

MAPPING TRAJECTORIES OF DISPLACEMENT

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This chapter gives an overview of recent research into migrant journeys with an emphasis on the methods used to trace the displacement of people across international borders. I begin by addressing the ways in which displacement has been usefully conceptualised in this context through a focus on the nature of movement. This includes notions of truncated journeys, clandestine routes, and migrant trajectories understood as phases of movement and stasis (Collyer, 2010; Hage, 2009; Khosravi, 2014; Mainwaring & Brigden, 2016; Schapendonk, 2012). Whilst a lot of work in this area is inherently spatial, there is also a recent emphasis on describing migrant journeys through alternative temporalities, such as body chronologies or in relation to certain pivotal life events (Collins, 2018; Shubin, 2015). This work aims to understand the specificities of the experience of crossing borders without documentation, including the ways in which the border regime has made such journeys increasingly difficult and too often fatal. It also focuses on the role of a wide variety of actors, including people smugglers and border officials (Garelli & Tazzioli, 2018; Icli, Sever, & Sever, 2015; Macías-Rojas, 2018). Yet, there is an inherent contradiction and ambiguity in the use of methods such as tagging, tracking and tracing of individuals within research, since these are all key to how the border regime itself functions. In such a context, it is impossible for research to be either apolitical or neutral. Whether understood through the bureaucratised language of university ethical committees as the imperative to protect vulnerable participants, or understood as a personal ethical commitment towards those in precarious and often highly difficult situations, many researchers choose to take a stance that actively helps undocumented migrants. But this is of course not always the case, many research projects exist that are designed to help states govern their borders, whether in the form of new technologies of securitisation or through providing expert evidence to aid deportation (Hatton, 2018; “iBorderCtrl,” 2016).¹

In this chapter, the term ‘activist research’ is used to denote those who align themselves consciously with undocumented migrants, often using the techniques of border control against itself, in what Pezzani and Heller have called ‘a disobedient gaze’ (2013). Official narratives can thus be challenged, for example monitoring the number of people making a particular journey can be used to account for the number of lives lost as a result of border securitisation, or statistics can be interrogated in order to turn the logic of the border around by focusing on the number of people who *started* a particular journey rather than the number that arrived (Tazzioli, 2014). Despite such possibilities, it is important to emphasise that in using similar techniques to those of border control, researchers face a whole set of ethical issues that must be dealt with care and a critical perspective in order to not inadvertently harm the very people we attempt to advocate for. An ubiquitous example of such a technique is the use of GPS for locational positioning, which as many have noted is based on military technologies of surveillance and control (Holmes, 2006; Kaplan, 2006; Schuurman & Pratt, 2002). In thinking about the ethical implications of GPS, Petrescu points to the difference between tracking and tracing, using the example of the psychoanalyst Deligny’s practice of tracing the movements of severely autistic children through hand drawn maps (2007). In making these maps there was a desire to spend time with the children, to get to know them through their movements and gestures. This kind of tracing is the precise opposite of the tracking of individuals made available through GPS, which allows a knowledge of a person’s location without sharing a presence with them; extreme care is therefore required in the way that this knowledge is mobilised.

¹ Considering the EU’s investment in fortifying its borders, it is perhaps unsurprising that a large number of technologically oriented EU funded projects exist that focus on border security, all of whom justify their research through a discourse of security and convenience (“Efficient Integrated SeCurity Checkpoints (EFFISEC),” 2013; “MobilePass, a secure, modular and distributed mobile border control solution for European land border crossing | MobilePass,” 2014; Kyriazanos, 2018).

Migrant journeys and temporalities *en route*

It is now commonly understood that in many journeys of displacement, and especially those made by forced migrants, there is no direct route that can be traced from A to B (Ahsan Ullah, 2013; Hassan & Biörklund, 2016; Shaffer, Ferrato, & Jinnah, 2018). Instead, the journey is emphasised as a social process that is an ongoing event in people's lives, as well as shaping the places through which people travel. There may be periods where migrants remain static, but that does not necessarily signal the end of a journey, which can also encompass settling in, finding a home, deciding to move on or being deported. At the same time, deportation regimes and militarised borders keep people moving, what Khosravi terms circulation: 'a controlled movement of people sent back and forth between undocumentedness and deportability: between countries, between laws, between institutions.' (2018) Any mapping of such journeys requires an ethical position in relation to a securitisation regime that derives surplus value from the very conditions of precarity that people are forced into. This means that journeys that are regarded as illegal and therefore assumed to be hidden, are not necessarily so. Both the demonization of so-called 'human smugglers', who were often undocumented migrants themselves, and the pretence at a hidden dimension to border crossing, is merely a way for those such as the EU who are pushing for evermore policed borders to evade responsibility for the deadly effects of their policies (Achilli, 2018; Garelli & Tazzioli, 2018). As the Windrush scandal in the UK and the changing fate of the dreamers in the US has shown, the confluence of securitised borders and legal regimes produces illegality within racialised subjects.² Coutin refers to this aspect of migrant lives as 'clandestinity', which she defines 'as a hidden, yet known, dimension of social reality' and further observes that when migrants are clandestine they embody 'both law and illegality.' (2005, pp. 195 & 198) In this sense, migrants are of course illegalised but their presence is accepted, wanted even, for the neoliberal economies of the north to draw value from working lives that can be exploited due to their illegal status and can easily be cut short through deportation. In Europe and the US, undocumented migrants are included in our economic and other systems, we rely on their labour for our cities and our rural economies to function, for example through providing domestic labour or for fruit picking, and yet they remain illegal, not having the correct documentation and the right to remain in the country, as well as not being able to access services. As Mezzadra and Neilsen have argued, borders become a method for the production of exploitable and precarious labour (2013).

This contradictory status of being known yet hidden is one of the most important elements of contemporary forced migration, and a quality that must be appreciated when attempting to trace and tag such journeys. For whom is the tracing and tagging taking place? What purpose does it serve? And crucially, how does it intervene within the complex politics of (in)visibility that many migrants embody? In some of the examples I relate below, this tracing takes the form of a single story or event that is then used to understand and comment on wider processes, whether it is the bodily experience of such journeys or the failings of the border regime. But as Mainwaring and Brigden note: 'Human smuggling and migration routes are sustained practices, leaving visible traces in the physical, social, economic and political landscape of transit communities.' (2016, p. 246) Examples in this chapter show how we can find these traces not only in the physical landscape but also in social relations or in the virtual realm of digital signatures.

² The Windrush scandal concerned people from mostly Caribbean backgrounds who were wrongly detained and deported by the UK Home Office. Many of these were British subjects that arrived in the UK as citizens before the Immigration Act of 1971 that restricted the citizenship rights of those from the former colonies. For more information see, (El-Enany, 2019; "Windrush scandal," 2019). The Dreamers refers to undocumented migrants within the US that arrived as children. They were provided temporary rights under the Obama administration but their fate has become a political bargaining tool under the Trump administration. For more information see, ("DREAM Act," 2019; Walters, 2017).

For many migrants the journey becomes a near permanent condition that is perpetuated through deportation regimes. What type of time does such a life embody and how does it affect an understanding of displacement? Often in cases of deportation, time is used as a mechanism of control. Being 'sent back'—sometimes to a place you might not even know—can, of course, also be part of the journey. As Griffiths explains time in such instances can slow down whilst people wait months and years for a decision on their asylum application (2014). For many, time becomes a bodily experience that weighs heavy in waiting. In other cases, time is accelerated with deportation decisions being made in days, or even hours, making the threat of having to leave always imminent. The time of deportation is therefore contradictory, both fast and slow, disrupting life rhythms.³ In traumatic and difficult journeys, the body can also act as a time keeper. In the dark, in the back of a lorry, time might be understood as rhythms, but rhythms that are interrupted and broken. Conversely, in longer timeframes the body offers its own chronologies based in events; the birth of a child, an illness or a reunion. To understand the temporalities of such journeys, the linear, concatenated time of modernity needs to be replaced by time that is embodied and relational (Grosz, 2005). In the examples related below, time acts in different ways. It is used to verify places and locations in order to assign responsibility for journeys that ended in death, but in other examples time-based media is used to disorient, to reflect the experience of travelling clandestinely (Awan, 2016). In other examples, alternative temporalities are described that remove people from what is considered to be the 'normal' flow of time.

Mapping stories and accounts

The use of maps within the normative discourse on migration, whether in policy reports, academic research or journalism, has often been critiqued for showing only a particular perspective that is aligned to the interests of border securitisation and migration control. In the European context, for example, maps are used to show the movement of people in one direction only – towards Europe – ignoring, for example, the large numbers of people moving within the African continent, or the circulations caused by the deportation regime described above. Such representations have been described as 'static invasion maps' that 'not only represent moral panics, they also co-construct them.' (van Houtum, 2012, p. 410) More recently, the use of mapping by policy-led organisations has become more sophisticated, so that rather than focusing on the start and end of the journey, as the arrows on earlier maps did, the focus shifts to the routes that people take, pin-pointing important nodes and places of passage that should be targeted in the quest to reduce migration towards Europe and North America. Casas-Cortés et al. describe the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) as exemplary of this attempt to map the shifting routes that people take in order to evade border control. Their i-Map is interactive and regularly updated to reflect the changing nature of the routes. The aesthetic of the map is relational, rather than using arrows to map flows in one direction only, the map has a networked logic that encompasses some of the circulations of undocumented people. As Casas-Cortés et al. have noted, the map attempts to capture a shifting subject in order to 'facilitate control and not movement' (2017, p. 13). The different thicknesses of lines are used to denote major and minor routes, as well as distinguishing between what they call 'migration hubs' and 'migration route cities'.⁴

³ Griffiths identifies 'four experiential temporalities', including 'sticky time', 'suspended time', 'frenzied time' and 'temporal ruptures' that reveal the contradictions of the way time is experienced in detention and deportation (2014, p. 1994).

⁴ The map used to be available to view freely, but since the controversy surrounding it, the website now requires a password: <http://www.imap-migration.org/index.php?id=4>. For a detailed account of the i-Map and its complicities, and a conceptual distinction between routes and trajectories see (Casas-Cortés, Cobarrubias, Heller, & Pezzani, 2017); A graphic derived from the interactive i-Map can be viewed on the Reuters website ("Europe's migration crisis," 2016).

In contrast to the i-Map, there are others who use maps to understand the experience of crossing borders without documentation. In the Mapping Journey Project, the artist Bouchra Khalili asks migrants to trace the routes they have taken on a map of the world (Khalili, 2008). Their stories speak of difficult journeys across international borders, a thick line drawn in black permanent marker shows the circuitous routes taken to evade border control. In my own work, I have also used maps in a similar way, but instead of a geopolitical map people were given a blank piece of paper on which to draw a story of their journey (Awan, 2016). This meant that the maps people drew were necessarily distorted with the scale changing according to the details of passage. Often parts of the journey that took longer and were more difficult were shown in greater detail, taking up more space on the page than areas that were easier to pass through. Both in Khalili's work and my own, videos focused on the hands that drew the maps and the voices that spoke of their own experiences. The difference between these maps and the approach of the i-Map is clear in both the methods and the politics of representation. The i-Map is a matrix, a grid over territory, that is approached as a growing repository and a database. Techniques of crowd-sourcing are used to collect and collate information from lots of different sources. The maps of Khalili and the ones I use in my own work are different, they are hand-drawn by migrants themselves, they tell stories of journeys with an ethnographic focus on how people account for their own experiences. They could be understood as a way of doing trajectory ethnography, asking people where they went, why and how, in order to understand their motivations and desires.



Migrant Narratives of Citizenship exhibition (Awan, 2016); interview with Afghan woman in Odessa, Ukraine. Image: Cressida Kocienski.

What hopefully becomes clear from these three examples is that the way in which displacement is tagged and tracked is very much related to the political motivations of those doing the work. In the i-Map the subject is removed, and we are left with deterritorialised and desubjectified lines that attempt to hide their politics whilst also being largely ahistorical in their approach. In the use of hand drawn maps by migrants the politics behind the work is acknowledged even if the faces of the people we interviewed are hidden. There is a desire to protect individual identities whilst not erasing the subject, so that the focus on hands and being able to see the pattern and fabric of a sleeve, give a glimpse of the person. Combined with their voice the map is embodied through stories that speak

of what it felt like to move clandestinely, the material conditions of such journeys and the lived experiences that lead to time being measured through the movement of bodies in space.

Mapping signals and traces

The ambiguity of tracking people's movement through space means that the way in which these routes and trajectories are understood is key, as are the motivations for doing such work. Whereas the examples above understood the movement of people through their own accounts, the practices described below aim to track displacement through uncovering the signals and traces that are left behind. These can be digital signals embedded in different kinds of archives, from satellite images to web traffic, or they can be material traces left within the physical environment. To detect and make sense of such traces requires careful investigative work that is able to deploy a set of interdisciplinary methods, an approach that is exemplified in many of the examples related below. At the same time, it requires an appreciation of what Weizman calls 'weak sensors', material or otherwise, these are traces that can only ever be faint, remote and far from objective in the normative sense of the word, being always 'suggestive rather than conclusive.' (Weizman, 2014, p. 29) The role of such weak sensors can be appreciated in an investigation carried out by the Forensic Architecture research agency, where a blurry line in video footage of a Palestinian demonstration was the key to building a case around the culpability of the Israeli army in the death of a demonstrator (Forensic Architecture, 2014, pp. 83–95). The faint trace in the video prompted the reconstruction of events in a three-dimensional model of the scene populated with information from several videos, which was then presented in a court of law. On its own, the faint line in the video footage would not amount to much, but buttressed with other accounts and presented within the constructed space of the model it became decisive. Such 'weak sensors' therefore demand a political and aesthetic project alongside the investigative or academic concerns.

The Undocumented Migration Project (De León, 2010) addresses the lived reality of people crossing the US-Mexico border. Through combining approaches from ethnography, archaeology, and forensic science, the project documents and analyses the material traces people leave behind. There is in this work an explicit desire to not interfere with what is a clandestine process. Instead fieldwork in the Sonoran desert takes place in the hottest part of the day, since an exchange with human smugglers could put migrant lives at risk. The project meticulously records material left behind by migrants that is usually considered rubbish, approaching these as an archive that gives a glimpse into the harsh realities of the desert crossing. Drawing on the practices of museum archives, everyday objects such as discarded clothing, shoes and water bottles are given a status and an importance within a carefully curated collection and in this way become part of the historical record. The interdisciplinary nature of this work gives it a potency, by mixing archaeological fieldwork with an ethnographic approach that produces powerful accounts of the realities of lives lost in the desert. Through a process of tagging found objects and by placing emphasis on the materialities of the journey, the project highlights techniques of US border control, which are designed to enrol nature itself in its work; the environmentality of the desert, animal and other non-human agents are all put to use to form a lethal barrier. As de León writes, it is 'a killing machine that simultaneously uses and hides behind the viciousness of the Sonoran Desert.' (De León, 2015, pp. 3–4)

The investigative approach described above is also deployed by the Forensic Oceanography project, which centres on the deaths of migrants at sea by attempting to piece together the traces and faint signals that are left behind after a devastating event (Forensic Architecture, 2014; Heller, Pezzani, & SITU Research, 2011). Centred on the 'left-to-die boat'⁵ in the Mediterranean, their research traced

⁵ A boat that set sail from Tripoli on 27 March 2011 and spent 14 days drifting in the open sea with no rescue despite a number of ships and fishing boats present in the area. It resulted in the deaths of 63 people.

its path after it ran out of fuel and drifted at sea. The aim of doing this work was to prove that a number of actors were aware of the boat in distress but chose not to launch a rescue. The report and maps produced by the group were used to assist a legal case brought against the European Union (EU), Frontex and NATO by 'Groupe d'information et de soutien des immigrés' (GISTI). Forensic Oceanography's methodology most explicitly uses the border regime against itself by mobilising the very technologies that are used to control borders, such as satellite imagery, remote sensing and visual analysis. They combine this data-driven approach with the testimony of survivors to uncover the precise details of events as they have unfolded. In an interview with a survivor they used *aide memoirs* such as photographs of vessels and planes that were in the area to verify and cross-reference the locational details found through the sensing data. Unlike the interviews related above that focused on the experiential aspects of border crossing, these were designed to uncover factual details that can stand as evidence to support a legal case. Here the dense practice of tagging and tracking journeys at sea through vessel-tracking technologies, thermal imaging, radar and satellites that are part of the Eurosur surveillance programme used to police the borders of the EU, is put to a very different use – to prove the culpability of those who claim jurisdiction over the seas.

The Forensic Oceanography project consciously uses digital technologies of border control against the grain within the very specific context of a legal case, but without such a framework the practice of tracking and tagging journeys can become ethically problematic. In parallel to Eurosur, the EU's Eurodac programme is designed to aid border control through collecting biometric data on migrants, which is shared with European law enforcement agencies. At the same time, a number of European governments as well as the US are using smartphone data, 'proactive monitoring of social media' and in some cases having the ability to seize laptops and smartphones from asylum seekers without identification documents (Latonero & Kift, 2018, p. 7). In such a context, to use social media analysis of migrant's networks requires a very strong rationale that has the capacity to overturn a surveillance gaze.

The recent project, Mapping Refugee Media Journeys: Smartphones and Social Networks, aimed at understanding refugee's use of social media through a mixed methods study. The project report provides very useful insights into the ways migrants have used social media, particularly WhatsApp and other potentially private communication channels, such as Telegram and Viber (Gillespie et al., 2016, p. 64), based on extensive interviews with refugees themselves. But the project also aimed to uncover the behaviour of refugees online through an attempt at tracking their use of social media using 'computational social network analysis of social media communications networks.' (Gillespie, Osseiran, & Cheesman, 2018, p. 3) This was achieved by extracting and sorting information on particular users from datasets provided by Facebook and Twitter through their proprietary application programming interfaces (APIs). The data made available through each of these APIs is limited in different ways, from the type of data available to its size. What is surprising in the write up is that the researchers seemed to lament their own restricted access to information, since they were only able to use data from public groups on Facebook and public tweets, rather than having access to private areas of the platforms. They couched this as 'technical problems ... that restricted our unfettered access to refugee information on social media.' (Gillespie et al., 2016, p. 59) At the same time, they seemed to be unaware that the ability to track people online was not restricted simply because people chose to hide their identity, but that through making connections with the accounts that they were engaging with online, identities can often be revealed (Priedhorsky, Culotta, & Del Valle, 2014; Sharma, Ghosh, Benevenuto, Ganguly, & Gummadi, 2012). Therefore, the project's attempt at using Twitter data to follow people's 'likes' and follower networks raises serious methodological and ethical questions in the context of a group for whom surveillance can be an issue of survival. What seems to have curtailed this attempt is a lack of technical know-how rather than a critical perspective that would allow what is essentially a technology of surveillance in the name of marketing to be overturned in a counter move.

The report was published before the recent Cambridge Analytica scandal, where the company acquired the data of millions of people from Facebook without their consent using it to micro-target adverts. It is now widely acknowledged that social media influenced the results of a number of votes, including the 2016 US presidential election and the UK's Brexit referendum (Cadwalladr, 2017; Russia "meddled in all big social media," 2018). The public outcry resulted in Facebook and other social media platforms restricting the amount of data they make available through their APIs. Yet many academics, and particularly those in the field of digital journalism, complained that the actions of one academic and a disreputable company had lost them access to extremely valuable social data (Bastos & Walker, 2018; Bruns, 2018). This goes to the heart of the problem in the majority of academic research involving such data, where the standard epistemological questions somehow fall by the wayside. As with any other research method, it is not only the information that is acquired but the ways in which it has been gathered and the purpose for which it is collected that is of importance. The data provided by social media APIs has been curated and collected by these platforms for the explicit purpose of marketing (Lanchester, 2017). As Venturini and Rogers state: 'They have purposely and relentlessly built the *self-fulfilling prophecy* of 'computational marketing' and, to do so, created a new type of data devoted to support it.' (2019) To use such data uncritically is to go along with the assumptions behind it, including the fact that such platforms are designed to undermine public discourse by encouraging certain types of behaviour based on clicks and likes. The above example highlights the difficulties faced by academics when engaging with technologized ways of doing research. It seems that while the research team was very well represented by people who had contacts within the refugee community and wider related networks, the technical aspects were not as well represented or thought through. This would suggest the need for stronger ethical guidelines concerning research using social media, something that is underway in many universities. But more importantly, it requires researchers to not only think of adding new digital methods to the mix to make their research 'cutting edge', but to take seriously the implications of using such methodologies in the research design itself. In particular it is important to think through the lived ethical implications of such work, which go far beyond simplified concerns around surveillance or the fact that digital methods only reach limited types of audience, although these are clearly also important.

The politics and possibilities of looking askance

The examples discussed above all attempt to unpack the experience of displacement through finding ways to trace what are often difficult journeys. The most successful of these are able to mobilise a series of interdisciplinary methods within a practice-based research designed to interrogate the technologies and techniques of the border regime. There is a desire in this work to move beyond analysis to affecting the situation on the ground, often in collaboration with migrants themselves, whether in the service of bringing people and institutions to account for the crimes that have been committed, or in order to make others empathise with the lived experience of displacement, or simply to help people along their way. This work, therefore, is unapologetically political; it takes a stance that is not the neutral space of the objective researcher (Haraway, 1988). In this the research is not only concerned with producing academic or investigative work, but through bringing a collage of different perspectives and techniques, it also takes part in an aesthetic project that is able to reveal some of the contradictions inherent within the mainstream discourse on migration and the displacement of people.

There is a concern across the different examples of beginning to account not only for the spaces of displacement but also the times of it. The use of stories and narratives speak for an embodied time that allows for moments of empathy and exposes the facile nature of a modernist understanding of linear time. When difficult journeys are recalled they are not related chronologically but follow their

own embodied logic. But the mobilisation of time as timeline is both common and highly destructive within asylum practices, where it is used to track and verify someone's story. Time is often used to deny asylum by questioning specific details and chronologies. In this context, it is interesting that the Forensic Oceanography project consciously uses time understood as linear to question instead the narrative of the border regime. The passing of time is also dangerous for the way in which it can easily erase precious traces of lives lost in remote locations or cover the traces of faint signals, which gives the work of uncovering traces an added urgency.

The ethical question of how to approach a vulnerable subject underlies all work discussed in this chapter, and for most the answer lies in choosing an indirect approach. In the context of visual representation for example, the subject is present but identities are not completely revealed by choosing to only show people's hands and through hearing their voices. In the Undocumented Migration Project, De León is adamant that direct participant observation of the harsh desert crossing will always remain a problematic choice; it not only serves to obscure the migrant subject by foregrounding the experience of the researcher, it also puts migrant lives at risk (De León, 2015, pp. 12–14). Rather than addressing this difficult and clandestine process directly, he deploys a range of other anthropological methods that indirectly trace the route of migrants. There is much to be said for such indirect approaches when dealing with vulnerable people and difficult situations. When military and corporate technologies of surveillance and control are brought to bear upon such research, whether in the use of GPS tracking or social network analysis, the ethical obligation lies with researchers to fully understand the implications of such technologies.

I started this chapter by asking, for whom is the tagging and tracking taking place and what purpose does it serve? These remain central questions. While there are varied impulses for doing this work, they all seem to share a common political project of revealing the violence of the border. This could be achieved through supporting the movement of people, allowing those on the move to share their own realities, or by using the border *dispositif* against itself. Both the potential and danger of this work to track and tag migrant journeys, is that whether used by agencies such as Frontex or activist groups such as the No Borders Network, there is a similar conceptualisation of space that underlies this work. It is an understanding of space as relational and the border regime as fluid and dynamic. The possibilities of intervening within such a space, or of finding cracks in the grid means gaining a close understanding of this topological space of surveillance and control. It might act as a grid but is not necessarily homogeneous; it is the technologized biopolitical manifestation of the dispersed border that is shifting yet ever present. To find a path through such a space requires an intimate knowledge of this thick terrain but also of the gaps within these contours that bodies can silently slip through. Slipping through the gaps, that is, finding a space that is neither tracked nor tagged is both a necessity and a danger for those who are compelled to cross borders without documents. Research in this area would do well to follow the example of migrants themselves, by being aware of the dangers as well as the politics and possibilities of looking askance and of finding the cracks.

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