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Whitescapes: A posthumanist political ecology of Alpine migrant (im)mobility

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A R T I C L E   I N F O

A B S T R A C T

This article explores the many more-than-human actors involved in crafting migrant (im)mobility across the Alps and the racialised (re)production of the borderscape as what I call a whitescape. Using cycling and hiking as embodied and mobile methodologies of encounter it examines the entanglement of landscapes, terrains, gradients, weather, water, and forests, alongside transport and tourist infrastructures: roads, railways, tunnels, bus routes, ski slopes, golf courses, hiking trails and cycling tracks in shaping how illegalised migrants encounter the Alpine Susa Valley/Hautes-Alpes border routes and how these ecologies are made political. Drawing on the work of Juanita Sundberg the article makes the case for posthumanism and political ecology in the study of borderscapes and illegalised migrant (im)mobility, while being sensitive to the racist dynamics of the nature/culture divide present in much posthumanist and political ecology scholarship. Therefore, while the article makes space for the role of more-than-human actors in borderscapes it also highlights the racialising work of these more-than-human entanglements in the following ways: through perpetuating dualist ontologies of nature/culture or nature/human from which illegalised migrants are linked to the natural, read pre-modern, world; and through producing illegalised migrants as 'bodies-out-of-place' in a political ecology that is concomitantly (re)produced as a whitescape.

1. Introduction

On the 9th May 2018 the body of Blessing Matthew from Nigeria, was found at the ERDF hydroelectric Prelles Dam in the Durance Valley, Hautes-Alpes, France. It is believed Blessing's body had been washed downstream for 16 km or so after she fell into the Durance while escaping from the police as she crossed the Claviere-Montgenèvre mountain pass on the Italian-French border [see Figs. 1 and 2]. Later that same month the body of an unidentified man was found by a local hunter curled up in a crevasse not far from Bardonecchia the Italian town at the base of the nearby Col de l′Échelle [see Fig. 1]. It is thought he spent the winter there, covered by the snow. A year later on 7th February 2019 29-year-old Derman Tamimou from Togo was found at the side of the N94 linking Montgenèvre to Briançon. He was taken to hospital in Briançon where he was declared dead of hypothermia (Giuffrida, 2019a). The violence of a global border and (im)mobility

regime that excludes and brutally expels those considered 'other' can be located in this Alpine space.[1]

"Crossing the desert and the Mediterranean Sea was hard, but passing the mountains in all this snow is going to be even harder. We will be risking our lives again, but we have no other choice" (Mohammed Traoré quoted in Camilli, 2018). The locals call this border area "une petite Méditerranée," a little Mediterranean (Le Monde, 2018), to highlight the dangers of (im)mobility in this mountainous borderscape that has become a site of death and injury, as well as struggle and hope, for thousands of migrants (and those who stand in solidarity) who have made the Alpine journey from Italy to France (see Chomette, 2020; Vergnano, 2020). This Alpine journey is shaped in intimate and embodied ways by, not only, the border controls of the French Police aux Frontières (PAF) or Italian Guardia di Finanzia who chase migrants through forested slopes, along Alpine trails, and across mountain streams, on foot, in jeeps, and from the air with the support of

helicopters and drones, but also by the ecologies and infrastructures that shape this Alpine environment. The journey, the routes taken, or not taken, the times of travel, and the success or not of journeys are not only conditioned by the border controls, but by the landscape, terrain, weather, roads, railways, tunnels, and Alpine resorts that are part of the ecology and infrastructure of this borderscape.

This article attempts to give life to these lively ecologies and infrastructures and their entanglements with migrant (im)mobility. In doing so it pays attention to materiality in everyday geopolitical processes (Dittmer, 2014) and brings work on posthumanist political ecology (Castree & Nash, 2006; Panelli, 2010; Sundberg, 2011; Whatmore, 2002) into conversation with literatures on borderscapes (Brambilla, 2015; Brambilla & Jones, 2020; Pallister-Wilkins, 2018), borderwork (Rumford, 2008) and critical border studies. Addressing what William Walters sees as a lack of attention to the 'theorisation and investigation of materialities such as vehicles, roads, and routes and their role in migration worlds' (2015: 470) I consider — and make political (see Cristina Del Biaggio in Libération, 2017) — the more-than-human work landscapes, terrains, gradients, weather, water, forests, roads, railways, tunnels, bus routes, ski slopes, golf courses, hiking trails, cycling tracks and other infrastructures, such as dams, play in the making of the border and migrant (im)mobility in the Susa Valley/Hautes-Alpes. As Duncan Depledge has argued "the ways in which nonhumans are entangled with *the physical constitution* of space — still seems largely undeveloped"

Fig. 2. "The Border Has Killed. Goodbye Blessing" graffiti commemorating the death of Blessing Matthew along the SS24 from Cesana Torinese to Claviere in Italy.

which reinforces "the idea that the material world does little more than provide the stage for political dramas to unfold." (2015: 91, italics in original). But as Elizabeth Grosz has argued in her work on geopower, matter and nature are productive of life (2005). Work on lively or vibrant matter and its role in making difference/s in the socio-political has a sustained presence in Science and Technology Studies. However
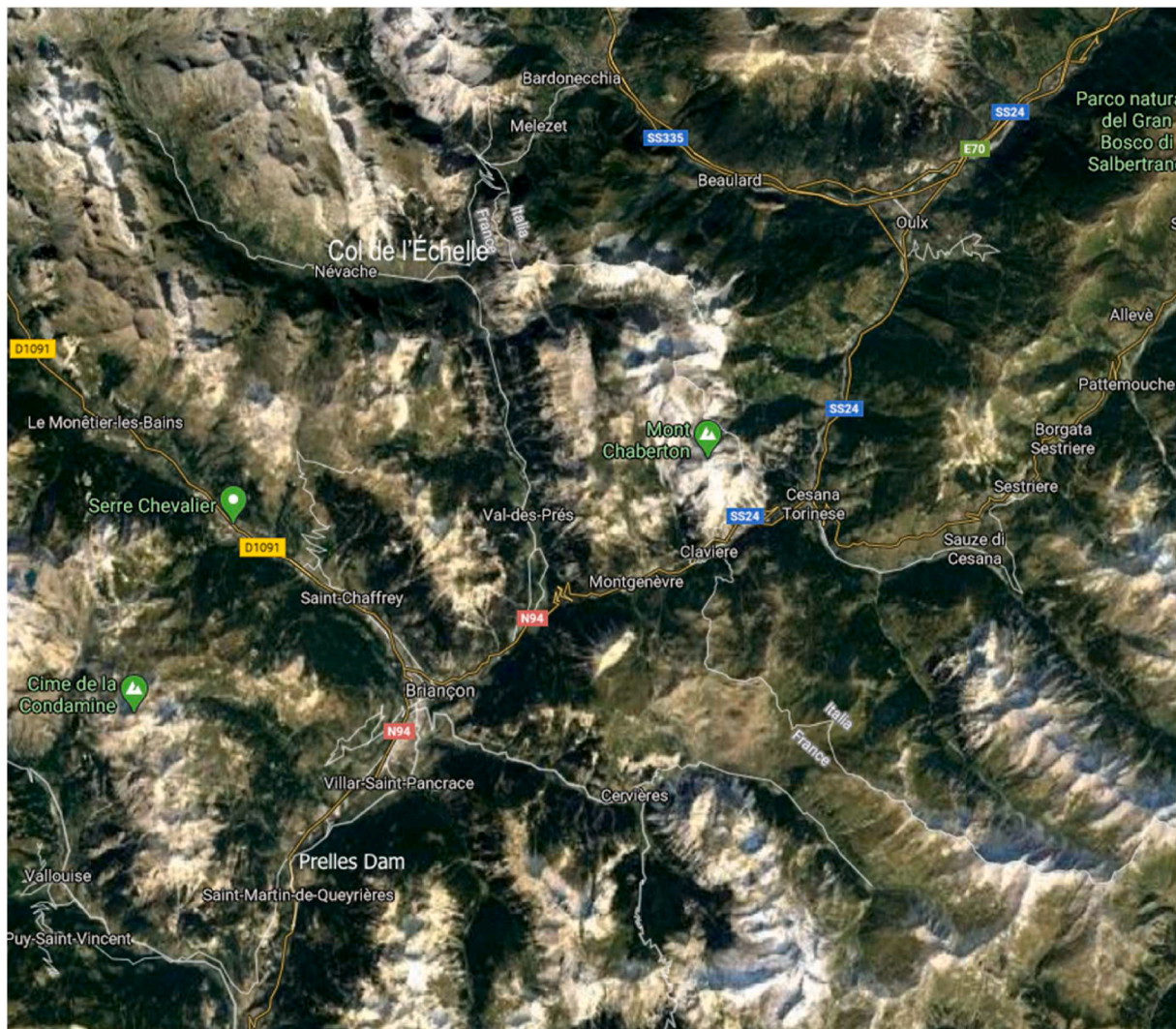

Fig. 1. Map of the Susa valley/Hautes-Alpes.

as Nigel Clark notes an emphasis on vitality alone suggests that matter only matters when it is lively matter rather than when it appears to be benign (Clark, 2011). The work done by both lively and apparently benign matter are important for my discussion here, as both, I show, are constitutive of particular forms of illegalised migrant (im)mobility, life and/or death, and processes of racialisation producing what I call a whitescape. Here more-than-human entanglements are generative of bodies-in-and-out-of-place that (re)racializes and affects illegalised migrants' (im)mobility and safety and (re)produces the borderscape as a white space (Anderson, 2015) or whitescape. Through crafting the portmanteau concept of a whitescape I play with the centrality of snow in the political ecology of this borderscape. But more than this I high-light how the Alpine landscape in conjunction with policing efforts plays a role in exclusionary white supremacist borderwork where whiteness has an assumed mastery over space and time (Du Bois, 1920), is syn-onymous with human (Wynter, 2003) and thus assumed to be the immutable norm while Blackness is the aberrant out-of-place 'other' (Wekker, 2016).

In showing how nature and landscape come to matter in the (re) racialisation of migrants and the patterning of mobility in the border space I am informed by feminist political ecology approaches to different ways of knowing (Sultana, 2020). I draw specifically on the work of Juanita Sundberg on posthumanist political ecologies in US border enforcement (2011). However, in drawing on Sundberg, I focus not only on how ecologies are utilised by, and impact on border enforcement, but also on how they foster migrant (im)mobility and the important role of Alpine transport and tourist infrastructures, alongside the 'natural' in that (im)mobility. Furthermore, staying with Sundberg's (2014) decolonial critique of posthumanism, I remain attentive to both the potentials of posthumanist relational ontology and the potential reproduction of Eurocentric binaries of nature/culture or nature/human that are a common thread within some posthumanist work (see Bennett, 2010; Braun & Whatmore, 2010; Stengers, 2010). I pay particular attention to critiques to posthumanism offered by Black feminist and decolonial work (Anderson, 2007; King, 2019; McKittrick, 2006; Moore, Kosek & Pandian, 2003; Shilliam, 2015; Smith, 1999; Todd, 2016; Weheliye, 2014). This means I interrogate the ways such ecology-mobility entanglements are generative of less-than-human, racialised subjects as well as racialised geographies of whiteness, while being keen to avoid what Denise Da Silva (2007) calls "affect-ability", that is Black embodiment overdetermined by nature and exteriority.

In drawing out the work of the more-than-human in Alpine migrant (im)mobility I have chosen to focus attention on altitude-terrain, transport infrastructure, and the Alpine Sports industry. A focus on these illuminates the complex interrelationships between political ecologies, the politics of bordering and the (re)racialisation of migrants as they encounter, endure, and move through this whitescape. First however I discuss how I encountered the space under discussion through the embodied leisure-practices of cycling and hiking, before outlining what a posthumanist political ecology approach conceptually opens up for the study of borderscapes and migrant (im)mobility.

2. Episodes of encounter

Mobile methods have been proliferating in the study of mobility. The 'go-along' interview, 'talking-while-walking', the 'run-along' or 'walking the line' are increasingly used to uncover socio-political human-spatial relations (Mason, 2020; McGahern, 2019; Rijke & Minca, 2018). I build on these methods, in encountering the socio-political more-than-human relations of the Alpine borderscape under discussion here. My encounters with the Susa Valley/Hautes-Alpes have been structured, from the first instance, by the ecologies and infrastructures of the space unrelated to my profes-sional life. Instead, I encountered this borderscape through recreational tourism, more specifically through cycling and hiking. My encounters,

therefore, were not initially structured through a purposeful embodied methodology, but rather by 'accident'.[2] Therefore, it differs from other embodied methodologies that attempt to make visible human-spatial relations as the Alpine borderscape slowly became a matter of concern for my research through recreational and embodied encounters gener-ated through cycling and hiking the terrain.

Following my first encounters with the Susa Valley/Hautes-Alpes borderscape, I questioned whether or not migrants used the route as the intersections of terrain and infrastructure appeared, in my mind at least, to be conducive to irregularised crossings. It was only later, after a number of illegalised migrants were found suffering from hypothermia on the Col de l'Échelle, that it became public knowledge that this bor-derscape was being increasingly used by illegalised migrants to make the journey from Italy to France. My encounters, over a period of six years, have given me an appreciation for the changes, contours, and dynamics of the living environment of the mountains, and an appreciation for the intersections of a number of elements both natural — landscape, flora, weather, altitude — and infrastructural, relating to roads, gradients, tunnels and human settlements that would not have been revealed to me in the slow, intricate, yet always partial ways they were through cycling and hiking. For example, there is no way I could have gained an appreciation for the interrelated effects of altitude, gradient, tree cover, wind exposure, and traffic density without moving through these Alpine passes as both a cyclist and hiker. Echoing Olivia Mason's recent argu-ments about "the relationality between the moving body and the ma-teriality of ground" and their embodied affects (2019: 6), to move through these Alpine spaces as a cyclist or hiker is to encounter the more-than-human in concert with bodily sensations.

I draw particular attention to the recreational element of my embodied methodology because of the important role of Alpine Sports as well as cycling, hiking, and golf (amongst others) and their related tourist industries and infrastructures in the political ecology of the borderscape. Nevertheless, these embodied encounters are highly structured by my class, race, and gender identity as a middle-class, white European woman with non-disabled body and surplus income to spend on Alpine leisure pursuits and the attendant 'kit'. Borrowing from Sara Ahmed I am an unmarked body (2002) in the Alpine borderscape. And so, while such pursuits have given, and continue to give, me an intimate knowledge of the political ecology of the Susa Valley/Hautes-Alpes, I am also acutely aware that my experiences of the space are different from those of illegalised migrants who move through the space differently as marked bodies and thus can only be partial (Bauhardt & Harcourt, 2018). These encounters — including friendly and at times even helpful interactions with policing authorities — are conditioned by my presence as a Lycra/Gore-Tex-clad body-in-place, or more specifically, not-out-of-place. Therefore, these episodes of encounter, while produc-tive of intimate knowledge of the more-than-human and its affects, are also instructive as to *how* bodies encounter and experience spaces along vectors of ableism, class, race, and gender.

3. Borderscapes and posthumanist political ecology

Work on borderscapes has enabled political geographers and critical border studies scholars to focus on the dynamic 'nature' of borders as socio-political practices of differentiation, as 'mobile, perspectival, and relational' and as spaces of resistance and new ways of being (Brambilla,

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[2] The 'accidental' or informal nature of my encounters mean my own per-sonal conversations with migrants and local residents were not conducted with an explicit or articulated research purpose. Therefore, it would be unethical of me to reproduce such stories here even while they shape my argument. Instead, I am using migrant and local resident testimonies reproduced in journalistic sources, by NGOs, and collected by other researchers (see e.g. Bachellerie, 2020; Vergnano, 2020) where the reproduction and use of testimonies has been made clear.

2015; Brambilla and Jones, 2019; Rajaram & Grundy-Warr, 2007; Perera, 2007). However, this work has yet to take seriously the role of the more-than-human as a social actor in the (re)production of borderscapes. Meanwhile posthumanist inspired work on borders has focused on things left behind by migrants (Sundberg, 2008), and activist attempts to give them political meaning (Squire, 2014); the mobility of the dirt of border landscapes (Nyers, 2012); and the particularities of the landscape and wildlife in boundary enforcement (Sundberg, 2011). In the latter, Sundberg brings posthumanist thinking into conversation with political ecology. Both posthumanism and political ecology allow for a consideration of the role of non-humans in socio-political relations. However, when considered together, such an approach helps to move beyond persistent questions in political ecology over *how* non-humans are to be conceptualised (Hobson, 2007). As Kersty Hobson has asked are non-humans "components of an ecological system over which humans struggle to assert control? (Sundberg, 2011, p. 321) or are they "subjects whose ecology, behaviour and welfare are an implicit part of … uneven social and economic outcomes." (Hobson, 2007, p. 255).

Posthumanism facilitates a move beyond the persistent *how* of non-human conceptualisation, advancing a relational ontology that is — broadly speaking — concerned with framing the human and non-human as mutually constituted in and through social relations. Donna Haraway calls this *sociality* whereby socio-political relations are constituted in and through encounters and associations between "ordinary knotted beings" that 'gather up those who respond to them into unpredictable kinds of 'we'." (2008: 5) This relational ontology cuts agency "loose from its traditional human orbit" (Barad, 2003, p. 826) giving agency to the more-than-human. According to Sundberg, a posthumanist political ecology "refuses to treat nonhuman nature as the thing over which humans struggle and instead builds on and enacts a relational approach in which all bodies are participants constituting the world." (2011: 322) Such approaches, as well as *appearing* to move beyond a modernist desire to master nature, are particularly useful for thinking about borderscapes and migrant (im)mobility across and through lively (and deadly) spaces, making room as it does for a consideration of both the "materiality and physicality of bodies while emphasising that their properties and capacities are historically contingent and geographically situated outcomes of association, [and] relations between things." (Sundberg, 2011, p. 322; see also; Whatmore, 2002).

However, a posthumanist political ecology approach to the study of borderscapes is unsettled by the "the ways in which geographical engagements with posthumanism tend to reproduce colonial ways of knowing and being and enacting universalising claims and, consequently, further subordinating other ontologies." (Sundberg, 2014, p. 24) Ruth Panelli has argued that posthumanist geographies reflect Eurocentric scholarship, opening up questions related to "social differences," exposing "uneven powerful meanings" and suggesting that "opening the boundaries previously used to delimit the social and the natural, the human and the non-human, does not dissolve social agendas." (2010: 84) One of the vectors along, through and around which posthumanist approaches (re)produce colonial ways of knowing and social differences is race, or more specifically the construction of race through nature/human binaries. These colonial ways of knowing are productive of race through its association with nature and are linked to "discourses of savagery and barbarism … that often defined normative European humanity in relation to an imagined 'constitutive outside' that located racialised alterity in bodies and landscapes at once, wild, uncultivated, and prehistorical." (Moore, Kosek & Pandian, 2003: 12). Drawing on Sylvia Wynter's work on the overrepresentation of Man in conceptions of the human (2003), Alexander G Weheliye in his Black feminist critique of posthumanism has argued against the 'isomorphic yoking of humanity to the limited possessive individualism of Man, because these discourses presume that we have now entered a stage in human development where all subjects have been granted equal access to western humanity and that this is, indeed, what we all want to overcome.' (2014: 10) Therefore, relationships between the natural

world and human subjects underpin constructions of race through linking modernity to processes of European understandings of cultivation and presuppose a teleological movement from nature to culture through human intervention. Resulting in those societies where such nature-culture processes were not visible or practiced in European ways being declared 'backward' 'savage' and 'pre-modern' (see Coulthard, 2014; King, 2019).

The production of this nature/human or nature/culture binary does not remain limited to earlier enlightenment thinkers, such as Locke, Hume or Kant. As Weheliye (2014) and Sundberg make clear it remains a tension and point of discomfort within much celebrated posthumanist work, by scholars such as Jane Bennett (2010) with concerns about pre-modern magic, that reproduce an "anxious Eurocentric humanist framing of the human as modern, rational autonomous, and nature transcendent" not to be confused with "superstitious animists" (2014: 38). However, as Zoe Todd argues the nature/culture, nature/human binary is not universal and relational ontologies can be found in a range of Indigenous knowledge traditions (2016: 9). For instance, Panelli draws our attention to Māori ontologies that see nature as not existing before society or as a separate entity (2010: 84). Indigenous epistemic traditions, Sundberg argues offer alternative pathways when confronted with the methodological challenges arising from attempts to understand and make visible co-production and relation from within posthumanism without reproducing nature/human binaries (2014: 35). Recognising Indigenous knowledge systems' relational ontologies that do not reproduce categorical splits is a necessary part of the call to decolonise the social sciences. At the same time the spotlight this recognition shines on the co-constitution of race and natural environments, makes visible the racialised and racialising elements of border (im)mobility, that as David Theo Goldberg has argued have been made to disappear (2017: 113). Making visible the racialised and racialising elements of border (im)mobility enables me to articulate the co-constitution of race and natural environments beyond reproducing the nature/culture binary, and to clearly emphasise the *political* in the ecology under discussion. In the following three sections I unpack the effects of altitude-terrain; transport infrastructures; and the Alpine Sports industry before moving on to show how they are productive of what I call a whitescape that works to (re)racialise illegalised migrants by linking them to a pre-modern culture and creating them as less-than-human bodies out-of-place.

4. Altitude-terrain

There are two cols traversing the Alpine borderscape from Italy into France from the Susa Valley (Metropolitan City of Turin), to the Hautes-Alpes department of France,[3] the Col de l'Échelle, or Colle della Scalla in Italian, at 1,762m [see Fig. 3] and the 98m higher Col du Montgenèvre at 1,860m. They lie approximately 12 km from each other as the crow flies, separated by the massif of Mont Chaberton at 3,131m and topped with the ruins of artillery batteries from the two world wars. In the surrounding Metropolitan City of Turin area there are two other cols crossing from Italy into France, to the northwest lies the 2,083m Col du Mont Cenis, a high plateau with a large lake and where, legend has it, Hannibal and his elephants crossed the Alps, while further south is the 2,744m Col Agnel or Colle dell'Agnello, the third highest paved mountain pass in the Alps after the Col de l'Iseran (2,764m) and the Passo dello Stelvio (2,757m). Further south still from the Col Agnel/Colle dell'Agnello is the 1,996m Col de Larche/Colle della Maddalena and further south again lies the 2,350m Col de la Lombarde/Colle della Lombarda. The cols of Mont Cenis, Agnel and Lombarde are all over 2,000m, and along with the Maddalena all are above the tree line, open to the elements, wind, rain, sun, and snow, and all are busy in the summer with tourists in campervans and col-conquering cyclists and in

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[3] The Col du Mont-Cenis is located in the French Savoie department.

Fig. 3. The Col de l'Échelle in Hautes-Alpes 6.4 km from the Italian border, 12 km from Bardonecchia train station, 3.1 km to the bus stop in the Vallée de la Clarée and 20 km from Briançon.

Fig. 4. The Italian-French borderline made visible by changes in road surface on the way from Bardonecchia to the Col de l'Échelle.

the winter with those enjoying the abundance of winter sports the area has to offer. Meanwhile the Col de l'Échelle and the Col du Montgenèvre are lower in comparison, less exposed and below the tree line.

4.1. The Col de l'Échelle

The Col de l'Échelle is located in a long flat(ish) narrow valley flanked with Alpine meadows and trees through which a number of hiking trails lead. At either end of this valley-plateau drop steep escarpments up which paths and roads must climb. Gradients on the roads range between 5 and 14.2%. Six hairpins and two tunnels cut through the rock on the northern side heading from the Italian border and the Pian del Colle [see Figs. 4 and 5]. On the southern side a straight, steep road clings to the mountainside with a precipitous drop and an unprotected edge as the road heads down to the officially protected Vallée de la Clarée famous for the continued use of traditional Alpine farming methods. The mountains on either side of the Col de l'Échelle, Mont Chaberton and Mont Thabor (3,178m) are dotted with hiking trails, including the Grande Traversée des Alpes. At the base of the Col, at either side, lie valleys. One leads to the Italian town of Bardonecchia. The other — the Vallée de la Clarée — leads to Briançon where it is one of the 'five valleys' that meet at the UNESCO heritage site walled city. Both valleys contain fast flowing mountain rivers, that are prone to flooding in heavy rain, while the mountainsides of Chaberton and Thabor regularly give way to landslides bringing soil, mud, rock, and trees down across the valleys and washing away or blocking the road. The road is criss-crossed in multiple places by deep concrete storm drains designed to channel flood water off the mountainside. In the winter snow closes the Col. The road that traverses it, the D1T,[4] is not

Fig. 5. Pian del Colle (literally base of the col) below the Col de l'Échelle, there is a driving range and golf course on the left and the Italian-French border runs along the edge of the trees.

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[4] The T suffix denotes a tourist route that can be closed for periods of time, while the D prefix denotes a departmental (meaning local) road.

busy or large enough to necessitate clearing and ploughing as there are no houses or farms between the Vallée de la Clarée D994G junction to Névache and the border at the Pian del Colle, on the other side of the pass. The location of the border line, not on the pass but at the base of the northeast facing escarpment means the responsibility and the costs would fall solely on the Hautes-Alpes department rather than being split across the border [see Figs. 4 and 5].

The altitude-terrain of the Col de l'Échelle make it at once relatively negotiable *and* treacherous for illegalised migrants walking on foot. It is the lowest paved-road mountain pass into France from Italy, until the Alps meet the Mediterranean at Ventimiglia, another well-known illegalised migrant crossing point. Its relatively low altitude in comparison to other passes makes it 'easier' to negotiate than others. From the nearest transportation points, the bus stop at the Pian del Colle in summer [see Fig. 5] and the train station of Bardonecchia in winter, the climb is between 350 and 395m, the weather can be less severe, the snow less deep, and the presence of evergreen forest along the side of the D1T for most of the way from the Pian del Colle to the D994G junction near Névache makes detection by border authorities harder [see Fig. 1]. The relatively light gradients from the Pian del Colle — an average of 5.4% with a maximum 14.2% for 200m — make the route less demanding. Furthermore, the location of the borderline at the Pian del Colle [see Fig. 5] rather than at the Col itself [see Fig. 3], unlike many other passes from Italy into France means that crossing the border happens at 1,367m in altitude and before the main climb to the Col de l'Échelle begins [see Fig. 5].

The D1T's descent from the Col de l'Échelle to the junction of the D994G is 2.7 km and heads down the Cros de Robion a virtually straight piece of road with a precipitous drop on the left-hand side. Before the Cros de Robion the descent winds through a heavily forested thicket before opening out into the exposed Vallée de la Clarée. The gradients are between 7 and 10% and the road is a narrow single lane with no protective barrier. In the winter navigating this descent down to the junction with the D994G is difficult and treacherous with risks of avalanches, hidden holes in the snow and as the road is not open in the winter there are no snow poles to mark the edge. Migrants talk about the effects of navigating mountain passes such as this, with tales of getting stuck in severe weather, fears of death, complaints of injuries, cases of frostbite leading to lost feet, while in 2018 three people are known to have died crossing the Col de l'Échelle.

Mohammed Traoré from Guinea made this journey in the winter of 2018 describing how as his legs sank deep into the snow, he lost feeling in his feet and worried that he was not going to make it (Camilli, 2018). Traoré made the crossing in daylight, however there are those that choose to cross at night to decrease chances of detection. Alongside this, the presence of tighter border controls in the summer months as well as the Col being a busy route for cyclists and hikers and a popular picnic spot means the crossing is used by migrants more often in the winter, when it is most dangerous but there is less chance of detection by border authorities. "The mountain landscape turns into an ice and snow trap for those who try to cross it … when you walk in temperatures of −15 °C, if your feet get wet, you risk your life" says Piero Gorza, an anthropologist and Piedmont representative of Doctors for Human Rights (MSF, 2021). Meanwhile a volunteer rescuer based in Bardonecchia exclaims: "Looking at a map, it might look like it's only a short distance between Italy and France, but the reality is that braving the mountains at this time of year with no equipment means you'll never make it alive." (Camilli, 2018.)

4.2. Col du Montgenèvre

The Col du Montgenèvre shares many similar features with the Col de l'Échelle but is also characterised by some distinct differences. Like the Col de l'Échelle the pass is below 2,000m and there is thick tree cover in places as a result. The pass is busy. The SS24/N94[5] road — where Derman Tamimou was found — is open all year round, serving the village resorts of Claviere in Italy and Montgenèvre in France, and is the principal trunk route through the Susa Valley and into the Hautes-Alpes. Again, like the Col de l'Échelle the border is not at the Col but located just outside the western edge of Claviere before the border swings sharply east enveloping the village on three sides. Claviere is bordered to the north by a steep escarpment of exposed rock while to the south the terrain falls away to a narrow open valley encompassing a golf course in the summer and the base of ski runs in the winter [see Figs. 6 and 9]. Testimonials collected by Human Rights Watch with migrants who have made the journey via Claviere suggest "they chose this route because they heard that it was less dangerous than other mountain routes" (2019).

From Claviere it is 1.7 km by road to the Col, however on the eastern edge of Montgenèvre is a permanent PAF post performing regular border checks on vehicles. This means that migrants on foot are forced to take one of the hiking trails that run through the valley-plateau and pine forests to the south [see Fig. 6]. It is here that Blessing Matthew is thought to have lost her life. These trails either follow the contours of the mountains down the Durance Valley southwest or climb higher up into the pine forest before dropping down towards Briançon. As the pass offers more trails away from the road and the border checkpoint, unlike the Col de l'Échelle, it is a popular route year-round. The dense forest and multiple trails increase chances of non-detection [see Fig. 7]. However, this has also increased the tactics used by the PAF — with assistance from the French Gendarmerie and military (see Bachellerie, 2020) — to detect illegalised migrants, meaning that as Silvia Gilardi a representative of the NGO Rainbow for Africa says "the path from Claviere is less difficult but it is the easiest one to be intercepted on" (Giuffrida, 2019b).

The mountainside between Montgenèvre and Briançon is now busy with police activity. In the summer, four-wheel drives regularly patrol those trails large enough for vehicles, while gendarmes in full camouflage camp out in the forests overnight and helicopters and drones patrol overhead. In the winter police patrol on snowmobiles. This increased police presence means migrants make the journey most often at night, walking as high as possible and hiding when they see lights in the distance or hear vehicles. "We walked a long way in the mountains to avoid the police" said Eva from Guinea (Human Rights Watch, 2019) while Etienne from Cameroon reported that, "our walk started from Claviere at 9pm along the road that leads to France. We walked until 8am the next morning but kept hiding out of fear from the police capturing us. If they did, they would've sent us back to Italy." (quoted in Dumont, 2018) According to Etienne of the 21 people he left Claviere with only three arrived in Briançon, the rest being intercepted by police (Ibid.).

These hiking trails offer less chance of detection even with the increased police presence. But they are still treacherous even in summer and in the daylight. They are steep in places, with rough ground, loose gravel, and large boulders, and they regularly change and shift during heavy rains. In the winter the snow compounds the danger. Meanwhile, the trees may provide cover from police detection and shade from the sun, but they can also make it hard to navigate the winding paths that often switch back on themselves, obscuring sightlines and views of the Durance Valley and the destination of Briançon marked by its large military fortifications [see Fig. 8]. Despite the altitude in the summer the southwest facing slopes can get extremely hot during the day when the sun is overhead, with temperatures reaching as high as 40 °C in July and August and the altitude means temperatures drop dramatically at night. In addition, the effects of altitude also increase rates of dehydration.

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[5] SS denotes a Strade Statali (State Road) in Italy and N denotes a Route Nationale (National Route) in France.

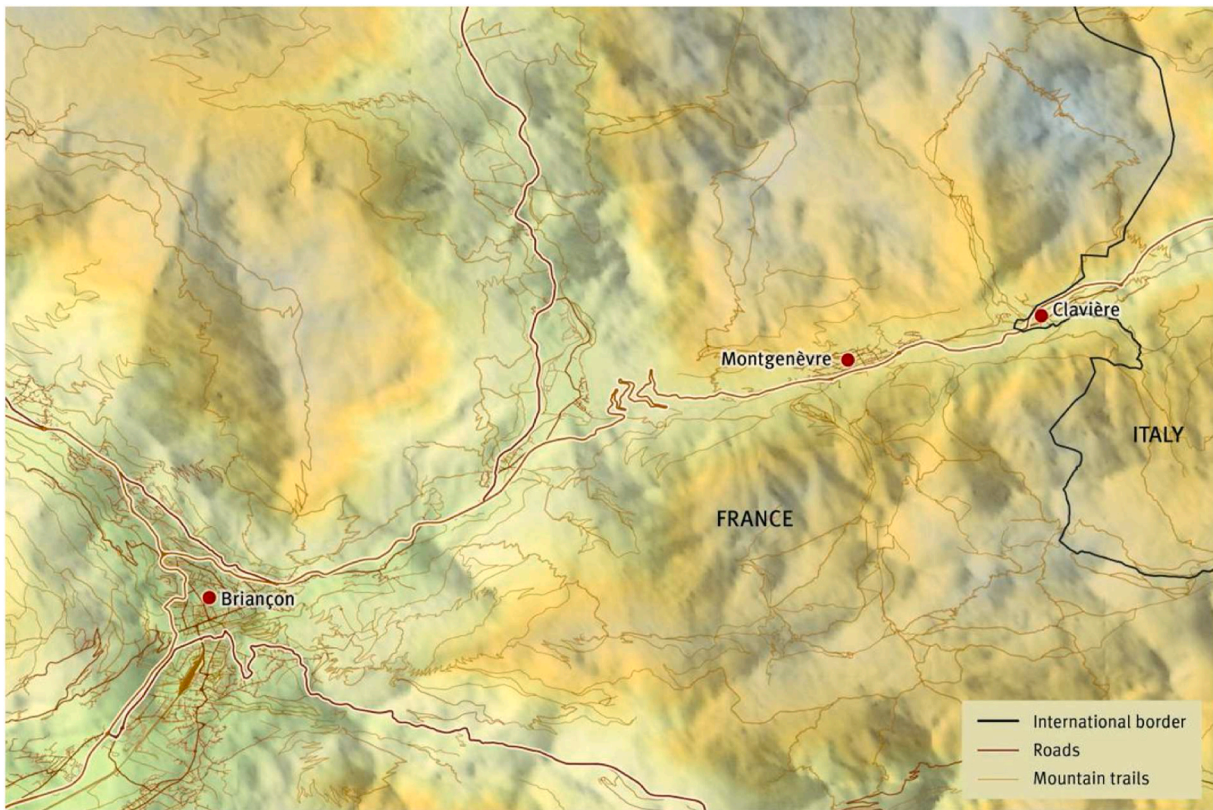**Fig. 6.** A detailed topographical map of the Col du Montgenèvre showing roads, hiking trails and the borderline in black © Human Rights Watch.

Fig. 7. Looking north up the Durance valley from Briançon towards Mount Chaberton and the Col du Montgenèvre located on the right.

Fig. 8. One of the many hiking trails through the forest from Montgenèvre to Briançon with its large military fortifications.

Fig. 9. The D1T road as it climbs from the Pian del Colle to the Col de l'Échelle.

Therefore, altitude and terrain work together to make the Col de l'Échelle and Col du Montgenèvre less treacherous than other mountain passes in the region meaning passage is possible, if still extremely dangerous, in the height of winter and at other times harder to detect by border authorities. However, altitude and terrain alone do not provide a full picture of how illegalised migrants encounter this borderscape. To understand how it is that illegalised migrants come to focus on these passes it is also necessary to understand how altitude and terrain relate to and interact with transport infrastructures and the Alpine Sports industry that sustains this cross-border region. This mountainscape may be rugged, and unforgiving, it is not however, remote or free from the impact of human interventions to conquer space and master nature for the extraction of profit.

5. Transport

Infrastructure projects are material conquests of nature under modernity. Roads, railways, and runways conquer the challenges of space and time, reducing the effects of altitude and terrain [see Fig. 9]. But as Laurent Berlant suggests, infrastructures pattern social life (2016). In the Alpine borderscape transport infrastructures pattern not only the social life of residents but also the journeys of illegalised migrants, bringing them into contact with the effects of altitude-terrain already discussed, making journeys and border crossing on foot significantly more accessible. The Alpine borderscape of the Susa Valley/Hautes-Alpes is a highly infrastructured space as successive generations have sought to make the mountain landscape work for them, whether that be for warfighting as evidenced by the multiple fortifications from the time of Vauban to the Second World War, or for mobility across the natural 'border' created by the Alps, with these infrastructures in turn shaping illegalised migrant journeys.

The Susa Valley is the route to France from Italy's industrial, commercial, and agricultural heartland of the cities of Turin, Milan and the Po Valley, encompassing Bologna, Mantua, Modena, Parma and Verona. As a result, it contains the principal autostrade (motor/freeway)

connecting this heartland to France through the Fréjus Tunnel that passes under the Col du Fréjus, a high, unpaved mountain pass at 2,542m. The Fréjus Tunnel is Europe's fourth longest road tunnel at just under 13 km (8 miles) in length and carries 80% of French-Italian commercial traffic along European route 70 (E70). Alongside the E70 — the SS24 (to Oulx) and SS335 (Oulx to Bardonnechia) — runs the railway line that carries freight, and the Paris-Turin/Milan high-speed TGV through the Fréjus rail tunnel (sometimes also known as the Mont Cenis Tunnel) between Bardonecchia and Modane on the French side. Meanwhile other national, regional and local Trenitalia trains terminate at Bardonecchia lying as it does at the end of the Susa Valley and in the shadow of the Alpine massif.

The road and train connections and their interface with the Fréjus Tunnel are important for providing illegalised migrants with access to the Col de l'Échelle from Bardonecchia and the Col du Montgenèvre from Oulx. But also because the Fréjus Tunnel acts as a barrier for irregular mobility. Even while the Schengen Acquis allows for free movement of people and Article 28 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union allows for the free movement of goods, the cross-border Fréjus Tunnel regulates cross-border mobility for safety and to allow for toll collection. Before entering the tunnel, all vehicles must stop for the collection of toll tariffs, to check the electronic payment tags of commercial vehicles, and for vehicle roadworthiness checks. Passage through the tunnel is monitored and tightly controlled with only so many vehicles allowed in the tunnel at any one time. The four lanes (two in each direction) of the E70 is reduced to two lanes through the tunnel meaning attempts are made to prevent breakdowns, to avoid delays and hard to access vehicles. In addition, fire safety is of paramount importance and all freight traffic, and some other vehicles are screened for high temperatures using thermal gates.[6] The combination of toll collection and thermal gates mean the Fréjus Tunnel is difficult to navigate as an irregular migrant. Additional checks by border authorities are regularly carried out on vehicles with multiple occupants such as coaches, or on those carrying non-white passengers, while the thermal gates detect anomalous heat sources in vehicles meaning irregular passage for illegalised migrants is difficult. In addition, border police checks are carried out regularly on trains passing through the Fréjus rail tunnel, meaning the train line does not offer an easy alternative route.

As difficult as the Fréjus Tunnel link between Italy and France is for illegalised migrants, the transport infrastructure around it shapes their trans-Alpine journeys. The train station at Bardonecchia is a jumping off point for the Col de l'Échelle, either on foot or via the bus service that runs to the village of Melezet and the Pian del Colle. The train station at Oulx (1,100m) provides access to the Col du Montgenèvre via the SS24 to Cesana Torinese — and Sestriere (via the SP23R and SP215) — and on to Claviere with regular bus services that run all year in order to serve the Alpine Sports industry. The roads themselves are built so as to mitigate the gradients using hairpins and the dynamics of the terrain, while tunnels also cut traversable paths for vehicles through the mountainscape. The D1T road over the Col de l'Échelle makes use of six hairpins, small tunnels and balcony sections to reduce the steep gradients and exposed rock faces of the escarpment [see Figs. 5 and 9] before it reaches the high valley where the Col is located. Meanwhile on the climb from Cesana Torinese at 1,354m to Claviere at 1,760m faced with what appears like a wall of dense forest and exposed rock cut with deep ravines, the SS24 climbs for 6.1 km through a number of hairpins, tunnels, and over bridges [see Fig. 10]. It is an impressive feat of engineering that has been slowly upgraded over time as can be seen from the presence of the old cut and cover tunnels cut into the side of the

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[6] These safety measures were introduced following the Mont Blanc tunnel fire of 1999 in which 39 people died after a lorry carrying margarine and flour caught fire inside. Despite these measures in 2005 a fire in the Fréjus Tunnel killed two Slovak lorry drivers and there have been a number of other non-fatal fires.
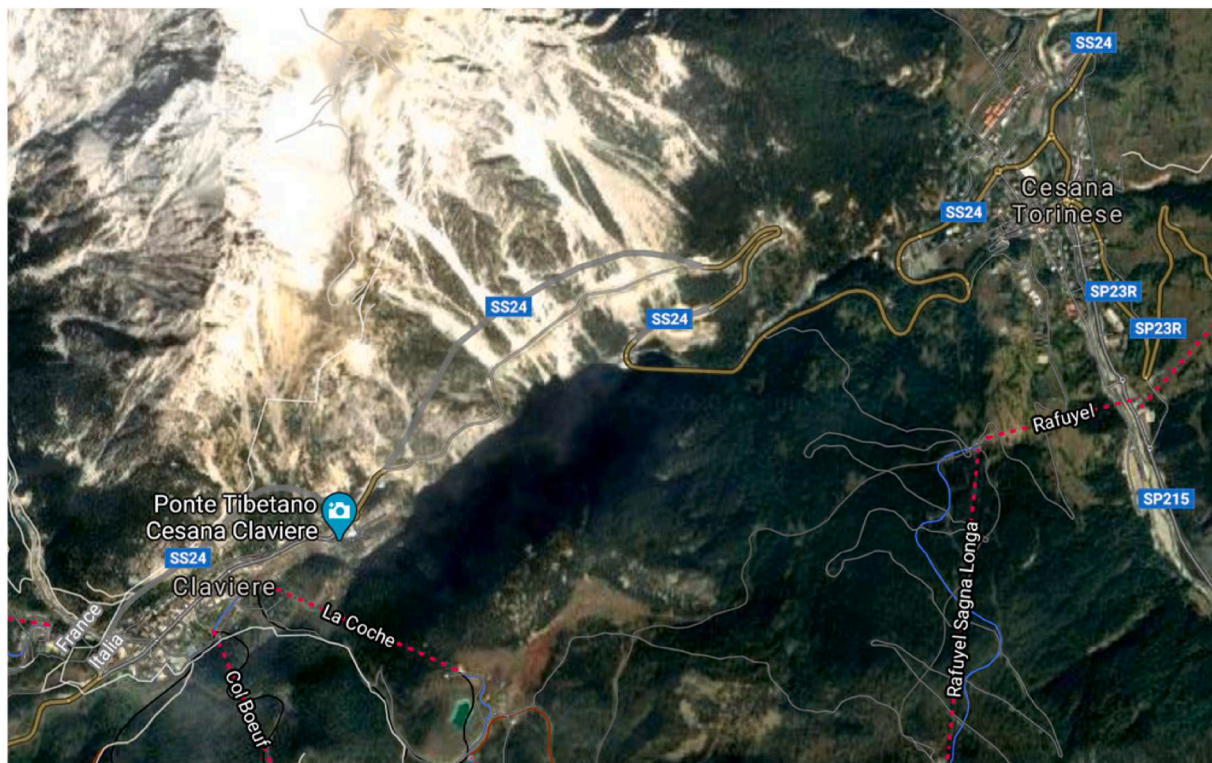
Fig. 10. The road from Cesana Torinese to Claviere includes three tunnels marked on this map in grey.

mountain rather than through the rock like the newer tunnels.[7] This engineering means that Claviere can be served by public transport, with a regular half hourly bus service running the 16 km from Oulx that takes between 30 and 40 min. Meanwhile there is a cross border bus that runs five times a day from Oulx to Briançon over the Col du Montgenèvre that also stops in Claviere. However, this cross-border bus has to pass through, and the passengers consequently checked at, the PAF border checkpoint at Montgenèvre and so is less accessible for illegalised migrants.

These transport infrastructures in collaboration with border architectures and police activity pattern the journeys of illegalised migrants through the trans-Alpine borderscape. Roads, railways, trains, tunnels, and buses make access to the region possible but also condition that access, denying access to the mobility afforded to those who pass as white, and limiting mobility to specific routes. These specific routes simultaneously make the most of the engineering that has enabled the conquering of Alpine space, while making it necessary for migrants to walk and make use of hiking trails. In turn, just as the transport infrastructures of the mountainscape cannot be understood without the influence of atlitude-terrain, the transport infrastructures, including hiking trails cannot be understood without a concomitant appreciation for and an investigation of the Alpine Sports industry that shapes the region's political ecology.

6. Alpine sports

The Susa Valley/Hautes-Alpes is dominated by Alpine Sports. 'Unproductive' nature has been conquered for the extraction of profit through the leisure pursuits of not only skiing (and snowboarding) but,

cycling, mountain biking, white water rafting, hiking and the distinctly un-Alpine golf. Golf courses in the high mountains not only appear out-of-place but are a stark testament to the extraction of every last drop of surplus value from the landscape that is otherwise only thought able to provide for the limited farming of cows, goats, and sheep, as well as evidence of the impact of climatic seasons on the uses of the landscape. Golf courses are to be found both at the Pian del Colle and between Claviere and Montgenèvre, where in both instances the base confluence of ski-runs in winter are made productive when the snow melts in summer through landscaping, and the building of bunkers and artificial water features [see Figs. 5 and 11].

Snow as Mohammed Traoré's experiences show (Camilli, 2018) is a hazard for illegalised migrants and a limiter of agricultural production. But when combined with the altitude-terrain of the Susa Valley/Hautes-Alpes borderscape, snow becomes a highly profitable commodity that shapes the region in profound ways. It is hard to overstate the impact of Alpine Sports on the borderscape in question. Everything from the high-quality transport infrastructure aimed at conquering the limits of the mountainous environment and opening it up for leisure pursuits, to the (cross-border) public transport system, to the presence of France's largest orthopaedic unit in Briançon in a hospital that is far larger than the permanent population could sustain, to state-of-the-art mountain rescue services and equipment, including police helicopters and drones, is shaped by the relationship between snow, terrain, altitude, gradients and some wood strapped to a pair of feet. The Alpine Sports industry has utterly transformed the ecology of the Susa Valley/Hautes-Alpes and made it what it is today in conjunction with the presence of snow and the complimentary effects of high-altitude mountainous terrain and gradients.

The transport infrastructures of the Susa Valley open up the space, and the ski resorts for the residents of Turin and Milan and with their international airports to those from much further afield. The roads such as the E70 and SS24 make the Italian resorts of Melezet, Bardonecchia, Sestriere, Cesana Torinese and Claviere accessible. The resort of Sestriere at +2,000m holds regular World Cup events and the Susa Valley

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[7] Due to the length of the new tunnels, the need for headlights, and the poor air quality, cyclists are required to use the old cut and cover tunnels, which have windows (visible on Google Streetview, if you are so inclined) letting in natural light and air when ascending and descending.
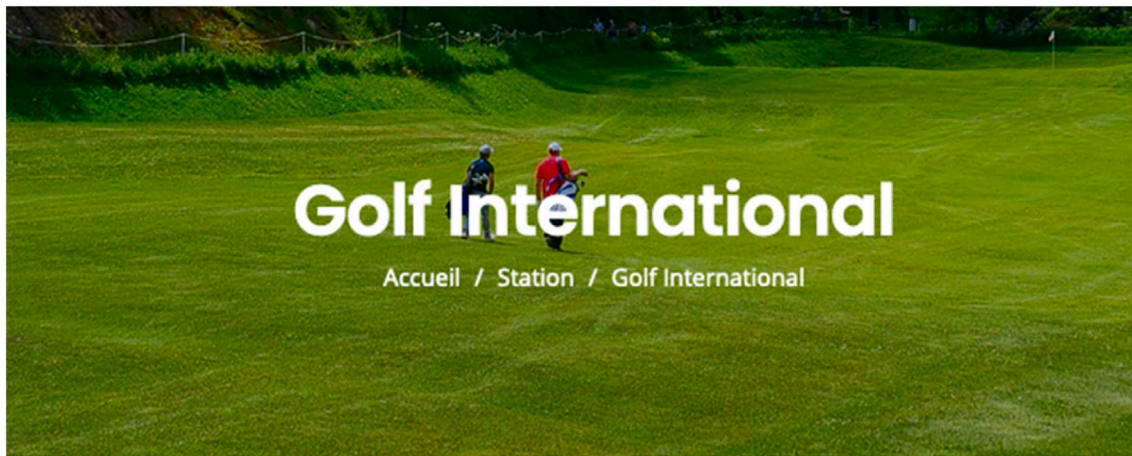
Fig. 11. Montgenèvre golf at https://montgenevre.com/.

resorts held the 2006 Turin Winter Olympics downhill events (skiing, bobsleigh, skeleton, luge etc). Indeed Mohammed Traoré mingled with tourists 'carrying skis headed for the ski lift' as he and his group walked past the Olympic village on their way to the Pian del Colle (Camilli, 2018). Meanwhile there are a number of resorts on the French side of the border. Montgenèvre ViaLattea is a cross-border resort and the fifth largest ski domain in the world. The city of Briançon itself provides access to a number of pistes and is accessible by road and train including France's last remaining sleeper service from Paris. Meanwhile from Briançon the Serre Chevalier cluster of resorts run northwest up the Guisane valley towards the Col du Lautaret and Grenoble beyond. In other parts of the borderscape, the relatively flat gradients of valleys such as the Vallée de la Clarée at the base of the Col de l'Échelle make the most of the terrain and the snow through providing Nordic skiing in the winter — Traoré and his group briefly considered following these well-worn Nordic skiing tracks after they made it over the pass (Camilli, 2018) — and whitewater rafting in the spring making the most of La Clarée's tumultuous snowmelt waters. In addition this centrality of the ski industry to the border region is made visible cartographically, with runs and lifts — like roads and paths — marked on maps.

However, skiing, reliant as it is on snow, is seasonal, possible for only four to five months of the year, with that time period shrinking in the face of climate change (even if the high altitudes of the resorts in the Susa Valley/Hautes-Alpes mean the industry is less effected than elsewhere in the Alps). The reliance on snow is mitigated through using the mountainous terrain, its fresh air, warm and sunny summer climate, and abundance of natural beauty for summer sports, and leisure pursuits, such as the aforementioned whitewater rafting, hiking, and, yes, golf. Alongside this the terrain is utilised for both road cycling and mountain biking. The Giro d'Italia regularly passes through the Susa Valley and makes use of the numerous climbs in the area, while Briançon and the resorts of the Serre Chevalier are popular stops for the Tour de France, with the 2,360m Col d'Izoard, the 2,413m Col du Granon, and the 2,642m Col du Galibier located nearby [see Fig. 12]. The Italian resort of Sestriere markets itself as a summer training base for professional cyclists which in turn attracts amateurs to make use of the abundant accommodation facilities and the ability to live and train above 2,000m at high altitude. The UNESCO World Heritage city of Briançon now promotes itself as a gateway for cycling the 'big mountains.' Meanwhile Montgenèvre, as well as transforming the base confluence of its ski runs into a golf course in the summer months hosts a mountain bike centre self-promoted as one of the best in the region, turning its terrain, snowless ski runs, and ski lifts into facilities for downhill mountain biking, hosting national and international championships as well as amateur riders from across the world [see Fig. 13]. All of these cycling activities are supported by the abundance of accommodation linked to
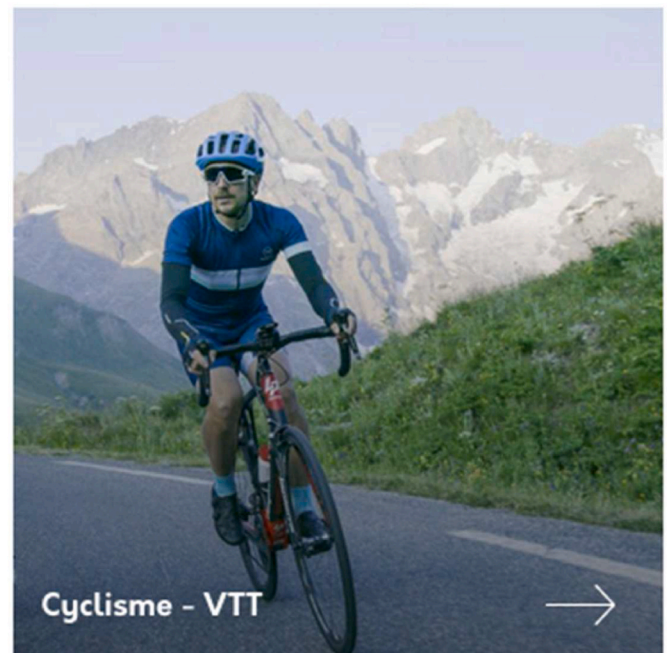

Fig. 12. Cycling on the Col du Galibier promoted via the Serre Chevalier tourist office at https://www.serre-chevalier.com/fr/activites.

the ski industry, that has turned small mountain settlements into year-round tourist resorts with highly transient populations and small numbers of permanent residents.

The borderscape, its landscape and infrastructure are shaped therefore by Alpine Sports that in turn shape the communities of people both resident and transient in the space. The presence of Alpine Sports shapes the uses of the space, making the borderscape an intensely 'busy' space, full of human life and activity and more-than-human infrastructures where the landscape is put-to-work generating in turn particular communities of people-in-place. These communities are classed and abled, in that they require monetary resources as well as certain physical capabilities to make use of the landscape as it has been produced over time as an Alpine Sport tourist destination. These communities of people in place are also (re)racialised through linking being-in-place to particular leisure pursuits allied to a modernist overcoming of nature's limits or its taming and operationalisation in capitalist extraction, suggesting there is a 'correct' way to be in the borderscape. It is to the borderscape as a whitescape that I now turn my attention.

Fig. 13. Summer activities and facilities available at in Montgenèvre at https://montgenevre.com/.

7. Whitescapes

In describing the Alpine borderscape and its political ecology as a whitescape I make two moves. With the first move I argue that the more-than-human entanglements unpacked above are generative of bodies-in-and-out-of-place, (re)racialising illegalised migrants, shaping their journeys and affecting their safety. With the second move I focus on how the production of bodies-out-of-place in the borderscape (re)produces a white space or whitescape. The two moves are not to be read as sequential but as co-constitutive and coterminous processes.[8]

Turning to the first move, Elijah Anderson has conceptualised 'white spaces' suggesting their most "visible and distinctive feature is their overwhelming presence of white people and the absence of black people" (2014: 13) and where "the anonymous black person's status is uncertain" (14). Stephen Nathan Haymes meanwhile discusses white spaces as the products of mastery masquerading as universality (Haymes, 2018, p. 43). Alongside this Bruce Braun discusses the production of whiteness through its association with extreme sport, adventure travel and risk culture and its intersections with nature (2003). Here Du Bois' (1920) ideas about whiteness as mastery intersect with specific practices and ecologies that work to signify people's relationships to nature, the racial politics of risk, and socio-economic status.

I want to focus particularly on the racial politics of risk. More specifically the different meanings and possibilities related to risk that are available, denied or attached to racialised bodies and the subsequent racialising work such understandings of risk generate. In the Alpine borderscape white bodies engage in a range of activities that are normalised in the landscape and in many instances glorify risk or particular racialised class positions. These activities utilising the landscape such as skiing and hiking bring white bodies closer to the landscape and naturalise their presence in the space [see Fig. 14]. As Sarah Bachellerie describes her observations of Montgenèvre, "people who had the stereotypical attitudes of "tourists" (moving around in the middle of the day, in the middle of the village, having a drink out in the open, wearing sportswear, hiking boots, a ski suit, skis or snowboard) were not stopped by the police" (2020: 6). Meanwhile the denial of access to cross-border transport infrastructures, or Alpine sports that naturalise bodies in the landscape, places illegalised migrants closer to the natural landscape as they attempt to move through the borderscape. These different relationships to the ecology of the borderscape produce white bodies as risk takers and black bodies as both *a* risk as illegalised migrants, and *at* risk through being denied access to the abundant transport infrastructures that have 'conquered' the altitude-terrain of the

mountains.

As Katherine McKittrick has argued "social practices create landscapes and contribute to how we organise, build, and imagine our surroundings." (2006: xiv). The social practices of Alpine Sports and the work of overcoming altitude and terrain through transport infrastructures have organised and built the Alpine political ecology around imaginaries and materialities of risk taking that centre whiteness and leave little space for alternative ways of inhabiting and moving through this borderscape. With the result that Black and brown bodies of illegalised migrants are out-of-place in the more-than-human entanglements that (re)produce the border as a space where white bodies-in-place can move ski, hike, cycle and move with little socio-political hindrance. Therefore, more-than-human entanglements enact a form of racialised borderwork that privileges white mobility through, and presence in, the borderscape.

Meanwhile these more-than-human entanglements also open possibilities for resistance and contestation in the borderscape, where more favourable altitude-terrain, and the presence of transport infrastructures and the political economy of Alpine Sports make the borderscape more accessible, meaning illegalised migrants can attempt border crossing and shape the border as a site of contestation and resistance to racialised (im)mobility regimes. These alternative routes taken by illegalised migrants are generative of counter-lines challenging those of demarcation, separation and exclusion (Ingold, 2007). However, this contestation and resistance further marks illegalised migrants as bodies out-of-place, as they encounter and move through the borderscape in alternate, and more hazardous ways. Or as Bachellerie makes clear, as bodies-out-place traversing alter-routes, illegalised migrants become 'hunted humans' exposed to particular racialised forms of violence (2020: 3).

Move two is concerned with how bodies-out-of-place and the more-than-human entanglements involved in their constitution (re)produce the whitescape, creating a racialised spatial hierarchy. Olivia Mason has recently written about how walking bodies make and contest territory and the political conditions under which this walking takes place. These include the ways walking has been understood as a territorial nationalist project in post-war Europe, deepening attachments to the nation and erasing non-white bodies from such attachments and territorialisation (2021). In thinking about the making of territory, or more specifically a whitescape, the actions of the fascist pan-European group Generation Identity are instructive. Generation Identity is a proponent of the racist 'great replacement' idea that claims white Europeans are under threat of becoming a minority in European space. In April 2018 around 100 members of the pan-European group staged an action named "Defend Europe" on the Vallée de la Clarée side of the Col de l'Échelle unveiling a banner on the snow-covered mountainside that read: "Closed Border: No Way" while setting up a plastic border fence in the snow and hiring two helicopters to fly over the area all with the aim of preventing migrants

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[8] I am cognisant of the ways in which discussions of Black and brown racialised bodies in relation to nature is itself a racialising move.

Fig. 14. Montgenèvre promotes its winter Alpine Sport options at https://montgenevre.com/.

from crossing into France. These actions of Generation Identity explicitly claim this borderscape as a white space under threat from the presence of non-white migrants who traverse the territory. In contrast to the explicit actions of Generation Identity and their racist claims to white mastery over the border space, illegalised migrants encounter the borderscape differently. Bachellerie's research on the racialised border policing at Montgenèvre argues that what she terms 'light-skinned' migrants who play the role of 'tourist' often manage to escape interception by the PAF, while Black Africans who deploy the same strategy do not escape interception and as phenotypically racialised bodies-out-of-place are subject to what some migrants call "black hunts." (2020: 6).

The intimate, embodied and illicit journeys illegalised migrants make utilise more-than-human entanglements the proximity to which marks them as out-of-place. Meanwhile their treatment by the border police (re)produces the space as differentiated along racial hierarchies, wherein distinct spaces and political ecologies emerge within a singular border space. Here the more-than-human-entanglements described above coalesce to pattern migrant (im)mobility, placing them close to nature, and outside of the licit (and explicit) activities and repertoires through which white bodies inhabit and move through the borderscape subsequently placing them in the PAF's crosshairs. This racial ordering of bodies in place, results in understandings and imaginations of the Alpine space as one in which white bodies belong and Black and brown bodies are illegalised or illicit, with the result that the space is encountered, experienced and (re)produced through a hierarchy of whiteness and the borderscape is (re)constituted as a whitescape.

8. Conclusion

Racial hierarchies and differential mobility experiences in border processes are not unique to this Alpine context but can be found across a range of border sites and spaces from airports (Browne, 2015; Kamaloni, 2016), land crossings, and seascapes (see Danewid, 2017). However, what a focus on the Alpine borderscape makes visible is a consideration of how the political ecology of the border space plays an active role in the construction of racialised bodies, spaces and differential encounters with space. Alongside this a focus on the relationship between political ecology and (im)mobility politicises the landscape and its uses and makes the case for a greater consideration of the 'natural' world in critical border studies. It is vitally necessary for critical border studies to think not only about how (im)mobile bodies encounter different spatialities but also the role of more-than-human actors in the creation of those different and in turn racialising spatialities. While it has long been acknowledged that borders are multiple and encountered in multiple ways, what constitutes the border as a political space and what is

capable of undertaking borderwork — purposefully or not — has been concentrated on human and more recently technological actors.

To address this, I have employed a relational ontology to attend to the many more-than-human actors patterning illegalised migrant (im)mobility and their work in (re)producing racialised bodies and border spaces. Employing an embodied methodology of (accidental) encounter resulting in an intimate, yet only ever partial knowledge of the Alpine border space has enabled me to unpack three relational elements: altitude-terrain, transport infrastructures, and Alpine Sports and their effects on migrant experiences of, encounter with, and (im)mobility through the border space. With this de-scription I argue for taking more-than-human entanglements seriously in the (re)production of borders and bring work on posthumanist political ecology into conversation with work on borderscapes and critical border studies more broadly. The article therefore asks that future research on (im)mobility and bordering considers the political ecologies and material context in which mobility occurs, for what they make possible but also what they bring into being.

Furthermore, in attending to altitude-terrain, transport and Alpine Sports, I have made visible the ongoing production of race at and by the border as a dynamic process related to (im)mobility and its intersection with political ecologies, alongside the border's simultaneous production as a racialised space. This production of what I term a whitescape with its racial hierarchisation of space and differential mobility, moreover, highlights how the landscape and its attendant features are made to matter politically in a (global) network of racialised mobility injustice. As such the article calls for a more serious discussion of the dynamics of race in border studies and bordering practices and their intersections with racialised and thus *political* ecologies.

Declaration of competing interest

None.

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