

Sounds of the Jungle

Restoring the Migrant Voice on New Media

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Abstract

In this paper we examine the cross-border tensions presented by the refugee settlement dubbed the 'Jungle in Calais'. Calais has been the focal point of debates about illegal entry into the United Kingdom. The 'Jungle' as a physical entity is often enmeshed into debates of illegality and violation of the White suburbia through the unauthorised movement of the migrant. In mainstream media debates, the migrant is rendered voiceless often appropriated into discourses of immigration policy and transgression of territorial borders. The human trauma of migration is silenced through the distancing of the human subject in media discourses. We analyse how civil society organisations and interest groups use new media to restore the voice of the migrant enabling them to tell their stories through narratives and images not shown in mainstream media. The restoring of the voice to the migrant becomes an important device in enabling proximity and the reconstitution of the migrant as real and human. It stands in juxtaposition to the distance-framing techniques of mainstream media where a de-humanisation perspective works to situate the migrant as a disruptive contaminant in civilised and ordered society.

The story of the Jungle

Calais has long been a major transit point between continental Europe and Britain and with the opening of Channel Tunnel in 1994 the volume of traffic has increased exponentially. It is unsurprising then that large numbers of illegal migrants headed for Britain use Calais as a launch-pad from where they attempt to stowaway on vehicles headed across the Channel. However the French coastline is also the end of the Schengen Agreement area of free movement and so at Calais migrants encounter border controls for the first time since they entered the EU. The result is a

bottleneck and the French authorities have had to deal with large congregations of migrants determined to reach Britain but unable to move on so in need of temporary shelter.

It was in this context that British newspapers began to talk in 2007 about the 'jungle'. At first this was described as a handful of 'makeshift' tents located on scrubland on the main road to the port of 'the jungle' (Tristem, 2007) but by 2009 it had become a 'sprawling shantytown' of shelters and a wood-and-tarpaulin mosque (Rawstone, 2009). Living conditions had degraded to the point of 'inhumane squalor' (Allen, 2009a) and the Jungle, according to the newspapers, had become criminalized - a 'hiding place' for rapists, gang masters and people traffickers; a 'no go area for the police' (Allen, 2008); and a uncontained space where inter-ethnic 'turf wars' 'spilled onto the streets of Calais' (Rawstone, 2009) disrupting local business and threatening local residents with their desperation and determination to reach Britain (Bracchi, 2009). This discourse of degradation and lawlessness served to justify the demolition of the camp. In September 2009 French riot police accompanied by bulldozers and equipped with flame-throwers and chainsaws demolished the Jungle in the full gaze of the media (Garnham, 2009). The occupants of the camp were dispersed or arrested.

However, within hours of the police action new camps had 'popped up' in Calais (Allen, 2009b) but migrants also dispersed and 'at least 20 new mini-camps' sprung up around the town over the next few weeks (Allen, 2009c) and 'all along the northern French coast' (Sparks, 2009a). A year later a 'New Jungle' in the village of Teteghem, near Dunkirk (Finan and Allen, 2010) was similarly demolished.

The organizations in Calais

In recent years a controversial 'crime of solidarity' has made it illegal in France for individuals or organizations to assist undocumented, vulnerable migrants (Allsopp, 2012; Rigby & Schlembach, 2013). Despite this a number of local charities, religious institutions and anarchist organizations were operating in Calais at the time of the jungles. Some (i.e. Association SALAM and La Belle Etoile) have provided clothing and daily food for migrants. The PASS clinic offered basic medical care. Our focus is on the anarchist organization Calais Migrant Solidarity (CMS) and its 'solidarity activism' in which it eschews the notion of charity as patronising, rejects what they see as hierarchical relations between humanitarian organisations and those they

help and opposes any distinction between those who are worthy of help (asylum seekers) and those who are not (economic migrants) (Alidred, 2003; Millner, 2011).

CMS is a member of the anarchist No Borders Network which has 12 regional organizations in Britain, 15 across Western Europe and Scandinavia and links to similar anarchist collectives in North America, Australia and Israel. No borders is ideologically opposed to all borders and border controls based on an anti-capitalist, anti-statist and anti-colonialist position in which they argue that borders generate and reinforce the inequalities that are the causes of much migration (Alidred, 2003; Anderson, Sharma, & Wright, 2009). Their definition of borders is particularly broad encompassing the “physical, political, ideological, linguistic and social” (see Collective email October 2009, cited Millner 2011: 325).

In 2009 just before British newspapers and French authorities constructed the jungles as a threat, a no-border “camp” of activists, humanitarian workers and migrants met in Calais. It found that ‘migrants took responsibility themselves for directing discussions to an extent that had not been experienced before’, the decision was taken to set up CMS as a permanent presence in the town and to adopt a ‘solidarity activism’ which ‘placed migrants’ desires and passages at the heart of future campaigns (Millner, 2011: 324).

So instead of ‘simply campaigning on behalf of the Calais migrants’ CMS have adopted a non-hierarchical approach in that they ‘take their directions from the border struggles of the migrants themselves’ while also ‘offering practical support, monitoring police activity, documenting and where possible preventing arrests and the destruction of migrant settlements’ (Rigby & Schlembach, 2013: 169). CMS has also been particularly critical of government and media labelling of migrants as ‘illegal’ citing instead the Geneva Convention on the right of the individual to “seek asylum anywhere they choose” and rejecting the narrow definition of asylum commonly used in the EU (Calais Migrant Solidarity 21 Sept 2009, Calais Migrant Solidarity May 2010 cited Millner 2011: 325).

Millner argues that their ‘solidarity approach to activism’ resonated with undocumented migrants she interviewed and who ‘felt that their voices were “heard like whispers in the courts” ... and that their individual “struggles to survive were being ignored” because of media images of migrants and asylum seekers’ (Millner, 2011: 326). She also argues that the CMS ‘production of testimony’ since 2009 challenges the ‘framing of the scene in the media and public understanding’ marking

a shift 'from the politics of sanctuary to the politics of spectacle' so that the discriminatory practices by the police and other agencies does not go unnoticed (Millner, 2011, 327).

British newspaper constructions of the migrants

Newspaper constructions of the migrants has been shaped by their perception that increased migration was changing the demographic profile of Britain; their willingness earlier in the decade to wage campaigns for tougher policies; and the closure of Sangatte in 2002 which drew their attention to Calais as a focal point for illegal migration across the Channel (see Howarth and Ibrahim 2012). It is in this context that the jungle migrants have been constructed, de-legitimized and rendered voiceless through distance framing by the British national newspapers.

This was done partly by subsuming people within discourses of immigration policy failure and in particular impersonal numbers that presumably captured this. French policy failure was constructed in terms of a failure to check the expansion of Calais jungle or prevent new ones sprouting, police failure to act decisively against the lawlessness as well as the inability to slow the flow of migrants into Calais and across the Channel. British policy failure was constructed in challenging to Home Office claims of a fall in the number of illegal migrants entering Britain with the counter-claims of charities working in Calais and newspaper 'investigations' which ascertained that over 10,000 a year could be slipping into the UK but that the 'true' numbers were unknown (Taher 2007: 17; Fagge 2007: 4).

Distance framing also de-legitimized the migrant presence through discourses of criminality both in the frequent references to their 'illegal' status and in the lawless discourses used to justify the demolition of the jungles discussed earlier. It also served to discredit the legitimacy of their endeavor to reach Britain. Interviews with and the personal stories of migrants did draw attention to the conflict they had fled from and the arduous journey getting to Calais (Fernandes, 2009) however this endeavor was discredited in discourses about them wanting to make use of the British benefit system (Finan, T. and Allen, 2010a). Or it was discredited in labelling their perception of Britain as an 'El Dorado' (Flanagan, 2009; Sparks, 2009b) with its associations of myth or fantasy, fruitlessness and wishful thinking divorced from reality. The vulnerability of many of them was also minimized. Most of the news stories focused on adults; quotes from child migrants were accompanied by

skepticism as to whether or not they were as young as they claimed (Reynolds, 2009); and it only became apparent that half of the Calais Jungle camp were children after it was demolished (Express, 2009). Thus, distancing and discrediting of the human subject in media discourses has also served to silence the human trauma of migration and their experiences in Calais.

The migrant voices

CMS mission is to 'document police harassment and to strengthen resistance against the border regime'. On a broader level CMS seeks agency from the public from their own situational context and in line with this they 'invite you to take action wherever you are against all those who are part of the construction of this totalitarian world, including the French and other governments, the European border police force Frontex, mercenary corporations such as G4S, Serco, Mitie and others who run migration prisons and border controls, and all those individuals and companies who profit from their actions'. The border regime of Calais is viewed as part of a wider architecture of control and persecution against the powerless or what these organisations and governments define as 'illegal'. The long term goal of CMS is to 'to build a stronger transnational movement against migration controls, comprised of those with and those without papers.' While the organisation is happy to work with reporters and journalists and to provide background information, they have nevertheless made it clear that they 'unequivocally refuse to engage in any dialogue with reporters from 'The Daily Mail' or 'The Express' newspapers, which have repeatedly misrepresented migrants and their situation for their own agenda'. The CMS website also describes its struggles in winning the trust of the migrant community and how they were initially suspicious of their efforts. They are conscious of protecting this trust with the migrants despite the language and cultural hurdles.

The CMS website strives to directly update the public on the events in the affected areas and camps by putting out a press release on events as they happen. The events are recorded from the vantage point of the migrants and often when camps are destroyed by the authorities, it immediately issues calls for the public to replenish and re-stock what has been taken away or destroyed through police action. A recent press release dated 11/04/2014 on the 'Sudanese jungle evicted by the police' they not only outline the difficulties of reporting on the event but also seek public help to redress the loss;

'Because it is difficult to get near to big police actions like this, we do not know exactly how many people were arrested. At the moment we think that it was around 8. One person was not living at the camp, but was arrested for refusing to show their ID.'

With a van people of the no borders collective managed to collect a lot of the tents, blankets and bicycles from the camp, before they were taken by the council workers. Some workers from the local charities showed up late.

If you are coming to Calais this weekend for the demonstration, or in the next couple of weeks, it would be very useful if you bring tents or sleeping bags to replace what has been lost today.'

CMS's list of items solicited from the public include, phones as well as cameras beyond basic amenities such as tents, pots, books (in all languages including French, Italian, Arabic, Pashto, Farsi, Tigrinya, Amharic and Greek) as well as games. Cameras are sourced as they are 'often damaged/destroyed by the police.' The use of cameras to record police action and brutality is implicit in this.

CMS's work extends beyond reporting and exposing border regimes and police brutality, it is also active in keeping the public informed about fascist demonstrations against border camps and jungles in Calais. It highlights fascist activities (such as protests against Sauvons Calais) and counters these by organising counter demonstrations. One such demonstration was organised for the 14th of April 2014. In view of this, they also mobilise support from the ground through social networking sites such as facebook and blogs to publicise these counter demonstrations about fascist ideologies in Calais where they urge the public to look for all 'possibilities for resistance'. It also urges the public to report to Facebook about the activities of Sauvons Calais to urge them to take its page down even though Facebook has refused to do so thus far.

A distinct feature of CMS reporting of casualties in Calais is to name them and to give them an identity which is in sharp contrast to the mainstream newspaper reporting. They are constructed as human beings as opposed to statistics in official figures. The website is used to capture the human suffering for migrants and provide them a means to mourn and remember their loss. In then functions as a memorial site for lives lost in the quest for a better life and security.

CMS has also been involved with a move to provide bikes for Calais in a campaign called 'bikes without borders' and has urged the public to bring Bikes and bicycle parts and tools to provide mobility to the migrants. This is a direct resistance to contain and constrain migrants to the camps they are in and to enable them to have access to society beyond the camps.

CMS uses a mix of online media to maximise, entwine and sustain online and offline engagements while restoring dignity and identity to the migrants. Some of the distinctive features of CMS include;

- Supporting other organisations which support migrants in Calais and publicising their efforts. CMS is transnational in its focus both in terms of outreach and in catering to a wide community of migrants from different parts of the world.
- Reporting on migrant issues from the vantage point of the migrant and their suffering and from a wider political imperative of resistance against migration control and their definitions of illegality in an interconnected world.
- Deaths of migrants are announced with their images and their personal predicament in detail.
- The website is used to highlight the plight of the migrants through narratives and images. It seeks to provide a space to the migrants to narrate events from their own vantage points. It allows the public to form connections with them as protagonists in the narrative rather than as victims. The blog site is also a space for migrants and the public to grieve and to come to terms with trauma as it evolves. It provides a space to mark these events in sharp contrast to mainstream media reporting.
- These narratives allow the wider public to partake in the grieving and to feel part of the community. This is in direct contrast to the depictions in mainstream media which have relinquished the human interest dimension to frame these as immigration and border patrol failures.
- Unlike mainstream media the affected migrants are named and given an identity
- CMS support of resistance organisations which locate vacant houses for women and children as well as their campaign 'bikes without borders' seek to

provide mobility beyond the camp and in the process they disrupt the description of the camps as static entities within the border and extend these boundaries.

- Organising live demonstrations against border regimes and by standing up against fascist ideologies.
- It provides legal information for refugees on the situation in different European countries
- CMS is 'acultural' as it seeks to involve wider publics beyond those who can use the 'borders of France or the UK' as a space of indexicality. It seeks to raise awareness of the plight of people in migrant camps across the world and hence it is not just 'European' in construction but transnational in terms of resistance and ideology.

The counter discourses of organisations such as CMS play a vital role in presenting the jungle in a wider ideological framing beyond a mere policy failure of immigration issues. They re-instate the need to look at the humanitarian and human rights perspectives of migration and the issues and dilemmas these present to governments and nations today. The depiction of the EU as a fortress against the rest of the world and the inherent justification to prevent 'Others' from transgressing the ever-expanding borders of the EU raises the impracticality of this construction (i.e. fortress) and the inevitable human consequences unleashed through wider processes such as globalisation, unequal social and economic development as well as the malleable interpretation of human rights in cross-border conflicts and migration. The CMS' solidarity activism has to be located within wider transnational processes of migration and the jungle is a metaphor for a phenomenon that extends beyond Europe. In assessing the CMS's online activism as a counter-site, it needs to be juxtaposed against the representation of immigration issues in mainstream media where the 'migrant' is constructed as a deviant corporeal body devoid of human rights. The migrant is voiceless and rendered in a composition of silence on her predicament or trauma. The counter sites of the CMS seek to reframe them as human as opposed to statistics or casualties crossing the Calais border. This framing draws in the public through the suffering and trauma of the migrant forming connections which the mainstream media truncate.

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