photo : in Bailleul & Senovilla, 2016



# “Adults posing as children” ?



The children, pictured, are part of a group of around 300 that are expected to be resettled in the UK with family that are already here

Photo : [A. Martin](#), [I. Drury](#), [S. Greenhill](#), [Daily Mail](#) 18 October 2016

# The ambivalent value of liminality

- ✓ Liminality give rise to an “unliveable life” : fall outside the existing categories; impossibility of moving (space/time);
- ✓ Liminality could also imply the richness of hybrid identity (Bhabha, 1994), transforming borders into “third-place”.
- ⇒ In front of the multiplication of uncertainties, the answer of the institution is a tautology : “**children are children**” (UNICEF, 2017), “épidéictique discourse” (a common sense which should avoid disputes (Boltanski, 2011))
- ⇒ Children and Adults : a “**common humanity**” (Boltanski & Thevenot, 2006) defined as the impossibility of being defined exhaustively by all kind of test (“**caratère inépuisable des puissances de la personne**”) / instead of “human needs”.

# Conclusions : sociology in questions ?

- The role and the place of the sociology of childhood and children in this “affair”:
  - including the “border” between adults/children as a social, historical, moral and political construction which is as a matter of disputes, performances and tests.
  - including “false” or “pretend” children ? a sociology of adults ? / “non-marked” (invisible) identity as “adults”
- The voices of the sociologists vis-à-vis the experts & medias & the respective role of reformist and radical critiques in sociology
- “To see from below is never easily learned nor unproblematic” ([Haraway, 1988](#)).

**Thanks - σας ευχαριστώ - Merci**



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