3. Temporal violence

Published by

Hicks, Dan and Sarah Mallet.
Lande: The Calais 'Jungle' and Beyond.
Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/79538.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/79538
“The humanitarian dismantling operation is over.” The slow violence of words again. Let us step back from the sheer staginess of the destruction of October 2016 as an iconic event and media spectacle, and follow Leonie Ansems de Vries in seeing the ‘no man’s land’ of La Lande as, throughout its existence, a precarious space for the performance of ‘transience and persistence’ (Ansems de Vries, 2016). Its condition of being ‘forever temporary’ as each cycle of building and destruction plays out (Reinisch, 2015) leads us to study La Lande as the UK national border with Schengen, rather than as a camp, an event, a localised situation for reflexive fieldwork with cosmopolitan subjects.
In Calais, the cosmopolitics reaches from space into time, in the ongoing strategy of an erasure of the human through the performance of permanence afforded to the nonhuman in the form of durable materials of concrete, steel, and a seemingly endless supply of tear gas: the performance of humanity reduced to impermanent alterity.

The border is temporal as well as spatial. There is doubtless a potential for an important institutional history of the camp, from British plantations in the Caribbean to British concentration camps in South Africa, reaching back perhaps even to the Roman military technology used in Gaul itself, re-emerging with the labour camps – such as that which existed, in this palimpsest landscape, in 1942 for Belgian Jews at the site of the 1999 Sangatte container camp (Bernardot, 2008: 111). Marc Bernardot (2008) is persuasive in his call for a ‘sociohistory’ of camps in France, from the First World War to the present day, a cross-temporal approach that doubtless would reveal such continuities in the physical use of buildings or places with a truly shocking regularity.

But the most recent chapter in any such history would be not just a function of any long-term French ‘national history of internment’ (Bernardot, 2008: 110), or accidents of co-location, but a kind of structural technology of occlusion, through which the image and performance of the camp is deployed to mask, to soften, to distract from, and to naturalise the new hostility of the leading experimental zone for the new phenomena of border technologies against the Global South. Calais is thus less a glimpse of some future urban form than it is ‘a testing ground for border security and technology’ (Corporate Watch, 2018: 125), from which that naturalising name, *La Lande*, sought to distract.

Through a trick with time, the presentation of the border as a camp distracts from the growing endurance of containment through narratives and experiences of emergency and precarity, enacted through the collision of human suffering with concrete and steel. As an academic field, Refugee Studies
continues often to frame its field sites through the ideologies of emergency and humanitarian militarism because its definitions of fieldwork and humanity still rely on the timeless and patriarchal accounts of sites, framings and humanity of an older functionalist anthropology. The motivations for and modalities of an anthropology of displaced people requires some critical examination in this light. In this chapter we want to suggest that the old anthropological technique of temporal violence, as a device for othering, is re-emerging in the borderwork of Calais. But we want to question how anthropological thinking about ‘cosmopolitics’ maps on to borderwork as well, before returning in the final two chapters to the potential of an anthropological account of the cosmopolitical, as infrastructural and ecological rather than ‘cosmopolitan’.

*
How to begin to describe the *temporal violence* of La Lande? One helpful place to start is Joel Robbins’ important account of the shift in the locations and subject matters of anthropology following the discipline’s internal (post)colonial critiques and attempts to abandon ongoing racist narratives of progress and temporal otherness. Expanding on Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s account of anthropology’s ‘savage slot’, Robbins (2013) has suggested that the ‘suffering slot’ – places of pain, suffering, oppression or violence – has come to displace this as the central location for anthropological fieldwork and thinking, in ‘a turn from a concern with anthropological difference to a focus on universal suffering’ (Ticktin, 2014: 274; cf. Trouillot 2003).

Experiences of the environmental hostility in the previous chapter above clearly share some primary characteristics with what Robbins describes as ‘suffering’. In extending the questions of hostility and militarism from material and ecological perspectives towards the question of time, let us begin with that felicitous notion from the Annalistes – their sense of *l’histoire environnementale* which constitutes the *longue durée*, a notion that they deployed to critique *l’histoire événementielle* as short-term, or journalistic, or superficial. With a nod to Braudel, let us suggest that at Calais, the term ‘Jungle’ has represented a *chronotype* – a linguistic trick through which this place can shift location and be repeatedly destroyed and announced to have been destroyed but still remains somehow present, timeless, ephemeral – a permanent emergency, an ideology that co-opts the language and practices of humanitarianism for the sake of borderwork.

The long term takes the form, the Annalistes showed us, of environmental history. But even impermanence can generate a kind of environmental history. There is a complication, since part of what persists over this nascent longer-term history of environment is a history of the ultra-short-term, through which impermanence constitutes not just abandonment, decay or ruination, but both a condition and a technology of ‘material precarity’ (Mould, 2018). The temporary becomes a
space for politics, a time destroyed so quickly that it is perhaps even shorter than the *événement*. Recall how the times of sleep deprivation mean that ‘sleep has become a political matter in Calais’ (Hagen, 2018). This is a cosmopolitics of differential access to time, a mode of existence that produces difference through the withholding of duration. Like myths and music in the account of Lévi-Strauss, the bulldozers of La Lande were ‘machines for the deletion of time’ (cf. Hicks, 2019a, 2019b).

This temporal *legerdemain* is very familiar to anthropologists since our discipline can take much of the dishonour for inventing it, during the early modern days of merchant ethnography, and then profiting from it as the museums filled up with supposed timeless and universal artworks during the years of informal empire. This politics of time is what Johannes Fabian, in his classic text *Time and the Other* (1983), described, that is, how anthropology created the geotemporal illusion that the further the traveller ventured from Paris or London, the further back in time he went: until, in Tasmania or South Africa (or, for Charles Darwin, Tierra del Fuego), he witnessed the human conditions, supposedly ‘archaic’ or ‘fossilised’ or ‘degenerate’, of the Stone Age. In these ways, anthropology misrepresented Indigenous people deeply affected by historical processes as ‘pristine’ ethnographic situations, or survivals. They came to use the idea of the ethnographic present as a given moment of universal time, masking the way in which it was a frame in which people might be frozen, through the constant deferrals of salvage. Here, survival of a different kind was at stake, one compressed into the much shorter timescale of human loss and trauma, calibrated by the human lifespan. Time, Fabian suggested, became a more powerful means of creating ‘the other’ than space. Western ‘civilisation’ grew in two directions at once, enacting the idea of progress in tandem with its reverse – creating present pasts that justified its own degenerate savagery beyond the bounds of Europe. From the last quarter of the 19th century – perhaps specifically from 1884, a year which marked
both the Berlin Conference and the foundation of the Pitt Rivers Museum – the border and the museum were the two central devices in fabricating the time-geographies of informal empire – forged through ideologies of ‘race’ and the practice of destroying and stealing the possessions and settlements of others. Today, at both the museum and the border, time is a (post)colonial weapon.

In the Calais landscape these ongoing (post)colonial survivals are experienced vividly by displaced people through the strange epoch into which they are forced: a technological Mesolithic, where, apart from the smartphone, there is no modern technology of shelter, of transport, of lighting, heating, or community based on sedentism, but instead just walking and running, constant mobility, long journeys measured through time passed.

‘I was surprised that I saw no houses, no electricity, there were just shelters. I arrived knowing no one, with no connections, to see a place that belonged to the European Middle Ages.’ (Muhammad from Syria, in Godin et al., 2017: 113)

The questioning in newspapers and on social media of the authenticity of displaced people at Calais through images of them with smartphones recalled a thousand racist anthropological tropes (O’Malley, 2015). At the Calais ‘Jungles’, impermanence is a form of governance, an artificial limbo of timelessness that is just as significant as statelessness. The experience of displacement here is a condition of waiting, of unsafe boredom, of the banal everyday experience of wasting time that is collapsed into immobile transit, vividly captured in the static white shipping containers through which, as Miriam Ticktin has observed, displaced people were ‘rendered immobile by containers designed to travel’ (Ticktin, 2016: 31). Part of the logic of how this impermanence is achieved temporally is through the
state’s biopolitical appropriation of the humanitarian trope of ‘emergency’, as it has developed from 20th-century world wars as a focus on saving human life (Barnett, 2011).

But the problem of border time cannot be recalibrated through Fabian’s solution, simply by asserting the ‘coevalness’ of a common humanity. Inequality of any kind is more than a social construction to be relativised and demonstrated to be a falsehood, as if the ‘zero time fictions’ of anthropology’s problematic ‘ethnographic present’ (Vansina, 1970: 165), which re-emerge and harden in the idea of a ‘contemporary turn for anthropology’ (Agier 2013a), could be simply generalised – opened up to all. This is the same instinct that leads to a collapsing of humanitarian aid into ‘development’ aid, reproducing the attendant linear, Eurocentric, and discriminatory temporal narratives (Atlani-Duault and Dozon, 2011).
The heterotopias of bottlenecks and chokepoints across the (post)colonial Calais landscape collapse temporal scales into each other (cf. Tazzioli, 2014). But how has the UK national border at Calais come, in the performative guise of the camp, to operate with the timelessness of anthropology? No border is built to be temporary, of course (van Houtum, 2010): the border claims duration for the province of the nonhuman alone through the banal technologies of (post)colonial bureaucracy, paperwork and waiting (Refugee Info Bus, 2018b: 17). The primary message of the border to the traveller is that it can classify them because it will outlast them. Across Calais, exhaustion plays out as a combination of repeated forced displacements, push-backs and the stretched temporality of years of uncertainty which is not resolved after being granted official protection (Ansems de Vries and Welander, 2016). From this holding zone, The Game looks like not just crossing La Manche but a kind of time-travel. The state of suspension is generalised from document-checking, border examinations, surveillance and anxiety in the passport queue, and forms, applications and hearings, across the landscape as waiting becomes the only possible act of dwelling. The presence of this archaic mode of existence (which is a mode of survival), enacted through bureaucracy and violence, means that we must think through the status of La Lande as a (post)colonial landscape.

*
Where to start with the idea that the white cliffs of Calais might have any relevant connection to the history and legacies of empire? In answering this question, let us follow Ann Laura Stoler in using the term ‘(post)colonial’ to underline the enduring legacies of European colonialism rather than relegating them to history (Stoler, 2016), and thus to understand the colonial past as an anthropological as well as purely a historical question. How far back do these ongoing legacies stretch? Calais has experienced centuries of conflict and peace and ongoing human movement during the post-medieval and modern periods, culminating in its importance in the border regime after the First World War and its almost total destruction in the 1940 Siege of Calais, a few days before the Battle of Dunkirk. But the medieval landscape archaeology of Calais may prove important not to neglect. The town was founded in 1165 by Matthew of Alsace, count of Boulogne, fortified in the 13th century and then taken by the English after the Battle of Crécy in 1346. Jean Froissart’s *Chroniques* recorded that Edward III
issued proclamations that English immigrants would have ‘liberties, privilege and immunities so that with their families and goods they may be able to remain and live there safely’ while French inhabitants were expelled (Rose, 2008: 23–4). However, while the exile of the ‘great burghers and their wives’ is fairly well documented, by Froissart in particular, it is much more difficult to assess what happened to ordinary people; as Susan Rose puts it in her account of Calais as An English town in France, these people probably ‘melted in the general body of anonymous poor folk in Northern France’ (Rose, 2008: 25).

Calais remained a possession under the Treaty of Brétigny long into the 16th century, until its loss after the Siege of Calais of 1558. Calais was thus an English town for more than half of the first four centuries of its existence, with Members representing the constituency of the Pale of Calais in the English Parliament. With the accession of Queen Elizabeth in 1558, and the Treaty of Troyes of 1564, French ownership of Calais was recognised with the payment of 120,000 crowns.

Let us reimagine the loss of Calais as a key moment in the nascent Elizabethan imperial geographies. The waters of the Channel might appear today to be a ‘natural’ border between France and England, but this is an artefact of 1563–4, the very time of the first expeditions to the Americas by John Hawkins, often considered England’s first slave trader. And so Calais represents, among so many other things, England’s last overseas possession on the European mainland (with small aftershocks in the temporary possession of nearby Le Havre in 1562–3, and also Dunkirk between its capture from Spain in 1658 and its sale back to France in 1662) and its last pre-colonial overseas possession, the withdrawal from which was a key moment in the emergence of the new oceanic geographies of empire. At Calais, withdrawal from any territorial possession on the European mainland laid the foundations for the transition from English exploration to overseas settlement, for the Acts of Union in 1707, and thus for the British Empire.
The question of (post)colonial legacies is even clearer in the more immediate life histories of those displaced people who have found themselves living in the Calais ‘Jungles’. As we have seen, Michel Agier and others have made much of the cosmopolitan character of displaced people at Calais, but the quantitative human geographies reveal a more specific geographical sequence. In her ground-breaking work *Asylum After Empire* Lucy Mayblin (2017) makes a simple but radical observation: most asylum seekers in Britain come from regions that were formerly part of the British empire. More specifically, at Calais these former regions overwhelmingly comprise just four states: Afghanistan, Sudan, South Sudan, and Eritrea (with some smaller but significant numbers of Somalians). Official government figures, published in November 2017 for the transfer of children from Calais in November 2016, list 227 from Afghanistan, 211 from Sudan, 208 from Eritrea (a total of 646), with a further 89 from Ethiopia, from a total of 769.\(^3\) This is in keeping with the description of nationalities at the many informal camps described in the report of the Coordination Française pour le Droit de l’Asile, *La loi des ‘Jungles’* in 2008: ‘Eritreans, Afghans, Iraqis, Sudanese and Iranians’ (CFDA, 2008: 24). More recent census data also shows that between two thirds and fourth fifths of the overall population at the Calais ‘Jungles’ have come from five countries: Afghanistan, Sudan, South Sudan, Eritrea and, to a lesser degree, Somalia (Refugee Rights Europe, 2016a: 9, 2016c: 9, 2016d: 10). Higher numbers of Iranians may have arrived during 2018, following the emergence of a new irregular route with the introduction of visa-free travel for Iranians to Serbia from August 2017, but the scale of this is at present based only on anecdotal reports.\(^4\)

*
It is perhaps uncontroversial to understand the current conflicts in Darfur and Afghanistan, and the military conscription regimes in Eritrea from which so many flee, in (post)colonial terms. It is a further step to recognise human displacement from these regions to Europe in the same long-term temporal frame: a history of changing definitions of ‘enemy aliens’, and of the alternative fates of British subjects within what became the Commonwealth, and British protected persons in those parts of the world that were subject to the informal forms of empire that emerged with the Scramble for Africa and in the Middle East from the 1880s. Four of the five main countries that have been represented by nationals at Calais were former Protectorates or Protected States of the British Empire – Afghanistan (Emirate of Afghanistan, 1879–1919), Sudan and South Sudan (Anglo-Egyptian Sudan 1899–1956) and Somalia (British Somaliland 1884–1960). And in the case of Eritrea, after half a century of Italian rule there was a significant period of British Military
Administration after the Battle of Keren in 1941 until 1952, before independence in 1958 (Balfour-Paul, 1999).

(Post)colonial narratives of the British are often focused on the earlier colonies of the Caribbean and India, or on Australia, the Pacific, and West and South Africa. We imagine the British Empire in terms of ‘possessions’ – dominions and colonies – and in doing so we erase how, later in its history, other arrangements developed in parts of empire that did not involve formal annexation: protectorates, condominiums, mandates and other administrations that created dependent territories or royal or crown colonies rather than British Overseas Territories, and thus excluded their citizens from the benefits of Commonwealth membership after independence, despite the central role of the British Empire in the formation of these states. The trajectories of those states that were not part of the Commonwealth (formed by the Balfour Declaration of 1926, and then the London Declaration of 1949) involved a range of different ideologies of place, ‘race’ and personhood – and enforced migration. The dominance of the model of ‘settler colonialism’ has led to a neglect of the very different conditions of extractive, bureaucratic, informal or, what we are here referring to as the militarist colonialism of the British informal empire in the Middle East and the Horn of Africa past and present, from the 1880s to modern conflicts, which are still played out in the Wars in Afghanistan (2001–present), Syria (2011–present) and Iraq (1991, 1998, 2003–9, 2014–present) – and, above all, in Palestine.

*
As Patrick Wolfe (2016) showed in the case of settler colonialism, so too for what we are calling ‘militarist colonialism’: each brought particular ideologies of landscape, property, time and ‘race’, some of which are refracted through Calais today. The basic geographical connection is made by the British and French governments:

Repeated attempts to subvert the border control between France and Britain are an acute symptom of a problem that starts in Africa, the Middle East and Asia, and is exploited by smugglers who take migrants’ money and risk their lives, in particular in the Mediterranean. (Joint UK/France ministerial declaration, 20 August 2015)⁵

But what are the temporal connections through which we might stretch a Braudelian understanding of environmental history from shores of the Mediterranean to La Lande, at this intersection between France and Britain, two former colonial powers, and in
the process restore the centrality of empire to modern European history, as many have done for the early modern period? It is the border regime, rather than the performance of the camp, that is the primary artefact of enduring empire here. The UK’s Windrush scandal in 2018 has made that clear: a moment of visibility in the (post)colonial border regime of the UK, in which the politics of documentation (an important theme, to which we shall return in Chapter Four) and the horror of illegal deportations for British people born in Commonwealth countries has rightly raised an international outcry. But while the Calais situation and the supposed ‘migration crisis’ has continued in Britain’s national dialogue at the same time, the very different fates of those living through the legacies, scars and debts of the different and more recent forms of militarist colonialism remain virtually unmentioned. Here, we take a lead from Thom Davies and Arshad Isakjee in their call for ‘excavating the ideological and material linkages that tie colonial histories with contemporary border governance’, which they see as ‘key to understanding Europe’s shifting constellation of camps, and the racial politics that underpins them’ (Davies and Isakjee, 2019).

*
Part of what is recovered through such excavations is a broader temporal perspective on the ongoing debate about the reasons displaced people at Calais risk their lives to cross the Channel and claim asylum in the UK. The balance-sheet approach to this debate, as framed by the British media, polarises and weighs up the so-called ‘push factor’ of fleeing ongoing conflict emphasised by the Left against the supposed ‘pull’ of benefits imagined by the Right. A more complex picture is suggested by primary research in 2016 by Refugee Rights Europe (2016d: 14–15) concluded that three main factors stated by refugees are language skills, family members and perceptions of education opportunities (especially among Eritreans). But in a longer-term perspective than such accounts of motive and agency can reveal through structured interviews and focus groups, the (post)colonial logics of displacement may be significant too. Those fleeing the Taliban or Janjaweed or the forced labour inflicted by the Eritrean state on its citizens do so under (post) colonial conditions – harsh examples of what Ann Laura
Stoler describes as the ‘duress’ of ‘imperial durabilities’ and ‘ruination’ (Stoler, 2008, 2016) that accompany colonialism and decolonisation as ongoing processes in the present. One part of the fragments, structures and modes of existence that endure across time in these regions is the imperial enactment of Britain as a just and good place. Talal Asad has shown how, as a colonial power, the British actively associated themselves with the image of secular humanitarianism – without it being clear that their actions aimed not just to humanise the world but included ‘the desire to create new human subjects’ (Asad, 2003: 110). We might detect the ongoing dominant influence of settler colonialism upon anthropology in the framing in contemporary Refugee Studies of settlement through the image of the camp. At Calais this impulse has served to erase the status of La Lande as part of a border created through the ongoing influences of another, militarist, form of British colonialism – through the foregrounding of its status as a camp, and thus as a nonplace rather than a key site of (post)colonial subjugation as the technology of the border uses new parahuman criteria to define others as illegal. La Lande was a human landscape that made visible the ongoing mortal risks being taken for asylum in Britain by moderates, Christians, Muslims and others, especially those from communities, political groups and families most at risk from former associations under new regimes and fundamentalisms, from these specific (post)colonial legacies. To map this landscape, to understand it, requires a geo-temporal rather than a purely situational account of La Lande.

The border, like the anthropological museum, is an engine for the production of alterity; both are devices for the classification of some humans as out of time as well as out of place.

*
We learn from Michel-Rolph Trouillot (2003) that time of the ‘savage slot’ was that of archaism, the fantasy of pristine survivals from past stages of the human and the myth of progress; what then is the time of what Joel Robbins (2013) calls the ‘suffering slot’; what are its myths? Those times and myths must surely those of impermanence and ‘crisis’.

At Calais the militarised border reduces displaced people to emergency cases in a humanitarian camp. The short-term fix is an ideology in which some parts of academic Refugee Studies are surely complicit, especially in a ‘challenge-led’ UK government funding environment. (Post)colonial debts, obligations and cases for restitution are reduced through the narrative of urgency. The material culture of aid and emergency shelter are made with built-in impermanence, an ephemeral functionalism. There is a ‘temporal politics’ in play like that described by Gisa Weszkalnys (2014) in situations of anticipation fixed into a permanent impermanence. Two unanswered questions: What does this violent presentism share with the history of contemporaneity in
anthropology? What does it share with what the world systems theorists used to call ‘underdevelopment’ as a technique of oppression?

The general failure of Refugee Studies to engage with history (Marfleet, 2007; Chatty, 2017) matters most in its failure to engage with the (post)colonial (Mayblin, 2017: 3), and thus with the idea of the contemporary. One thing to which Contemporary Archaeology may be particularly attuned is the weaponisation of contemporaneity; top of the list on that score when encountering Refugee Studies is the euphemism coined there, one which matches the violence of the anthropological idea of the ‘ethnographic present’ – ‘the emergency’ (cf. Turner 2015).

Just as the emergence of the suffering slot was a response to decolonisation, so the very status of the ideology of the ‘emergency’ is a persistence of ongoing (post)colonial knowledge structures. At the sharp end of this body of thinking, the ‘violence of humanitarianism’ operates in the camp through an ‘antipolitics of care’, where preserving biological life serves to bolster and maintain inequality (Ticktin, 2011). The ‘state of exception’ (Agamben, 2005) is normalised by the state, extended through time, generalised so that even to talk in those terms, in the terms of crisis or emergency, is to contribute to the temporal mystifications of ‘disaster’ and the militarised othering of borderwork (cf. Fassin and Pandolfi, 2013). Through uses of the idea of human survival, humanitarian accounts of ‘bare life’ thus not only obscure how some lives are more likely to be subject to this categorisation because of ongoing (post)colonial processes (Tagma, 2009) but also contribute to the elision of abjection with ‘still life’, fixed in time and space.

Against those slippages towards humanitarian militarism, let us try in the next Chapter to use the possibilities of Contemporary Archaeology to address questions of resistance, of protest, of endurance, of survival, of ‘appearance’, of documentation, and of visual politics.