

Rethinking Transit Zones: Migrant Trajectories and Transnational Networks in *Techno-Borderscapes*

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Abstract: This article examines the intersections between migrant trajectories and digital technologies by analysing the role of mobile digital devices in the everyday lives of migrants in transit. We introduce the novel concept of *techno-borderscapes* to rethink transit zones as sites of embodied and virtual encounters among various state and non-state actors and to unravel the intersections between digital securitisation, humanitarianism and activism. Based on narrative, participatory and ethnographic research with migrants in transit at the France–UK border and ongoing transnational collaborations with a sub-group of former camp residents, our research shows that digital devices shape migrants’ experiences of transit, their migratory trajectories and their transnational encounters. Confronted with increased border securitisation, migrants use mobile technologies to bypass borders, create new forms of migrant-to-migrant protection and assistance, and articulate their political voice. Moving away from the general representation of transit spaces as singular points in a unidirectional migratory trajectory, our findings show that these spaces are sites of confluence of multi-directional mobilities. Transit zones are not just ‘in-between’ spaces but rather transformative and transforming spaces in which mobile digital technologies play a significant role.

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Introduction

Europe's 'migration crisis' has raised new questions about the intersection between mobilities and mobile technologies in the context of migrants' increasingly long, complex and fragmented trajectories. This article examines the complexities that digital devices reveal in negotiating, constraining, facilitating and transforming migrants' trajectories and experiences with a focus on migrants' daily realities of transit at the border.

Mobile digital devices comprise a multitude of technologies and sources such as mobile applications, websites, messaging and calling platforms, social media networks, translation services and more (Gillespie et al. 2016) that can be easily transported. Snel, Bilgili and Staring (this issue) write that existing research has tended to neglect and under-examine the significance of migrants' experiences after departure and before arrival. Our paper contributes to this Special Issue's overall goal of debunking linear approaches to mobility by challenging the concept of 'transit' zones as insignificant 'in-between' places, arguing instead that they are sites of multi-directional mobilities and new transnational encounters. Several factors, especially migrants' engagements with mobile technologies, shape experiences of (im)mobility at the border.

The European migration 'crisis' has shed light on the perils of Europe's external borders, such as the Mediterranean crossing or the Baltic route. Less attention has been paid to borders inside Europe and the ways in which their formation alters understandings of transit and destination. In the Introduction to the Special Issue, Snel, Bilgili and Staring problematise the Eurocentric notion of 'transit migration', which defines 'transit countries' as those that migrants pass through on their way to Europe (or North America), ignoring that many migrants

stay in these countries for long periods and that some never intended to move to Europe at all (Collyer 2010; Collyer and de Haas 2012).

Similarly, our contribution problematises the concept of transit as well as that of destination and the relationship between the two. Historically, Europe has been monolithically viewed as a place of destination in the linear migratory journey from country of origin to arrival. The recent formation of transit zones inside the borders of Europe, both at its periphery and its core, disrupts this homogenous representation of the continent to reveal internal disparities that challenge essentialised views of Europe as a singular migratory destination.

This study fills a gap in the emerging literature on migratory trajectories and digital technologies. By examining how migrants use mobile phones to navigate these new transit ecologies, we show that mobile devices shape migrants' experiences of transit, their migratory trajectories and their transnational encounters at the border. The paper is based on a civic engagement project by the Centre for Narrative Research at the University of East London in which staff and students delivered an accredited short university course on 'Life Stories' to migrants residing in the so-called 'Calais Jungle' at the France–UK border.ⁱ Participant observations, life narratives and multi-modal workshops with residents of the Calais 'Jungle' were conducted between September 2015 and October 2016. Since then, the researchers have continued ethnographic work, transnational collaborations and informal conversations with a sub-group of former camp residents who now live in the UK and France.

This paper is organised in two main parts. The first section introduces the term *techno-borderscape(s)*, intended to rethink transit zones as sites of embodied and virtual local and transnational encounters among diverse state and non-state actors. The second section empirically demonstrates how *techno-borderscapes* operate in the Calais transit camp. The term *techno-borderscapes* draws from and integrates Appadurai's (1996) notion of the 'technoscape' and Rajaram and Grundy-Warr's (2007) concept of 'borderscapes'. Appadurai

(1996, 34) created the word ‘technoscape’ to describe the global configuration and fluidities of technologies, as well as to acknowledge the fact that technologies – both high and low, mechanical and informational – now move at high speeds across various kinds of previously impervious boundaries. Rajaram and Grundy-Warr (2007) used the term borderscapes to identify spaces in which meanings and identities are established, hegemonic ideas about nationality and citizenship are reimagined, and transnational, translocal and transcultural identities are renegotiated. These authors illustrate that technologies and borders are complex and dynamic concepts that frame the making of interactions, meanings and identities. By merging these two concepts, we shed light not only on the complexities and dynamics of borderscapes (territorial, geopolitical and symbolic) but also the ways in which digital encounters between actors in transit spaces shape migrants’ trajectories and their transnational social networks.

Transit Spaces as More Than In-Between Spaces

In the wake of the recent European refugee ‘crisis’, a large network of dispersed transit spaces has formed across Europe. These sites are the direct outcome of border policies established to control the movement of people and ensuing humanitarian borderscape responses to them (Pallister-Wilkins 2018). Transit zones are not neutral spaces but instead contested sites of belonging and extraterritorial spaces of geopolitical negotiations. Crawley and Jones (this issue) argue that migration research and policies, both of which predominantly focus on places of departure and destination, conceptualise everything in between as an insignificant stepping stone and that ‘in-between’ spaces are generally viewed as spaces of ‘waiting’. As a result of the European migration ‘crisis’, Ansems de Vries and Guid (2019, 2157) suggest that it may be more appropriate to think of the ‘in-between’ through the lens of the politics of exhaustion to aptly capture ‘the felt effects of the stretching over time of a combination of fractured mobility, daily violence and fundamental uncertainty’. Like these authors, we problematise the

perceived insignificance of the ‘in-between’. We introduce the concept of *techno-borderscape(s)* as an additional lens for the analysis of transit spaces and of migratory trajectories more generally.

The term ‘borderscape’ describes the complexity of transit spaces at the border. The concept is derived from Appadurai’s (1996) five dimensions of global cultural flows: ethnoscapas, mediascapas, technoscapas, financescapas and ideoscapas. The suffix ‘-scape’ allows us to think about borders in terms of fluidity, ‘revealing that the border is by no means a static line, but a mobile and relational space’ (Bambrilla 2015, 22). The concept of borderscapes thus shifts the focus from borders themselves to border processes (Newman and Paasi 1998). Viewed through the lens of the borderscape, borders are traversed not only by bodies but also by discourses and relationships that redefine what it means to be inside or outside, citizen or non-citizen, and host or guest across state, regional, racial and other symbolic boundaries (Perera 2002). Borderscapes are sites of interactions, ‘markers of belonging’ and ‘places in a constant state of becoming’ (Bambrilla 2015, 20). They are, by their nature, continuously transforming and transformative spaces.

The migration ‘crisis’ has brought to the fore the innovative ways in which migrants use technologies to navigate increasingly complex journeys (Zijlstra and Van Liempt 2017; Dekker et al. 2018). However, as described below, the emerging literature on migration and technologies tends to isolate the experiences of migrants from those of other social actors, such as states, humanitarians, and activists, and to underplay the diverse strategies these actors employ to connect using technologies. This segregation is reflected in studies that maintain a separation between inquiries into governmental bodies through digital securitisation, humanitarian actors through digital humanitarianism, and activism through digital mobilisation.

Securitisation, Humanitarianism and Activism in the Digital Age

In recent years, states have increased their use of technological devices to manage cross-border migration, securitise border areas and monitor the movements of people within and across nation-state borders (Andersson 2015). The digital securitisation of states relies on monitoring devices, such as motion sensors, infrared equipment and surveillance cameras that state agents use to manage and monitor cross-border movements. These digital practices are especially concentrated in the border zones at the edges of state territories. For example, in Europe, the border agency Frontex has established several transnational surveillance mechanisms to monitor, intercept, interrupt and apprehend migrants travelling between Greece and Turkey (Topak 2014). The use of drone technology in border surveillance has increased over the last few years, presenting challenges to the human rights of migrants and refugees (Marin and Krajíková 2016). This technology creates new transnational ‘digital borders’ that are distinct from their physical and geographical counterparts (Broeders 2007). Transnational surveillance practices, which are heavily reliant on technological innovations, increasingly address a public that is no longer defined exclusively as the citizenry of the nation-state (Aas 2011). Despite the proliferation of digital securitisation, however, migrants manage to navigate the obstacles they encounter in their long and fragmented journeys (Warren and Mavroudi 2011) and continue to cross borders (Topak 2014) with the support of other migrants, activists, humanitarian actors and migration brokers (Åkesson and Alpes 2018).

The smartphone revolution has shaped not only how states operate but also the responses of other social actors. Relief workers are increasingly reliant on digital mobile devices to deliver aid to migrants while on the move. The emergence of ‘digital humanitarianism’ has extended the delivery of conventional aid to digital packages and e-infrastructures. Watch The Med Alarm Phone, for example, is an emergency phone service created by 50 activists in October 2014 which remains highly active. The service alerts nearby coast guards to SOS calls from migrants experiencing distress on boats in the Mediterranean.

It also offers an online mapping platform to monitor migrant deaths and violations of migrant rights at Europe's maritime borders. Moreover, digital technology itself has become a significant form of aid: the global proliferation of new technologies has created new needs among refugees, who – in addition to food, shelter and protection services – now require access to electricity and Wi-Fi, which would have been an afterthought only a few years ago (UNHCR 2016).

In response to state digital securitisation, activists use mobile digital devices to challenge and undermine current border regimes. Many activists have responded to the escalating presence of technologically secured 'borderscapes' by developing strategies of resistance. For instance, digital activism includes – as described by Walsh (2010) – activist groups' use of digital photography and video recording equipment to monitor state agents at the Mexico–US border, as well as the use of technology by vigilante organisations to coordinate citizen-organised foot patrols that locate and assist migrants in danger. Such groups use geographic information systems to organise the provision of water and high-resolution border maps to migrants to assist them in navigating their journeys. Digital surveillance, humanitarianism and activism – often studied separately – intersect with one another to reveal under-examined interconnections in the existing scholarship on social life in transit zones across territorial, geopolitical and symbolic borders.

The following section presents a case study of the relationships among digital securitisation, humanitarianism and activism from the perspective of migrants in transit. It examines migrants' use of mobile digital devices to navigate, resist and engage with increasingly securitised borderscapes along with other social actors. The concept of *techno-borderscapes* brings together the diverse encounters and disruptions that unfold through technology in transit sites at the border, allowing us to unravel the triadic intersection of digital

securitisation, humanitarianism and activism. The section begins with an account of the research site before describing the participatory ethnographic project.

The Transit Space at Calais

Since the late 1990s, migrants and refugees have gathered in informal camps at Calais. In 1999, the Red Cross set up facilities in Sangatte which were closed three years later. Over the years, informal settlements continued to form only to be demolished and reconstructed. At the time of our research, from 2015 to 2016, around 8,000 individuals lived in what was known as the ‘Calais Jungle’. Although the camp was in French territory, its residents did not benefit from mainstream French services and national infrastructures. The camp had no running water, latrines were temporary and portable, and electricity was only available to the few individuals who had generators. Migrants in transit had limited access to emergency health and welfare services. Informal solidarity networks of activists and volunteers, rather than government agencies or formal aid organisations, delivered assistance to the migrants.

Many participants had settled in the Calais refugee camp as an interim measure after temporarily ceasing attempts to cross the English Channel, while others had decided to seek asylum in France but had yet to decide whether to stay in or near the camp. Before the camp’s demolition, this situation was promising for the exploration of new forms of collaboration between researchers and migrants. While the camp was officially closed in October 2016 and its residents were evicted, migrants continue to gather in and around Calais, waiting to cross the Channel.

Our research combines narrative, ethnographic and participatory methodologies. As outlined in the introduction, a team from the University of East London organised a series of written, photographic and arts-based workshops on life narratives which incorporated migrants’ reflections on their personal trajectories. Migrant students wrote testimonies of their

long and disrupted journeys, which were published in the book *Voices from the Jungle* (Calais Writers 2017), from which many quotes below are drawn. The two authors conducted additional online and offline ethnographic fieldwork and interviews with a specific focus on the use of mobile technologies at the border. Sustained conversations with former Calais residents led to new forms of collaborations that are ongoing, both in person and through social media platforms. Former residents continue to share personal stories with researchers and collaboratively shape the written representation of their own voices over time. Mobile digital devices thus functioned as an important methodological tool for collecting information, supporting migrants in their day-to-day survival and maintaining transnational contacts with former camp residents.

The next part of the paper presents the findings of our research. It shows how migrants use mobile technologies in their interactions with activists, border guards, humanitarians and other social actors who also use mobile devices in the *techno-borderscape* of Calais.

Everyday Life in Transit: Multi-Directional Mobilities and Transnational Connections

In the transit zone of Calais, people on the move used mobile phones to keep in touch with family and friends, strengthening existing transnational networks. Babak,ⁱⁱ who is from Iran, detailed his search for the highest point in Calais to obtain sufficient cellular connectivity to reach his family so that he could reassure them of his safety.

In the containers, the signal is not good. We don't have Internet here, only sometimes in the 'Jungle'. They go the highest point to have a good signal. I also go there to call my mum. When I am talking with her and explain I am in a container she says, 'why a container? Is it small?'. I say 'No'; I try to go somewhere else to have a good quality, and then I explain good things to her. I tell her that I am good. I don't want to show my family what is happening here. I always tell that I am good and that I am living in a house. My mother doesn't have Facebook, so most things my family don't know. (Calais Writers 2017, 25)

Other migrants told us that, like Babak, they used mobile phones to reassure their families of their safety and conditions on the move, even when their accounts did not match the realities of their everyday life in the transit zone. They sent selfies in front of houses and cars or at the beach in Calais instead of images of the transit camp, thereby concealing the reality of their circumstances.

Contrary to the perception that migrants' lives are in limbo in transit spaces, the Calais camp became a social and cultural dwelling place. The volatile transit environment facilitated local connections by making it necessary to share essential resources like phone chargers. A lack of access to electric lines and reliance on generators meant that electricity was a precious commodity, the scarcity of which – along with the limited availability of chargers – created occasional tensions among residents. Some spaces were transformed into communal charging stations where it was possible to charge mobile phones for free. There were few television screens in the camp, one of which was located in an Afghan restaurant, where a satellite dish facilitated the reception of channels in languages other than French. The television was charged using a generator and thus could not be left on all day. In this context of material precarity and only basic infrastructure, mobile phones replaced televisions as primary recreational devices for listening to music, following the news, watching videos and playing games. One such space was the previously mentioned Afghan restaurant. As we sat in this restaurant and charged our phones at the end of the day, residents – mainly young men – sat next to us, watching videos or chatting via WhatsApp, Facebook and other social media platforms while waiting for their phones to charge. On the main street of the Calais migrant camp, Haris, a man originally from Pakistan, ran a restaurant called Khurasan. Describing a photo he had taken through the plastic window inside the restaurant, he portrayed a vivid account of the lively multinational atmosphere at the transit site:

It was a rainy day. I was sitting inside my restaurant. It is a little bit shady and that is because of the mirror... I was sitting inside, so that is why it is a little bit shady. I think this place is important for people because lots of people are coming here, charging their mobile phones, get together, discuss with each other and get food and drinks as well. People are from different communities. Iraqis, Syrian, Eritrean, Sudanese, Pakistani, Afghani people come here. All mixed together.
(Interview with Haris in the Calais refugee Camp, 2016)

Digital technologies were thus ‘orientation devices’ (Twigt 2018) that not only enabled migrants to imagine lives elsewhere but also provided digital windows into migrants’ affective transnational lives. On several occasions, residents with whom we spoke used their mobile phones as photo albums to show us pictures of their family back home, relatives in the diaspora and themselves in their professional roles before leaving their countries. These examples indicate how digital devices were used to maintain transnational connections and establish new ones at the local level.

These new local and transnational connections mediated by mobile technologies sometimes led to bifurcations in migrants’ journeys. Abdulai, an Afghan resident of the Calais ‘Jungle’, revised his migratory trajectory in the transit zone. He had been travelling with his sister along with her husband and two children and had originally planned to end his journey in the UK, where he intended to pursue his education. While ‘waiting’ in the transit camp, he continued to study computer engineering via online and distance learning. After receiving an offer to enrol in a new program for refugees at a French university, he decided to apply for asylum in France. His path thus deviated from that of his sister’s family, who still planned on crossing the Channel.

While some migrants adjusted their plans to be able to leave the transit zone – either to continue their journey to another transit space, reach a new destination or settle outside the transit space – others became trapped in transit with few prospects for movement, either

forward or backwards. The case of Ammar, an older Kuwaiti migrant, illustrates how transit can become a condition of immobility at the border. When we met Ammar, he had been in Calais for over a year. He had run out of money and options and was desperate. His journey and his transnational networks had been severely constrained within the *techno-borderscape*. The old mobile phone he possessed did not have enough memory to download new mobile applications that would allow him to speak with his family for free, and he was unable to buy a new phone due to lack of funds. Additionally, his limited IT literacy meant that he had to rely on others for technological assistance, such as the volunteer humanitarian we met in his tent who had come to help him with his phone's memory space. In Ammar's case, mobile technologies were not necessarily enabling but instead disempowering devices that amplified digital inequalities at the intersection of economic means and age.

Our conversations with women in transit at Calais exposed a different type of intersectional gender-based inequality. Lul and Ainom, two Eritrean women, owned older 'candy bar'-style phones, which limited their access to information, networks and transnational connections. They were rarely in touch with their families because of the costs of communication. Their experiences differed from those of the men – especially young men – in the camp, who had greater access to up-to-date devices. In another conversation with a group of women outside the Refugee InfoBus (a mobile tech hub in the camp which provided free internet for refugees), we were told that smartphones were often shared among family members and that the most technologically literate family members, who were usually male, were in charge of keeping the others informed.

The need for connectivity in the Calais camp generated a market for the trade of SIM cards, headphones, chargers and mobile phones. This emerging border economy in transit spaces was the catalyst for a change in Faizan's migratory trajectory. Faizan, who was originally from Pakistan, had transited in Calais, then moved on and regularised his status in

another European country. However, he decided to return to Calais to set up a small shop in the Calais ‘Jungle’ because business there was profitable. In contrast to the general perception of Calais as a space of transit along a unidirectional migratory trajectory, Faizan’s story illustrates that the transit space itself can become a place of destination, if only temporary – in this case, to conduct business during Europe’s ‘migration crisis’. At Faizan’s shop, camp residents bought monthly connectivity, around 12 GB of data for 20 pounds. They also sold him top-ups that they had received from relatives in the diaspora. These digital remittances were converted into currency to purchase food, medicine and clothes. In the context of Calais, technological connectivity replaced traditional money transfers that could not be accessed without the correct documents or access to Western Union kiosks. However, digital inequalities were evident between residents with transnational and IT-savvy support networks in the diaspora and those who did not have the requisite connections, finances or knowledge to transfer data.

As highlighted above, migrants’ trajectories are enabled and disrupted by several factors, not least their engagement with mobile technologies. Digital devices also opened up opportunities to sustain transnational ties and create new local and transnational networks. Migrants’ everyday lives in transit spaces were not suspended in limbo but instead filled with plans, interactions and transformations.

Digital Insecurity, Surveillance and Control of Migrants

The Calais ‘Jungle’ was situated in a highly securitised border area surrounded by walls and barbed-wire fences, patrolled by border guards and under camera surveillance. In order to navigate this *techno-borderscape*, migrants in transit spaces used their mobile digital devices to find safety in the knowledge that friends and family could monitor their migratory trajectories. Muhammad and his family’s journey from Syria entailed constant negotiations at the border that fragmented the linearity of their trajectory. Due to obstructed mobility,

Muhammad adjusted his family's journey to ensure safety and relied on his mobile phone as a protective device, as he explained to us before reaching Calais:

We arrived in Greece, on the island of Chios, at 4.30 a.m., and because we got wet, my mobile phone was damaged, and it was cold. The second day, I sent my group, as I had planned, before me, on the ship from Chios to Kavala in Greece. I had to find an excuse not to go with them; they discovered I was not with them when they were on the ship. I was watching their progress step by step, to make sure that they would arrive safely – that was my promise to my brother. When I was assured that they were safe, I started my journey. (Voices from the Jungle 2017, 105)

Like Muhammad, Abdulai (an Afghan resident of the Calais 'Jungle') used his smartphone to track the journey of his sister, her husband and their two children across the Channel step by step to ensure their safety and monitor their progress throughout the crossing. Digital devices not only impact migrants' interactions with border guards and smugglers but also enable them to temporarily become active agents of transnational, cross-border networks. Mobile phones thus functioned as an essential lifeline during migrants' journeys (Zijlstra and Van Liempt 2017; Gillespie et al. 2018; Alencar et al. 2019; Donà and Godin 2019) and facilitated new migrant-to-migrant forms of local and transnational monitoring, protection and assistance.

In March 2016, border securitisation was introduced inside the camp. The northern part of the camp was dismantled, and a dozen shipping containers were brought in and converted into shelters with the support of the French authorities. This situation created a paradox: in order to access 'safe and formal shelters', residents had to have their fingerprints taken for security reasons, but residents' lack of trust and fear that the French authorities would use their fingerprints to deport them meant that they avoided the space or bypassed the security checks. Some residents avoided checking out so they could keep their beds while attempting to cross the border.

Conversely, in the France–UK *techno-borderscape*, mobile technologies were adopted to develop strategic technological counter-border practices against the European border regime and the Calais transit zone embedded within it. Residents used mobile phones to alert other residents to imminent police raids. On 14 October 2016, we saw transnational networks of activists alongside migrant activists alerting the camp’s residents of a forthcoming raid via the cross-platform instant messaging application WhatsApp. The resident’s immediate response was to draw the shop curtains and remove a television standing in the corner of a restaurant and for customers to swiftly leave the premises, returning only after both activists and refugees had informed them that the anticipated raid would not take place that day.

In addition to economic, social and political precarity, migrants experienced information precarity – that is, their access to news and personal information was insecure, unstable and unreliable, leading to potential threats to their well-being (Wall et al. 2015). In Calais, a notice posted on the door of a shop had the ‘Facebook’ logo printed on it and a warning sign underneath:

BEWARE: Refugees and Volunteers - The UK Home Office will look at your Facebook account and they will use photos of you in Calais or other European countries to try and deport you. Be VERY careful about who you add, your profile pictures, what pictures you are tagged in/who you tag and your privacy settings!

This sign shows that migrants and volunteers were embedded in the same *techno-borderscapes* of surveillance and resistance. Mobile technology gave migrants more tools to exercise action, have a voice and navigate highly securitised borderscapes. However, with states investing resources in securitisation technology, and with migrants, volunteers and activists relying on the availability of free public social platforms, new digital inequalities emerge that have consequences for migrants’ safety. Public digital platforms and online transnational networks

are important resources of support and information during migrants' journeys, but they can also be appropriated by state agents and turned against migrants at the border. Residents were aware of what they should or should not put on Facebook and often used separate accounts for different purposes: one to connect with family and friends and one to connect with volunteer and humanitarian activists they met in the transit camp. In navigating *techno-borderscapes*, people on the move resisted transnational forms of digital surveillance and thus used mobile devices differently depending on the individuals with whom they were interacting and for what purpose.

Digital Humanitarianism For, By, and With Migrants

In the *techno-borderscape* of the Calais transit zone, outside conventional forms of protection and assistance, migrants and volunteers formed new localised and transnational support networks that facilitated the delivery of digital humanitarianism. Snel, Bilgili and Staring (this issue) note the increasing significance of new social contacts made during migrants' journeys who become important sources of information and support. Everyday survival in the transit zone depended on relationships among residents as well as between residents and non-residents. Social interactions among residents and volunteers were built on trust and personal relationships that were fostered through social networking and made easier by the availability of communication channels, ranging from phone calls and text messaging to social media exchanges.

For instance, Salena, who was originally from Afghanistan and resided in the fenced compound inside the 'Jungle' with her family, used her text messaging service to ask a female volunteer to bring her water late at night rather than taking the risk of going out alone to fetch it. Women were a minority among the residents of the Calais transit camp, and their personal safety was an ongoing concern. While Salena's interactions with humanitarians reproduced conventional relations of assistance, less unequal relations also developed in the transit space.

Our conversations with Abdu, originally from Afghanistan, were continually interrupted by phone calls, WhatsApp messages and requests by co-nationals to check their paperwork. He explained that he had two mobile phones, one with a UK SIM card and another with a French SIM card, which he used differently depending on the type of connection he needed to make, such as placing local calls or accessing the internet. While talking with us, he was interrupted numerous times by phone calls with requests to interpret for a co-national who did not speak English and needed to be registered with the French authorities. Abdu's English language proficiency, digital agility and familiarity with European institutions was explained by the multi-directional nature of his migratory trajectory. He first arrived in the UK on a student visa, where he spent a few years before being deported to Afghanistan. From there, he resumed his journey. Abdu's story shows that transit spaces such as Calais are not isolated points along a linear trajectory; rather, they are segments of more convoluted and complex mobilities. Because of his migratory experience, he was better equipped to navigate the *techno-borderscape* of Calais than other residents and became a digital and socio-cultural intermediary between his co-nationals and the humanitarians operating in the transit camp.

Social media platforms also provided a digital platform for migrants in transit to organise themselves. Muhammad, a former resident from Afghanistan who chose the pseudonym 'Refugee's Voice', created a Facebook page called 'RefugeesVoice2015' while in the transit camp to foster transnational awareness and connections:

To be honest, I saw a lot of volunteers who are helping refugees and I was also one of them, I was a refugee volunteer. I realised that I see many things being done from the volunteer's perspective but what would I do from a refugee perspective? I saw many social media pages, pages on Facebook and this is the time I realised I need to do something. (Skype interview with Refugee's Voice residing in the UK, 2016)

The RefugeeVoices2015 Facebook page raised awareness of the conditions and needs of migrants in transit in Calais, amplified their voices and provided them with information to enable safer crossings. This digital refugee-to-refugee platform is another example of the significance of the transit experience in galvanising local and transnational support.

If mobile technologies reshape how refugees and volunteers operate together, enabling new forms of refugee-led support initiatives, they also alter how assistance is given. New models of ‘volunteer humanitarianism’ (Sandri 2018) are heavily reliant on online social networking to mobilise volunteers, activists and migrants. These flexible and spontaneous digital platforms foster the formation of digital communities of solidarity across *techno-borderscapes*. These strategies of active networking, which resonate with the concept of ‘network work’ described by Schapendonk, Bolay and Dahinden (this issue), facilitate mobility practices, assistance and support.

A mapping of humanitarian digital hubs conducted in October 2016 before the dismantling of the camp found more than 85 English-language Facebook pages for groups containing the words ‘Calais’ or ‘Jungle’. These virtual platforms of solidarity, action, compassion, volunteering, care and aid are were both transnational and local sites. Given the lack of infrastructure and facilities in the camp, aid coordination took place online and offline to provide medical equipment and medicines, deliver and prepare food and provide suitable shelter via the Caravans for Calais mobile crisis support units.

While in these instances technologies were used as ‘organisational hubs’ (Alencar et al. 2019), another change in digital humanitarianism involved the conversion of mobile technologies (phones and phone credits) into a kind of aid. Phone Credit for Refugees and Displaced People (PC4R), for example, coordinates the distribution of phone top-ups to people on the move so that they can contact their families, communicate with support agencies and stay safe. Set up by a British volunteer who regularly visited Calais and driven by the

connectivity needs of the migrants, PC4R exemplifies the new form of humanitarianism. In 2020, the group had more than 64,000 members, had completed over 60,000 top-ups and had raised over a million pounds.

A key feature of these digital humanitarian platforms is that they are transnational and can easily adapt to new contexts while remaining sustainable. Since the demolition of the transit camp in 2016, the transnational network has continued to support refugees and migrants in hosting centres and extended its service to other places, first in the Global North but also beyond Europe in the Middle East and Africa. Cross-collaboration among volunteers in other ‘transit spaces’ emerged, such as the *Plateforme Citoyenne de Soutien aux Réfugiés* (Citizen’s Platform for Refugee Support) in Belgium. These connections with other locally embedded digital platforms ensure that phone credit reaches migrants and refugees as they move. , encounters taking place at sites of transit can become catalysts for the creation of new digital transnational aid networks. Through their formation, the material space of the transit zone is reconfigured into an imagined space of sustained encounters between social actors who move on as well as back and forth. In the *techno-borderscape* of Calais, the emergence of digital humanitarianism reshaped conventional understandings of aid delivery, the provision of technology-related services and the formation of digitally mediated collaborations.

Digital Citizen/Refugee Witnessing and Activism

When migrants become the authors of their own narratives, they challenge stigmatising perceptions of migrants as security threats and advocate for migrants’ rights to cross borders as global citizens (Whitlock 2015). Residents of the Calais ‘Jungle’ used mobile phones to address local and context-specific issues and to engage in local and transnational politics. At the local level, residents of the Calais ‘Jungle’ directly documented the violence that French police and fascist groups enacted against them at the border and posted videos online to raise awareness. At the broader European level, residents used social media to criticise general

European refugee and asylum policies, denouncing their inadequacies in addressing their reality of movement at the France–UK border.

Aware of European asylum rules such as the Dublin III regulation, Mohammed’s informed and highly convincing analysis of the UK border crossing, showed that migrants in transit can use social media to advocate for change:

We as the community representatives even wrote a letter for David Cameron and in this letter we were suggesting a better method for refugees (Interview with Mohammad from Afghanistan, 2016.

His analysis contributes to current discussions of what ‘Fortress Europe’ means in the digital age by reversing the gaze to advocate for change:

UK government is putting more fences, more security, spending millions of millions of pounds every year to stop the refugees to come to the UK illegally but they are wasting the money, they are putting people’s life in danger, they are also strengthening the traffickers. When I first came to Calais they were taking from the refugee maybe around 1,000 pounds to make the crossing to the UK and after the months I spend, the rate went up to 5,000 pounds....So building fences, it costs money to the government, it cost money to the people, it costs bad things for the people, it risk people lives, why? They are also putting lorry drivers at risk as well so they should put a legal system where people could claim asylum to the UK in France. We always amend the laws for good and for betterness. But this is an issue they don’t want to talk about. (Interview with Mohammed from Afghanistan, 2016)

Activist residents used the internet to engage in digital activism with which they bore witness to violence and problematised the border. Some of the pictures posted online by Babak on his Facebook account *En quête de liberté* (‘In search of freedom’) are confrontational performances conducted openly in an attempt to undermine hegemonic representations of the ‘border spectacle’, i.e. ‘a spectacle of enforcement at “the” border, whereby migrant “illegality” is rendered spectacularly visible’ (De Genova 2013, 1181). Migrants were often

aware of the border spectacle in which they were embedded and of being ‘forced’ to play a specific role. This is why migrants could sometimes ‘make fun out of this border regime’ through visual digital border interferences, a form of online improvised visual, poetic and political satire. In doing so, migrants became narrating subjects who challenged the portrayals of refugees as passive, vulnerable and needy victims or as threatening outsiders. Their accounts of personal, first-hand experiences of persecution, displacement and exile led to politically reflexive accounts of the *techno-borderscape* experience. Online political engagements intersected with offline political activism, such as participating in demonstrations, supporting hunger strikes and talking to the media.

Migrants’ digital activism in the transit space of Calais redressed to a degree, power imbalances through their exercise of personal and representational agency, which challenged mainstream portrayals of migrants *en route* and through their agentic relationships with other social actors involved in surveillance, humanitarianism and activism.

The Legacy of the Transit Site of Calais

Students enrolled in the *Life Stories* course and former residents of the Calais ‘Jungle’ have moved on since the end of the project. However, some former camp residents are still attached to the place and the people they met there, returning to Calais physically to visit or digitally in solidarity. Mobile technologies continue to be used to keep in touch and engage with the politics of Calais.

Riaz, who was originally from Pakistan, was one of a number of migrants who changed their migratory trajectory on the basis of information they gained at the Calais transit side. He chose to remain in France, where he gained refugee status and became a university student at Lille, but remained connected to Calais and visited several times after his original departure as a gesture of solidarity. During the summer of 2018, he took part in the Solidarity March

Ventimiglia-Calais-London. The march was organised by L'Auberge des Migrants, a grassroots organisation that still supports refugees in Calais and for whom Riaz volunteered during his time there. The Solidarity March started in Ventimiglia, Italy, on 30 April and ended in London on 8 July. Riaz live-streamed the daily progress of the march on his Facebook page to disseminate the message to his many followers, including those he met while in Calais. Although he could not cross the Channel to participate in the final segment of the march in the UK, Riaz was able to share news of other former Calais residents who were present to welcome the marchers at the emblematic Speakers' Corner in Hyde Park on 8 July. Riaz used mobile technologies to maintain transnational connections with former Calais residents and advocate for the rights of migrants in transit. This example not only shows that transit zones are not insignificant 'in-between' spaces but also reveals that they are spaces of transformation where long-lasting attachments and transnational connections are formed.

The legacy of the Calais 'Jungle' continued after the departure of its residents through the example of former residents, such as Africa from Sudan and Muhammad from Afghanistan, who were community leaders in the Calais 'Jungle'. After meeting and becoming friends in Calais, Africa and Muhammad set up a refugee community organisation called Hopetowns after reaching the UK. Its initial aim was to support refugees in Calais by facilitating connections between volunteers in the UK and migrants at the border in France. With the closure of the Calais 'Jungle', Hopetowns focused its efforts on assisting refugees in the UK, including those who had transited in Calais. The organisation uses Facebook not only to reach out for financial support but also to make specific calls to assist refugees, such as the following (posted on 16 January 2019):

Hello everyone, to all Calais family.

A wonderful Sudanese man, well-known ex jungle resident, who now has his papers and lives in London, was savagely attacked 6 months ago by a racist gang, putting [him] in the hospital for

over 2 months [...] He is in dire need of support, but especially of help from someone who knows how to navigate British social paperwork and can fight for his rights, get him council housing etc... [...] Can any of you help or know who he could contact that could help him out?

This message was posted on the People to People Calais Solidarity Facebook page with the aim of re-mobilising some of those who had been involved in the camp at the time. Dormant ties made during the time of the Calais ‘Jungle’ were reactivated and transformed into transnational networks of support and information-sharing based on shared memories of activism and humanitarianism. Hopetowns is an example of the ongoing relevance of the *techno-borderscape* in the lives of former residents and exemplifies the legacy of Calais as a transformative space where strong ties were formed and sustained to create a ‘family’. Each year since its founders left the camp, Hopetowns has organised online and offline gatherings with ex-residents and volunteers living in the UK and elsewhere. On 6 July 2019, for the third year in a row, the event ‘Picnic for the Calais Family’ was organised in Hyde Park via Facebook.

The Solidarity March and Hopetowns are just two examples of the Calais *techno-borderscape*’s ongoing relevance beyond the physicality of the Calais Jungle for its former residents and others with whom they continue to interact via mobile technologies.

Discussion

Migrants’ trajectories are mapped onto cartographies delineated by borders. While borders were once understood as sites of crossing, they are now seen as zones of immobility where people on the move are often stuck in temporal, geographical and socio-political transit. Our ethnography of the Calais transit zone at the French–UK borderscape rethinks the view of the ‘transit’ space in migrants’ trajectories. Moving away from a general representation of transit spaces as singular points in a unidirectional migratory trajectory, our study depicts them as

sites of confluence of migrants' multidirectional journeys as well as continuously transformative and transforming spaces in which mobile technologies play a significant role. In this way, mobile devices are not only lifesaving tools, as they are often depicted in the literature on migrants' journeys, but also multifunctional devices that organise various aspects of migrants' lives and shape the practical, affective, economic, social and political dimensions of their journeys and transnational lives (Doná and Godin, 2019). As mobile technologies become more widely accessible to migrants, they can generate new kinds of digital inequalities and reinforce disparities between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots', facilitating the journeys of some while hindering others. Power relations mediate migrants' access to and use of mobile technologies, and they can both (re)produce and tackle pre-existing inequalities based on race, gender, class and age (see Leung 2018; Gillespie et al., 2018; Georgiou 2019; Paz Alencar 2020).

Most importantly, this article makes a conceptual contribution to border and migration studies through its introduction of the concept of *techno-borderscapes*. More broadly, it contributes to emerging discussions on the complex relationship between digital innovations, connectivity and migration mobilities (see Leurs and Smets 2018; Smets et al. 2020). During their journeys, migrants interact with other actors – state agents, activists, humanitarians, volunteers and agents as well as other migrants – all of whom use mobile devices and digital platforms. The concept of *techno-borderscapes* allows us to examine the digitally mediated social encounters among social actors who do not necessarily share the same agenda. It sheds light on the shared spaces that they occupy at the border through the use of mobile digital devices. State actors use digital platforms to advance digital securitisation and surveillance while humanitarian actors use mobile technology to facilitate co-ordination with refugees and delivery of assistance. These digitally mediated social encounters provide a glimpse of a new kind of humanitarianism which moves beyond the traditional labelling of 'refugee *versus*

refugee helper’ towards more fluid, transnational support systems. Our ethnography shows that mobile technologies offer migrants more opportunities to take on different social roles, both providing aid and protection to others and raising awareness about the conditions in which they are forced to live, thus engaging in acts of digital witnessing. In addition, migrants’ use of and access to mobile technologies enables them to regain control and agency over digital surveillance and monitoring practices used by state actors, border guards and migrant brokers throughout their journeys and in transit spaces through ‘acts of digital interferences’.

To avoid producing either a romanticised picture of mobile technology use by migrants as being mostly empowering or, alternatively, viewing it solely as a technology of control that reduces migrant agency, we conducted a ‘bottom-up’ study (Andersson 2015, 25) of mobile digital devices. Mobile technologies play an important role in how migrants in transit negotiate, mediate and engage with other social actors in *techno-borderscapes*. Migrants use mobile technology ‘to interact’ with other social actors but also strategically ‘counteract’ some of the dynamics in the borderscape by resisting and challenging it. In Calais, forms of digital oppression and subversion intersected, reshaping certain power imbalances and transforming the roles of traditional actors involved in surveillance, humanitarianism and activism- or volunteerism-related activities. *Techno-borderscapes* thus enable us to examine the intersections between digital securitisation, humanitarianism and activism and rethink the significance and relevance of transit spaces in understanding migration trajectories. While digital devices did not necessarily determine migrants’ trajectories, they nevertheless provided migrants with new resources and opportunities that impacted the directionality and temporality of their trajectories. Moreover, they created the necessary conditions for greater social fluidity, providing migrants with both the opportunities and the resources to take on different social roles at the border.

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ⁱ The aim of the project was to bring the experience of British higher education to the heart of the Calais 'Jungle' camp as part of a project called 'University for All' conducted by the University of East London. Many participants used photographic work as the basis for written assignments for the *Life Stories* course. More details on the *Life Stories* project can be found at the following website: <https://www.uel.ac.uk/schools/social-sciences/our-research-and-engagement/research/centre-for-narrative-research/collaborative-research-events/life-stories-at-the-jungle-refugee-camp-calais>

ⁱⁱ Most names used in the article are pseudonyms, often chosen by Calais residents, for the purposes of anonymity. A few participants' real names were used when they chose to use them.