

2. The Cell Phone as a Co-Traveller: Refugees and the Multi-Functions of Cell Phones

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ABSTRACT Modern cell phones may contribute to both increased integration and transnational literacy. While much research is still about the cell phone usage of settled migrants / refugees, this chapter represents a new trend focusing on people *en route* to an increasingly unwelcoming Europe. In a situation of permanent precarity, the modern smartphone (and its predecessors, with fewer apps and finesses) becomes a friend when facing dangers, and offers a multitude of functions including maintaining family relations, accessing information about the prospective new homeland, and catering to existential needs of the people underway. This chapter presents a study of how 18 refugees from the Middle East and Afghanistan apply cell phone technology on their way to Europe. The study is based on in-depth interviews while the refugees were still in asylum centres, and reveals how the cell phone caters to existential needs of refugees underway, and contributes to their transnational literacy.

KEYWORDS: cell phones | refugees | flight routes | integration | transnational literacy

2.1 PRECARIOUS TRAVELLING

Under safe circumstances, the cell [mobile] phone may be a pragmatic tool for communication, news consumption and entertainment, or it may increasingly contribute to a commercially driven existence in which the most recent model represents high status. In some cases, it turns into a ‘part of the body’ from which the user cannot easily separate; thus, dependency is established, and the owner may feel at great loss when separated from it.

Under extreme conditions, the cell phone takes on other functions. This chapter presents a study of how refugees from the Middle East and Afghanistan apply cell phones on their way to Europe, in some cases also after their arrival as asylum seekers in Norway.

In recent years, some studies on refugees' and migrants' usage of cell phones when travelling to presumed safety have been presented (Gillespie et al. 2018; Kaufmann 2016a and b; Zijlstra & van Liempt 2017), while media researchers earlier focused more on how migrant workers and refugees utilize their cell phones in their new homelands. The latter studies reveal how important it is to stay in contact with the country and family they left behind (Harney 2013; Fresnosa-Flot 2009; Madianou 2009; Murphy & Pirebe 2011; Sreenivasan et al. 2017; Wall et al., 2015). We still need more knowledge on how cell phones, from the smartest to the simpler models, work for people who find themselves constantly in precarious situations.

Movement is characteristic of globalization in the new millennium (Eriksen 2007, 2016). However, movement in search of asylum works differently, since a main aspect of such migration is border control. 'The national borders of rich countries are increasingly becoming militarized' (Eriksen 2007: 95). A journey from Istanbul to Northern Europe takes a few hours for a person with the right passport and visa, while a refugee may have to spend 15–20 days on the same journey. From Afghanistan, Iraq or Syria it requires more days. A one-way ticket for a tourist costs at most a couple of thousand NOK (200 Euro), while people who move at the mercy of human smugglers, will have to pay at least ten times as much.¹ In addition, they move at great risk. According to Bauman, refugees 'find themselves in a cross-fire; more exactly, in a double bind' (2007: 45). They do not 'change places: they lose their place on earth and are catapulted into a nowhere' (2007: 46). This entails that they oftentimes carry traumas from the country left behind, and simultaneously dreams about the country they hope to reach.

For many migrants and refugees, the existence in limbo, in Bauman's 'nowhere'-land, continues also in Europe, as they may remain unregistered and try to make a living in the informal sector. As Harney (2013) demonstrates, many work as unsolicited street hawkers. When the police approach their 'areas' they tell each other via cell phones. This has become routine on the streets of Naples. Nevertheless, the phone also remains a means of contact to friends and relatives, which among others eases their existential uncertainty (ibid.).

Right from the start when flight is planned – although sometimes a rapidly changing war situation does not leave much time for planning – the cell phone plays an important role. Those who can afford it, purchase advanced phones and download a number of applications to be able to communicate and find informa-

1. Prices vary, from 'luxury boat travel' to the more precarious rubber boat passages, but one refugee can expect to pay 900 Euro just for the short distance between Turkey and Greece (Eide et al. 2017).

tion on a variety of platforms. Others will have to make do with simpler devices, which serves the most necessary purposes of calls and text messages. In-between there is a group of people who have purchased pirate copies of smart phones, since such versions are available in many countries.²

Gillespie et al. (2018:2) ask how empirical research on smartphone use by refugees can contribute to 'wider understandings of social media as used by vulnerable mobile and/or homeless groups and, in so doing, shed light on how digital infrastructures emerge and are implicated in complex operations of power, control, and inequality'. This modest piece of research will try to treat some aspects of the above problematic, but only to a limited degree touched upon aspects of power, as in refugees' dealing with smugglers and border control helped by their mobile devices.

The chapter draws on an explorative study, which aimed at mapping the presumed multitude of ways in which refugees use their cell phones on their road of flight to Europe, and how modern cell phone technology becomes an integral part of the flight. Some people have cast doubt on refugees' right to asylum based on their possession of expensive smart phones,³ thus research into the role played by these devices may contribute to a deeper understanding of how they have become a tool of vital necessity during the many phases of travel.

2.2 INTERVIEWS AT ASYLUM CENTRES

The main research question is a broad-based one: How did the newly-arrived refugees use their cell phones underway to their country of destination? Sub-questions would be on the role played by cell phones in maintaining links to their homeland as well as to what extent the device helped to forge links to their country of destination.

The research is based on interviews with 18 newly arrived refugees at asylum centres during the spring 2016, after the influx of asylum seekers reached a peak during the autumn 2015. A team of three, two with refugee backgrounds, the third one (this writer) with ample experiences from working among refugees.⁴ The

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2. <https://www.fastcompany.com/1758927/chinas-cell-phone-pirates-are-bringing-down-middle-eastern-governments>. Accessed 7 August 2018, also confirmed by our own informants.
 3. Christian Tybring-Gjedde, The Norwegian 'Progress Party', cited by Johan Kaggestad, *Drammens Tidende*, 13.11.2015.
 4. The team: Eide has travelled much in Afghanistan and lived among refugees in Pakistan (one of the countries which have received most refugees) for almost two years. Afshin Ismaeli is a Kurdish refugee of Iranian origin, and Amin Senatorzade is a refugee from Afghanistan. Together the team published the book 'Med mobiltelefon på flukt' (On flight with cell phone) in 2017.

team members among themselves could communicate with the informants in their own languages or other languages spoken by them (Arabic, Dari/Farsi, Kurdish, Pashto, and English/French). The refugees interviewed came from Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria. Some of them were Kurds. In two cases, families were interviewed twice. Six of the interviewees were women, only one of them arriving without a spouse. Their economic status varied, from middle class people to poor young boys with rural backgrounds, the latter from Afghanistan. The differing social statuses could partly be derived from their possessions of digital devices.

As we entered the asylum centres, we experienced that very few refused to speak to us. On the contrary, perhaps due to the idleness experienced during long days of waiting, for an interview, for the scarce activities offered, most seemed eager to speak, and also to share the content of their phones, not least pictures and short videos. In some cases, we found that the potential informant did not have the experiences looked for, since they had originally come from Russia and travelled for a very short time. In a few cases, they had travelled without their own cell phone.

The interviews were conducted based on a questionnaire developed by the team, but were semi-structured and thus opened for follow-ups and improvisation. In some cases, they developed into a wider conversation, since the informants needed to communicate their total experiences, not least since the talk of cell phones may have reminded them of dramatic parts of the flight / the travel itself. In a popularized book from the project (Eide et al. 2017) all except for four informants (all from Syria, having gained asylum) were rendered anonymous. In this chapter, all have been given nicknames. The majority were men (12 out of 18), which reflects the lopsided composition of asylum seekers both in Norway and elsewhere.

The interviews lasted from one to three hours, and the project was registered with the NSD. In this chapter, I use the term *refugee* throughout, since all the 18 informants considered themselves as such and asked for asylum. For the purpose of variety, though, I use *travellers* in some instances. Our purpose was not to judge the foundation on which they based their applications. I also use the noun *cell phone* instead of for example *smart phone*, since the informants were in possession of a variety of devices, from the most modern and expensive I-phones, to the rather simple Nokia varieties that may be purchased in Afghanistan or Iraq for a small amount. Some of the refugees interviewed were (almost) illiterate and thus not able to handle advanced mobile technology. They would still benefit much from their simple phones, not least when contacting friends for advice *en route*, and, as one of them added: the battery lasts so much longer!

2.3 REFUGEE NARRATIVES

In the following, the diversity of cell phone usage under flight registered through the interviews, are grouped according to themes / functions, and towards the end, these functions are discussed in a wider, contextual perspective.

2.3.1 SMUGGLER CONTACTS

Phase one in any flight is the decision to leave. However, the contact with a smuggler is of great importance to many potential refugees. Others, who have travelled before, oftentimes provide such contacts. Many smugglers operate via websites, oftentimes on Facebook, where they answer questions concerning safe passages, for example from Iraq to Turkey, or from Turkey to Greece. On the Internet, colourful ads attract richer segments of refugees with luxury boats, or flights with helicopters or airplanes, but also more moderately priced opportunities (Eide et al. 2017). For good reasons, smugglers fear being traced, thus the Facebook pages are frequently changed and shifted to new locations. On the other hand, accessibility is highly necessary for them. At the street level, ‘applicants’ may reach the ones at the bottom of the smuggler hierarchy – the recruiters – via cell phones or face to face contact, a necessity for those opting to travel by boat from Turkey to Europe.

Some smugglers join their ‘passengers’ en route. One Afghan refugee tells how two smugglers were walking, one in front and one at the back of the group of refugees through large parts of Iran. They communicated with each other about their clients, about dangers and hindrances. ‘Without mobile contact, you might get caught any time’, he says. The smugglers also know that before the refugees have sent messages that they have safely reached the promised destination, they will not receive the full ‘salary’.

Nevertheless, on the relatively short-distance crossing of the ocean between Turkey and Greece, the smugglers mostly leave the refugees to their fate, and usually appoint one man to steer the rubber boat. However, even when left to themselves, the refugees are sometimes able to contact the smuggler by phone if they do not find the way.

Rahim from Syria tells that some of his friends contacted him through cell phone, as he was underway to Europe, as they wanted to know more about the smuggler routes. Were they safe? ‘They were worried, since many died on the way to Europe and many drowned in the ocean’. There were other reasons to worry, too. Several informants told about smugglers mistreating their ‘customers’. *Mahmoud* tells of one such incident where ongoing mishandling was stopped after

he called his father, who had promised to pay the smuggler only when they had reached the destination.

The smugglers mostly depend on such family members for their pay. The transfers take place gradually. Thus, the family at home (or elsewhere) has a kind of advantage over the smuggler via cell phone contact and may use this to prevent mistreatment.

2.3.2 AVOIDING DANGERS, FINDING THE WAY

Mohan told that he used the cell phone to find the smartest way onwards from Greece. He investigated bus and train routes and timings, but also mapped the asylum policies and opportunities in several European countries. Together with people he already knew, and some he met on the way, he created a Facebook group sharing all this information. Included was also information on how to avoid having to give fingerprints in other countries than the final destination.

Sometimes the destination is not that easy to find, since one has to avoid certain borders. Many relied on GPS installed on their smartphones to find a safe route. However, it was not always straightforward. *Irfan* sat with his family on a bus somewhere in Eastern Europe and suddenly felt they were heading in the wrong direction. He consulted *Google Maps*, and found out that they had to leave the bus not to end up at a border police station in a country they did not want to enter.

The informants would avoid risk in a variety of ways: some by regularly checking their location through apps, others by navigating to find safe passages. Many characterize the passage between Turkey and Greece as the most dramatic part of the travel, and cell phone usage was an integral part of this drama. A couple of informants tell how they used GPS to find a safe harbour at one of the Greek islands. Two others told of boats that were about to sink due to poor condition.

On the other hand, if they used their phones *too early* on this journey, they risked being discovered by the Turkish coastal guard and then arrested without having reached the destination. In some rare cases, the smugglers travelled with the refugees and banned all phone usage on board, since the signals could easily reveal their whereabouts to Turkish authorities.

One incident in particular indicates how threats of using the video device helped the passage to Greece. A group of refugees was in a rubber boat as the Turkish coastal guard approached them. Some of them pulled their cell phones out of the plastic wrapping to film the attackers, and *Mohamed* from Syria showed a video of how the coastal guards withdrew when they were confronted with this sponta-

neous action. Another informant, *Ekrām*, said he raised his cell phone to film the German police who approached him to obtain his fingerprints as he passed by.

2.3.3 FEARS, MEMORIES AND LOSSES

Some of the ones we met, but did not interview, had gotten rid of their cell phones before or during the travel, due to fear of surveillance or tracking. Syrian experiences indicate a great deal of surveillance: ‘Online surveillance practices render refugee journeys even more dangerous and precarious, as those cast as “undesirables” strive to remain invisible to powerful gatekeepers’ (Gillespie et al. 2018: 6). As the strictness of the European asylum regime becomes more apparent, this fear is far from baseless. Gillespie et al. also mention how ‘European authorities ask asylum applicants for information about their Facebook profiles’ (ibid.). One informant told that the smugglers asked him to turn off his phone as they travelled, for fear of being traced.

Other refugees (also among the ones interviewed) report having lost their phones underway, some experienced theft, and some were even forced to rid themselves of this possession. *Farid* tells that during their travel by boat from Turkey to Greece, the engine stopped. Waves were high; the boat was gradually filled with water. ‘We were very wet. We carried some luggage, but we had to throw everything overboard. Everybody did that. Thus, our phones also disappeared’. *Farid* and his family saved their lives this way. ‘The most important thing is that we are alive and well. But we miss all the pictures stored in the mobile phone, pictures of the children, and pictures of the family at home’. He eventually found a new phone after entering Greece, though.

2.3.4 LIFELINES

In the pre-cell phone era, people, including all kinds of travellers managed by making appointments of time and place to meet or by sending letters as *poste restante* to the post office in a city. Mobile technology has largely changed this relatively sparse communication. According to Kaufmann (2016a), the refugees experience the flight as an ‘extreme psychological burden’, since they both have to worry about the family in the country left behind (in her research: Syria) and for their own situation and future. One of the most important functions of the cell phone is what she calls ‘doing family’ (ibid.). This activity includes both necessary contact with the homeland to calm down those who worry about the travellers, and a just as necessary contact to facilitate transfer of money as needs occur.

To travel with much cash is not recommendable, and the cell phone facilitates alternatives reducing this risk.

Khazan felt the cell phone to be at its most indispensable at the moment when he and his small family had reached the island of Samos, Greece. ‘When we reached Greece, I called my mother in Iraq and told that we were safe. Then I was very happy to carry the phone’.

Some of the travellers’ family members had already reached the country of destination, and contact with these members is of particular importance to obtain advice concerning the best and safest routes. Not all who are closely related end up in the same place, though. One family was split underway and at the time of the interview lived in two separate countries, which meant that two children lived separately from their parents and two siblings. The parents in Norway emphasize the importance of the cell phone when the children communicate with each other. ‘My son would like to stay with these images all the time’, says the mother, who misses two of her children.

Rahim tells that his wife and some relatives went before him to Turkey. Via phone contact, he found out their whereabouts. ‘We contacted smugglers [...] via WhatsApp, and after some days received a message that we should come to Izmir’. There, they met with the smuggler, who wanted to take them to Greece the very same night. They had only one Turkish SIM-card at their disposal, and before crossing over informed their family in Syria about this. During the crossing, they were afraid. However, the smuggler had assured them that someone in the boat had a GPS and thereby would find the way to the chosen island. As they arrived, *Rahim* had to borrow a phone, since he did not have a Greek SIM card; he felt it urgent to inform those at home about their arrival. During the next weeks, they would shift SIM cards constantly when crossing borders, and *Rahim* purchased a ‘power bank’ to improve their charging facilities.

Shireen told of a tough travel from Afghanistan, not least through Iran. He spent more than two months on the road to Norway. In spite of many negative experiences, he used his cell phone to convey encouraging messages to his family at home. This concern for his relatives’ worries, which may be eased via texting, messaging, or sending images is widespread among the informants. We may presume that they at times include some white lies to diminish family worries in war-torn countries.

The lifelines to home, or to other vital persons, could be undermined by the lack of charging facilities. One Afghan refugee, *Hafsa*, was met by volunteers at a help station for refugees underway and they asked whether she was hungry. She replied that *she* was not hungry, but her cell phone was. This corresponds to Kaufmann’s

research on Syrian refugees, concluding that electricity is more important than food for many travellers. ‘Without food we can continue for a day or two, but without electricity or a smartphone it will be difficult’ (Kaufmann 2016a: 329).

Several informants told of solidarity. Those who were in possession of extra chargers – some had advanced chargers that could feed four cell phones simultaneously – were challenged to share their battery resources and did so. Those who at some stage did not have a cell phone or a functioning SIM card could borrow from co-travellers. An Afghan refugee, *Pervez*, told that for part of the journey he travelled in a group of eleven who all shared the same phone: ‘When we travel like this, we are all like brothers’

2.3.5 MEMORABILIA

‘Selfies on the shore’ seems to be a widespread genre among traveling refugees. The initial arrival to Europe (most of the cases in this research at a Greek island) represents moments of happiness and relief. Many refugees want to take care of these moments. ‘The first thing I did after arriving at Mytilini [at Lesbos] was purchasing a new SIM card,’ *Hafsa* said. ‘Then I could tell my father that I was at the other side of the ocean’. The father was very happy when receiving the pictures of her and another family member in Europe.

Pictures were sent via Facebook or WhatsApp; *Tarek* and his family remember how happy they were that they through cell phone functions would minimize the anguish felt by the family remaining at home. In some cases, such memorabilia from positive events underway are especially important. *Ekrām*, who lost large parts of his family during bombardments in Syria, and travelled only with his young son, showed images and videos from help stations, where volunteers from ICRC and other NGO’s play with the children and make them sing and dance, and perhaps forget.

Such selfies have harvested some negative comments in social media. At times, refugees are represented as privileged (Literat 2017). Gillespie et al. see this representation, at times containing hateful expressions, as ‘a way in which to discipline refugee bodies’ (2017: 23). However, selfies of marginalized people whose most valuable possession is their cell phone, may also be seen as an empowerment of sorts (Rettberg, 2015; Gillespie et al. 2017), signalling new opportunities.

2.3.6 IN THE NEW COUNTRY

Several studies of cell phones and migration focus on the connections kept alive between refugees / migrants and the countries they have left behind. Sometimes these bonds remain particularly intensive, since many at the outset do not plan to stay permanently in their new country. Some are labour migrants; some are asylum seekers with meagre options. Besides, in their new country, they experience face-to-face contact through their neighbourhood, through Norwegian courses and after a while as employees or students.

Some informants have prepared for their country of settlement by spending time getting to know the country by way of linguistic expressions, geography, culture and history. Since the travel includes long days of waiting, or spent on buses or trains, plenty of time is available for these purposes. Thus, the cell phone already underway may be seen as a *tool of integration*, easing the way to a new existence. This is not the same as concluding that cell phones may contribute to more interaction with permanent citizens of the new country. Other factors are at play, such as job opportunities, local communities' ability to integrate newcomers, and the refugees' ability to adapt by way of learning the language and understanding ways of life.

The contrasts between cell phone usage underway and after arrival are at times substantial. *Omar*, a Kurdish refugee from Syria told that during *Nevroz* (New Year in Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, Kurdistan) in the spring 2016, he was invited to celebrate with a community of Kurdish-Norwegians. He proudly pulled out his cell phone and showed a video recording where he sings for a festively clad audience. Such a celebration represents a break in the monotony of the asylum centre.

This joyful moment stands in stark contrast to the consumption via cell phones of news from the former home country. Some informants follow such news, but others, for example *Ekram*, avoids them, as they are too painful and remind him too much of his loss of family members.

Some of the Norwegian experiences may be painful, too. *Yusef* at the same centre worried about a nephew who travelled with him, his wife and their baby. The nephew is a minor and suffers from a chronic disease, and despite Yusef's pleading, was placed in a separate centre far away from them. As asylum seekers' meagre resources did not allow them to visit him. However, they were in daily contact via cell phone applications.

An Iraqi family, mother and two young men, lived in a small one-bedroom apartment, in what is called 'decentralized' asylum centre. A large part of the family is still in Iraq. *Ahmed* came too close to a bomb explosion two years ago, which resulted in the loss of an arm and several wounds. They had one phone to share

and showed several pictures from their tough boat ride to Greece during which they almost drowned. Through WhatsApp and Viber, they informed their family of their whereabouts, including ‘selfies from the shore’. While they wait for the results from their applications, the men fight amicably for the only phone in the house. Through this, they can follow their respective favourite Champions’ League teams. ‘We quarrel too much about the phone’, says mother. ‘The boys want to watch football; I would like to watch TV serials.’

The family had Internet access, but no TV.

2.4 DISCUSSION

A qualitative study commissioned by BBC Media Action (Hannides et al. 2016) interviewed 66 refugees from the same countries as our informants, and asked them about their informational needs. Their responses included borders (open or closed), how the asylum process worked and their options, where to access psychological support and other health services, etc. As these refugees had arrived, their questions were mostly about what would happen to them in the near future. They also mentioned the need for translators, legal advice and not least ‘access to Internet to find information and communicate with our family at home.’ (Hannides et al. 2016: 5). Furthermore, refugees both in Germany and Greece ‘felt that there was no one to hear their voices or believe their stories’ (ibid.: 21). To the extent that this is the case also in Norway, it may explain the eagerness to maintain the contact with the country left behind, and it may also explain our informants’ eagerness to share their stories during our visits, as well as complaints when wi-fi was limited.

2.4.1 EXISTENTIAL FUNCTIONS

It might be fair to speak of two different kinds of modern phone dependency. The one currently discussed in Norwegian media is much about dependency bordering on addiction, as young people spend many hours every day linked to their device. In recent research, young children say they spend more time with their phone than with their immediate family.⁵

5. https://www.bufdir.no/Statistikk_og_analyse/Oppvekst/Fritid/Barn_og_unges_mediebruk/;
<https://www.aftenposten.no/digital/Stadig-flere-yngre-barn-far-mobil-Flere-svarer-at-de-bruker-mer-tid-pa-mobilen-enn-med-familien-11819b.html> Accessed 08.08.2018.

The dependency underway to an increasingly unwelcoming Europe is of a very different, at times lifesaving character. This is also an *existential* function, which may be grouped in three parts. (1) *Educational*. Some of the refugees had stored their documents on their phones, which might give them a better chance at educational institutions or in the labour market. The gradually acquired transnational literacy (see below) from border crossing and having to deal with hitherto unknown experiences, has a strong element of education. (2) *Cultural*. Some informants would download apps to learn the language in the country of destination. A few had stored vast amounts of homeland culture (music and literature) to help their memory and preserve their identity. (3) *Memory / biography*. Most of the informants had saved important visuals, both from their family ‘back home’ and from the precarious journey, which – as is perhaps universal – will be an important part of their biography in a (settled) future.

2.4.2 TRANSNATIONAL LITERACY

As previous research has demonstrated, settled migrants (from refugees to labour migrants and au pair workers) use their cell phones much to remain in contact with their homeland. During flight, this is also the case, and here we can speak of *the calming effect*, as the travellers wish to reduce the worries back home. Yet another element is the ways in which refugees out of necessity improve their *transnational literacy* (Spivak 2006) by learning to cope with a variety of applications and information banks, also improving their language skills as they move along. Thus, the phone plays a central role in what Altheide (2013) calls today’s communication ecology. It helps to organize (the travel, group cohesion), it offers access to information (when there is net access and battery capacity), and it contributes to a kind of structure in chaos.

An important question for further exploration is *when* the ‘old’ lifeline – to the life and the ones left behind – will be weaker than the ‘new’ lifeline to the country of settlement. This belongs to a discussion framed by a larger integration perspective. What the refugees share, is a multitude of cell phone experiences and being from war-torn countries. Among them there is a variety of presumed mental leanings; some lean ‘backwards’, i.e. they yearn for the country left behind and maintain strong relations with their loved ones. Some are more ‘forward-leaning’, wanting to put ugly experiences behind them to build a new future, and thus the phone will be used to familiarize with the new country. Among our informants, several had young children, and for them, this leaning may have to do with securing the psychological health of their offspring.

2.5 CONCLUSION

For refugees and migrants, cell phone technology offers an anchor of sorts to the country and people left behind, and a tool for navigation towards their future country. Many informants characterize their phones as the most important item in their sparse luggage. The modern cell phone offers free-of-charge communication where wi-fi is available, it offers help underway to trace smugglers and co-travellers, as well as people at the final destination who can offer important advice. One of Kaufmann's informants called the phone 'my weapon when travelling'. One of our informants called the phone 'a friend of sorts'. Kaufmann (2016a) has also equalled the cell phone to a multifunctional 'Swiss knife'. It helps people survive, assists them in finding their way and forging new friendships. In situations of destitution, new solutions are sometimes forced. People on flight learn new abilities when the need is there.

Furthermore, the phone is a memory bank containing episodes from the travel as well as images of those back home and at times important documents. It carries competence and hopes for the future, as when travellers use it to gain knowledge of the countries where they hope to find a safe haven.

These hopes are dwindling. Bauman's 'negative globalization' (2007:7), in his words unsafety, injustice and lack of peace, offers no guarantees. The cell phone usage entails a risk of mediated social control and generated fear (Altheide 2013). Most refugees travel from oppressive regimes having experienced persecution and digital surveillance. For some, fear of these threats is so dominant that they rid themselves of this multifunctional co-traveller. However, they do not remain without such an item for a long time. Their dependency, which to some extent equals the one we experience under peaceful conditions, may have more to do with the fact that they are still linked to other worlds than the one to which they wish to adapt.

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