

ON MIGRANTS WITH MIGRANTS: MIGRATIONS 5 YEARS AFTER EUROPE'S MIGRATION »CRISIS«

Abstract. In which ways can we theorise the recent illegalised migrations in Europe? This article considers theoretical novelties in the field of migration studies that have emerged since the mass migration into the European Union seen in 2015. Methodologically, the authors combine critical (discursive) analysis with the testing of certain still relevant theoretical concepts that have yet to be applied in migration studies, based on fieldwork along the Balkan Route over the last 5 years. The analysis has shown that the defining and decisive feature of the recent illegalised migrations, insufficiently considered by migrations scholarship, is the political subjectivity and agency of the migrants. Recognition of such agency makes migration the site of the critique of global inequalities and the site of inclusive social transformation.

Keywords: Migrations; Europe; Political Theory; State; Balkan Migrant Route

Introduction

Throughout 2015, migrations into the European Union were a major focus of the media, politicians and the public, whereas social scientists were still searching for and designing theoretical tools to grasp this migration of such massive scope and dimensions. Migrations are far from a novel research topic, yet the research challenge created by this very recent phenomenon in global migration processes is multi-layered and complex and, above all, is an emergency at the present moment.

This challenge includes the need to establish an objectivising distance from the day-to-day developments in which researchers and theorists have engaged as witnesses, actors and active participants in the sense of »experts« who simply provide arguments that justify contentious political decisions for the public. Simultaneously, it is expected that researchers will not seek

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to objectivise the migration process to the point of forgetting that at its core there are living people, worthy and in need of assistance and empathy. This challenge also risks falling into the trap of dealing with migrants as a simple monolith, stirring up generally black-and-white reactions and responses and then justifying the reduction of people on the move to numbers and statistics, without registering or considering the individuality of the individuals involved. On the opposite end of the spectrum of possible reactions, objectivisation and demonisation have been countered by romanticising and idealising tendencies that have equally concealed the reality of migrations.

In attempts to rise above the perspective of migrants as amorphous Others, researchers have not been helped by the official interventions made along the routes taken by migrants. States did their most to separate migrants from the rest of the population by establishing sanitary refugee corridors, a term that in itself suggests migration is a disease that one needs to be isolated from, so as not to become infected by some nasty virus.

Sanitary corridor is not the only terminological issue arising from the 'migration crisis'. The latter phrase has been useful for establishing a social climate that has viewed the mass migrations as almost uniformly negative, like an economic or political crisis. In the post-socialist countries of Europe, we only encountered the first true crisis of the capitalist production cycle in 2008; by 2015, the term was still recent enough to arouse apprehensive associations. The term »crisis« also suggested that migrations would be a phenomenon limited by time since every crisis first occurs but then ends in this way or another, eventually becoming resolved. In practice, the media and politicians have largely concealed and ignored the fact that migrations have always been and are/will be everywhere; that those seen in 2015 were but an episode within a global social process of a Braudelian *longue durée*. We were all migrants at one time.

Further demonstrating how language shapes reality, the word »migrant« has come to dominate and do away with the more precise distinction between refugees, fugitives, defectors, displaced people, asylum-seekers, posted workers, seasonal workers etc. This variety of terms also implies various reasons for migrating, based on which a hierarchy has been established and maintained concerning the right of migrants to our assistance and hospitality. »Migrant« has turned into an empty vessel into which we may pour and then mix various meanings. Political decision-makers and monitors of media contents have endeavoured to fill this vessel with doubt, which acts to smother the public's sympathy for people on the move who may have needed to renounce their home/homeland overnight to save their very lives or had other pressing and valid reasons to emigrate.

If borders (and thus states) simply did not exist, migrations anywhere and at any time would not be seen as a problem, but merely the natural,

unhindered, free flow of people. States, borders and the concepts of citizenship are therefore, and not migrations per se, the principal issue here. That migrations in themselves are not a problem does not imply they are not associated with any issues; on the contrary, they are far more numerous than the ones briefly described above. Real and urgent issues relating to migrations that have recently also surfaced as research challenges are, for example, the acceptance of systemic violence against people on the move as self-evident in the name of »safety«; the normalisation of otherwise unacceptable cruelty in the case of Others; the paradox between conceiving migrations as a threat to human rights and the human right to migrate; migrants' traumatic homesickness pointing to the irreversible loss of rich local cultures, which host societies' 'integration' efforts only intensify; the selective, declarative openness and yet actual closedness of the EU's borders where everything flows freely except for people; the Balkan states, and especially Bosnia and Herzegovina as a migration filter, a sink hole and a buffer for migrations into Europe – to list just a few examples.

Below, we address the implications for states and the issues and limitations of the state-supported production of scientific knowledge on migration, by analysing theoretical insights pertinent to the Balkan Migration Route together with the aim of demonstrating the spectrum and deficiencies of theorising in migration studies. The research question we aim to answer in this text is how the turbulent events on Balkan Route since 2015 challenged the scholarship on migration and how the insistence on the agency of the migrants epistemologically affects the research on migration route. The text as it is based on, first, a series of academic debates on the topic in 2019 and then combined with extensive ethnographic material¹ gathered after 2015 along the Balkan migrant route on official migration policies, facilities and measures, NGO actions in the field and, primarily, many interviews with migrants themselves that provided them with an opportunity to think about and tell (and, importantly, choose not to tell) their experience. In the introduction, we explain specific challenges to be met by researchers in theory as well as in fieldwork pertaining to migrations, and summarise

¹ *This text is based on ethnographic research conducted by the authors on the Balkan route since 2015. The research took the form of volunteering during the existence of a formalised refugee corridor in 2015–2016 in either in the framework of an official humanitarian NGO or of an autonomous solidarity collective. After the official corridor was closed, the newly established solidarity structures in the Balkan region (in Northern Macedonia, Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia) have become the focus of research. Such participatory research allowed us to witness the suffering and struggle of the people on the move after they had again been forced into clandestine practices. Following the change in direction taken by the route in the early 2018, Bosnia and Herzegovina has become the main site of our research interest and in spring 2019 the ethnographic research that lasted for several months was conducted there. Its focus was the local autonomous solidarity structures, the attitude of public authorities and various sectors of civil society, and the plight of people on the move and their social practices.*

the current situation of the case study presented of the Balkan migrant route. In the core part of the text, fundamental concepts of critical border and migration studies are introduced and discussed, such as competing discourses on (state) power, sovereignty and human rights, and the subjectivity of migrants. Results of empirical research on the Balkan migrant route are outlined with respect to the phenomenon of “assemblages of mobility”. Our conclusions are thus founded on relevant fieldwork and critical examinations of migrations scholarship, which we attempt to broaden by introducing concepts that allow new perspectives on migrations and their scholarship today.

Migrant Agency and Europeanisation along the Balkan Route: Moving from Political to Epistemological

The various challenges and issues in migration studies stemming from the ongoing European ‘migrant crisis’ may be overcome and many researchers have sought to tackle them by not speaking and thinking *about* migrants but *with* them. Despite the obstacles and genuine danger on migrant routes, several academic studies (for example, see Holmes: 2013) have been produced in recent years that are a result of temporary embedment in migrants’ existence. Informed and insightful communication with migrants is possible, despite the linguistic and bureaucratic barriers. Researchers who attempted to empower and subjectivise migrants by inviting them to articulate their self-reflections have had to step outside of the academic confines, but for the good reason of refusing to limit knowledge production exclusively to the modern Western, state-oriented scientific research format.

Although the events of 2015 do not mark the start of a migrant route through the Balkans (Bojadžijev and Mezzadra, 2015), they certainly triggered its notoriety and the beginning of what was initially called a refugee crisis and, more recently, a migration crisis (De Genova, 2017), which has sent seismic waves into the fragile European political construction. The discord in the acting together of European states that was already visible during the recent global financial crisis was further accentuated in 2015, especially the discord between the ‘core’ EU member states and the peripheral post-socialist member states. The somewhat prevailing narrative of those events seemingly contrasted the more welcoming and human rights-oriented approach of the former and the unwelcoming and repressive approach adopted by the latter. German Chancellor Angela Merkel was accused of making a serious error that would destabilise societies across Europe by opening Germany’s borders to asylum-seekers stranded on the route in Budapest. Yet, at the same time, Hungary had built a wall along its border to stop people on the move trying to reach Germany and other

western and northern EU member states and was accused of being repressive and neglecting human rights, the Geneva Convention on Refugees, and international law. Since then, this rift has only grown, creating two political camps with a considerable impact on current European political dynamics: a liberal camp represented by the 'core' EU member states and an illiberal authoritarian camp that includes the Višegrad group countries and various versions of populist right-wing political movements and parties.

While our intention is not to dive deeper into this liberal-illiberal chasm that has emerged following the events on and around the Balkan Route, there is one aspect of it that should be elaborated. In the approaches of both the liberal and illiberal camps, with one claiming to manage migration based on respect for human rights and the other demanding the closure and fortification of the EU's borders, the existence of the migrants' agency is ignored (Kurnik, 2019). While the latter approach appeals to the sovereign prerogatives of states that supposedly have an unlimited right to decide who has access to the national territory, the former approach recognises that such a right is limited by the universal character of human rights and international law. Still, recognition of the plurality of norms that one must comply with does not lead to recognition that the border and migration regime is constantly being negotiated and that migrant subjectivity, i.e. the set of practices, knowledges, behaviours of people on the move, constitutes such a regime (*ibid.*). Both approaches therefore consider people who are crossing borders regardless of their entitlement to do so as simple objects of state policies. However, we argue that people on the move remain political subjects wherever they may find themselves.

In ethnography-based scholarship in particular, one can find accounts of the agency of people who tried and are still trying to reach their destination by traversing migrant routes (Papadopoulus, Stephenson and Tsianos, 2008) like the Balkan Route (El-Shaarawi and Razsa, 2019). Researchers who witnessed the drama unfold at the Kelety train station in Budapest in the late summer of 2015 called those events the Summer of Migration (Kasperek and Speer, 2015). They thereby emphasised that it is impossible to interpret the events that led to the humanitarian corridor being established prior to the EU's deal with Turkey in March 2016 without taking the collective agency of people on the move into consideration. The temporary suspension of the EU's borders and the migration regime based on the Schengen and Dublin agreements for which Chancellor Merkel was so harshly criticised would not have happened without the insistent protest march in the direction of the Austrian border by a determined multitude of migrants (*ibid.*). Moreover, this agency cannot be understood without taking account of the forms of collective struggle and organising that characterised the mass protest movements during the 'Arab Spring', later suppressed by an authoritarian and

violent backlash that forced so many into exile (Fargues, 2017). Likewise, the social practices or what is sometimes referred to as the migrant subjectivity of transnational migrants needs to be considered to fully understand how events like the Summer of Migration and mobility struggles on migrant routes were made possible. As critical migration scholars highlight, transnational migrant routes are complex and ambiguous environments as a result of the social practices of people on the move (Hess, 2018). They carve out migrant itineraries superimposed by state practices of control over mobility that attempt to keep those itineraries within manageable routes (Casas-Cortes, Cobarrubias and Pickles, 2015).

By considering and acknowledging migrant subjectivity we can write another history of migrant routes from the perspective of mobility struggles. Since the humanitarian corridor was established in the late summer of 2015 and its later closure in spring 2016, extensive ethnographic research on the Balkan Route has been conducted by various authors.² Those ethnographies that often refer to the tradition of militant research mainly focus on the ways the different state and non-state agencies co-constitute regimes of mobility along the route and how migrant agency is constitutive of the European migration and border regime. According to their narrative of the Balkan Route, the opening of the official humanitarian corridor and thereby the temporary suspension of the EU's border and migration regime was not a hospitable gesture but a concession to mobility which the EU powers were forced to grant to the migrant multitudes (El-Shaarawi and Razsa, 2019).

The temporary opening of state borders along the route and simultaneous suspension of the Schengen and Dublin regulations, together with the organisation of state-sponsored transport to allow the fast transit of hundreds of thousands of refugees to Europe's north, were needed to eventually suppress excessive mobility on the route, to impose control over the unruly migrant itineraries and to reintroduce the regime of mobility control. Subsequent closure – albeit never fully successful – of the route would not have been possible without its temporary legalisation (Kurnik and Razsa, 2020). The formalisation of the humanitarian corridor between September 2015 and March 2016 was therefore simply an effort by the member states to reimpose total control over the migrant route (*ibid.*). To achieve this aim, member states made use of (bio)political technologies intended to make the population easily controlled and manageable, such as the categorisation and segmentation of what may be referred to as an irreducible multiplicity into 'legitimate' migrants (initially refugees from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan,

² See *Bez nec, Speer and Stojić Mitrović, 2016; Bez nec and Kurnik, 2020; El-Shaarawi and Razsa, 2019; Hameršak and Pleše, 2017; Kasperek and Speer, 2015; Kurnik and Razsa, 2020; Lunaček Brumen and Meh, 2016; Pistotnik, Lipovec Čebren and Kozinc, 2016; Stojić Mitrović, Ahmetašević, Bez nec and Kurnik, 2020; Župarić-Iljić and Valenta, 2019.*

later only Syrians) and ‘illegitimate’ economic migrants (all the rest) as well as the prohibition of all forms of involvement in mitigation of the humanitarian crisis along the migrant route that are not sponsored and authorised by the state (*ibid.*).

This attack on what may be called the autonomy of migration (De Genova, 2017; Papadopoulus, Stephenson and Tsianos, 2008) was occurring against the backdrop of the European integration processes (Bez nec and Kurnik, 2020; Kurnik and Razsa, 2020). Obviously, states along the Balkan route had different views on their role in the restoration of Europe’s border and migration regime. Some were relentlessly repressive (besides Hungary, Slovenia) while others were more permissive, at least initially (such as Serbia). Some immediately imposed the state monopoly over management of the route (Slovenia and Croatia), while others (Serbia again) even after the official corridor was closed continued to tolerate informal migrant itineraries with autonomously managed shelters and camps. These differences may be explained by the different structural positions in the processes of European integration held by the states along the route (*ibid.*). In part, they were also due to the different historical traditions and mentalities in dealing with migration in these societies. Ethnographic research conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Ahmetašević and Mlinarević, 2019; Bez nec and Kurnik, 2020; Kurnik and Razsa, 2020) in particular, which has lately been transformed into a buffer zone for migrants or what some describe as a “dumping ground” (Stojić Mitrović; Ahmetašević; Bez nec and Kurnik, 2020), shows that Europeanisation relative to introduction of the EU’s border and migration regime in the region should be understood in more than one way: as the harmonisation of legislation and norms according to the EU’s standards and as the acceptance/imposition of the very notions of ‘being in common’ that were coined during Europe’s colonial modernity. The drama on the Balkan migrant route may thus be interpreted as yet another aspect of the re-imposition and reconfiguration of colonial power relations in the Balkans which Europeanisation as a whole has come to stand for (Bez nec and Kurnik, 2020; Kurnik and Razsa, 2020; Stojić Mitrović et al., 2020). The decisive, although tacit and almost invisible role of the EU and the ‘core’ member states in repressing the freedom of movement, the pivotal role of global migration management agencies like the International Organization of Migration (IOM) in the restoration of mobility control, the subordinate role of nation states whose constitutions are based on a colonial imaginary (such as the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, but also elsewhere), endogenous forms of ethno-national exclusivism and racism, the persistence of counter-hegemonic political legacies and traditions that are mobilised in solidarity with struggles for the freedom of movement – all of the above insights produced by ongoing ethnographic research reveal not only how

the coloniality of power affects the making and remaking of migrant routes but also the potential held by mobility struggles to generate a postcolonial critique in the borderlands which are crossed and co-constituted by the migrant routes (*ibid.*).

Critical Border and Migration Studies

Migrants have dignity. It is essential to acknowledge and respect this fact to be able to understand migration. Yet, this simple postulate is completely overlooked in official attempts to manage migration. As mentioned, the two opposing approaches to the 'migrant crisis' – one that claims it is possible to manage migration and human mobility while acknowledging human rights and the rule of law, and the other that claims absolute rights of the state over deciding who may enter its territory – share in common a disregard for migrant agency (Kurnik, 2019). Such disregard is also seen in the dominant scientific approaches to migration which insist on push-and-pull theories that reduce migrating people to passive objects. We therefore argue that this ignorance is not merely politically driven but has its roots in the dominant epistemology. The modern Western way of producing knowledge is to silence its objects. De Castro refers to objectifying triangulation as a procedure in which those who produce knowledge impose terms on the object of knowing (De Castro, 2009: 53). Further, according to De Castro, such knowledge production is analogous to the ways the establishment of modern sovereignty is conceived (*ibid.*) The sovereign, as the proponents of the exceptionalist theory argue, exempts itself from the relationship with its subjects and imposes terms of interaction onto the ruled subjects. This means that modern epistemology is developing parallel to the modern sovereign nation state. Due to this parallel development, modern state and science tend to homogenise human collectivities and conceive of a border as an exclusivist separator. Both focus on fixed identities and establish a taxonomy, i.e. a hierarchical classification by category and identity. If migration is an irreducible multiplicity as the proponents of the theory of autonomy of migration (Bojadžijev, 2009; Pajnik, 2019) argue, the current situation on the Balkan Route and other migrant routes then highlights the gap between state and non-state subjectivity. Migrants as a non-state subjectivity reject the very essence of the modern statist epistemology, namely taxonomy, i.e. the hierarchical integration of non-state subjectivity. The repression and violence along the route are about the categorisation and identification that is enforced on migrants as a transnational, non-state subjectivity. Influenced by migrant movements and reflections on the crisis of the modern concept of political subject, critical border and migration studies started to challenge the established and objectifying approaches to migration (Hess, 2011; Hess,

2012; Hess, 2016; Hess, 2018; Casas-Cortes, Cobarrubias and Pickles, 2015). The change in the conception of power that is the hallmark of poststructuralism considerably informed this challenge. Power is immanent; there is no unique centre of its rationality, no transcendent source and therefore no monopoly of the state over the articulation of power relations. This position implies that the articulation of a border and migration regime is to be interpreted as a result of various agencies that span from supranational instances, nation states, NGOs as well as migrants' practices of mobility. The border and migration regime is hence not an expression of the absolute power held by nation states, but evolves through incessant negotiations involving multiple agents, comprising mobility struggles that also constitute this regime (Bez nec and Kurnik, 2020; Kurnik, 2019). What we are actually dealing with is a strategy shaped by various agencies that possess different degrees of power not only in quantitative terms but in qualitative terms as well. Excessive and unauthorised practices of mobility that subvert attempts to bridle and subjugate it are therefore an expression of the other power that gives a potential basis for an a(nti)-hegemonic³ political project (ibid.). Critical migration and border studies therefore engage in an ascending analysis similar to the one suggested by Foucault (Foucault, 2008). Such analysis grasps the ways power relations are being articulated from below, in capillaries and on the margins, and enables the overall scheme of subjugation to be identified. On the other hand, it also allows the grasping of the other power or a(nti)-hegemony that emerges from resistances which are part of power, too.

The deconstructivist approach that de-naturalises and de-objectifies the notions of migration and border (Hess, 2012) permits us to detect how the migration and border regime is articulated in times of 'governance'. One cannot understand the ways a regime is actually being articulated without taking account of the plurality and heterogeneity of the agencies it includes. Moreover, we may thus focus on the political subjectivity of migration, which is obscured by the legal discourse on migrations in both versions, the human rights' one and the sovereigntist one (Kurnik, 2019; Papadopoulus, Stephenson and Tsianos, 2008). When considering the ways Foucault (2010) rejected the legal discourse and related repressive hypothesis on power, it is not difficult to understand that migration and mobility generally are not a deviation from the canon of sedentariness; instead, they constitute one of the central contemporary social practices upon which power is being articulated. One could argue further, paraphrasing Foucault, that power in times of global integrated capitalism does not repress migration and mobility

³ We use the expression a(nti)-hegemonic beyond a simple opposition to hegemony, as the non-hegemonic aggregation and articulation of differences.

but encourages it, articulates it from within, directs it and bridles it; by and through all of this power establishes relations of exploitation, hierarchy and discrimination. With respect to the drama on the Balkan Route, i.e. restoration of Europe's border and migration regime in the Balkans, one should keep in mind that the European Union is a political entity that promotes circulation and that its core principle is freedom of movement (of capital, goods, services and labour force). Yet, saying that this entity favours migration and mobility does not mean that there is no repression. Savage repression against excessive and unauthorised mobility is used to limit mobility and to articulate global relations of inequality and domination. The globalised world is one of normalised mobility. Mobility is therefore not an excess but a (regulated) norm. It is only when it is excessive in the sense that it challenges the distribution of power, identifications and categorisations that it becomes subject to state repression, but also an act of liberation (Kurnik, 2019).

From Migrant Escape Routes to Infrapolitics and Heterotopias

Research on transit migration in terms of escape routes (Papadopoulus, Stephenson and Tsianos, 2008) and the role of flight in constitution of the modern labour market (Boutang, 1998) highlights the centrality of escape and excessive mobility in the articulation of modern and postmodern capitalist power relations. Papadopoulus, Stephenson and Tsianos (2008) conceive of escape as constitutive of sovereignty or, better, of transnational and post-liberal sovereignty. The logic of the foundation of sovereign power, its substantiality and transcendent legitimation is now obsolete. Sovereign power is based on the arbitrariness of borders that emerge wherever there is a need to organise the social space and political governance with the aim to control and limit mobility. Its protagonists are both state and non-state institutions that act upon ad hoc normative principles defined in zones of exception, where human rights are deactivated (*ibid.*). Such zones of exception are conflict zones in which attempts to normalise mobility through identification, characterisation and its refinement are incessantly subverted by practices that re-appropriate the conditions of mobility. The state of exception on migrant routes is the combination of dehumanisation from above – with the aim to enforce control over mobility so that the population is hierarchised and managed, and de-subjectivisation from below – the myriad practices of de-identification, becoming, the invention of new biographies, i.e. practices that transcend the sovereign subject form (*ibid.*).

The latter practices largely fall into the category of infra-political action. Scott (1990) identified the infra-political as the cultural and structural substratum of those more visible forms of action which attract the most scholarly

attention. "So long as we confine our conception of the political to activity that is openly declared", Scott asserts, "we are driven to conclude that subordinate groups essentially lack a political life or that what political life they do have is restricted to those exceptional moments of popular explosion" (Scott, 1990: 199). Infrapolitics is relevant to how migration is conceived because it may predict that a movement, i.e. mass migration, is coming (Worth and Kuhling, 2004: 35-36) or because it allows actors to retain, uphold or perpetuate their capacity for agency when the political context precludes any serious chance of making tangible political gains (Chvasta, 2006: 5-6). Since they are deprived of access to legitimate channels for expression, people on the move cannot and will not articulate their claims via the conventional political channels, but will resort to action 'below the radar' to reclaim their dignity, be it individually or collectively. Furthermore, according to Scott, subaltern forms of resistance produce "hidden transcripts," namely, critiques of power that escape the notice of the dominant and contrast with the "public transcripts" of power relations, which may contain no record of opposition. Such discretion allows the dominated to covertly resist being symbolically appropriated by the dominant. In the case of migrants, such infra-political acts include hunger strikes, the demolition of border barriers, self-management in migrant centres and refugee camps, but also vandalism, arson, flights from state-controlled facilities, the voluntary discarding of identity papers, applying for asylum and moving on to another country etc., at the price of counter minimising their material appropriation (Scott, 1990: 188). Infra-political acts thus operate insidiously below the threshold of political detectability, making them all the more reliable vehicles of resistance: the less detectable they are, the more efficiently they conceal the resistance they inspire among the dominated (Marche, 2012).

The empowerment potential held by migration may also be detectable via another theoretical concept, the Foucauldian heterotopia. The heterotopia is a placeless place "in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invent the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect. These spaces ... are linked with all the others, yet however contradict all the other sites" (Foucault, 1984: 47) and hold a mirror up to society as a whole. And what are migrant centres and refugee camps, indeed, entire migrant routes interspersed by border regimes, but heterotopias? In line with the Foucauldian heterotopology, migrant facilities and routes can now be found in every European country, yet they may function differently depending on whether they are in the 'core' EU states or on the margins of Europe; they are a juxtaposition of several spaces because they exist in facilities and locations previously intended for other purposes; they function in heterochronia or different schedules and time frames than the rest of society (for migrants waiting for their status their time/life is on

hold); migration-related spaces presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable; and they have a function in relation to all of the space that remains outside them, which in the case of migration is not one of illusion or compensation but of exclusion (ibid: 48).

Fieldwork-based insight: assemblages of mobility and the 'Bosnian paradigm'

Ever since the official refugee corridor was closed in March 2016, people on the move have faced increasing state repression. The plight of refugees and migrants might lull us into thinking that violence on the borders confirms the aforementioned sovereigntist hypothesis whereby the sovereign nation state is back, having regained its monopoly over force and norms in its designated territory. Given the empirical reality on the Balkan Route, we do not argue in favour of such a hypothesis (Beznec and Kurnik, 2020). Although state violence, such as the illegal pushbacks orchestrated by the Slovenian and Croatian police (Info Kolpa, 2019), drastically increase the human and material costs of unauthorised mobility, the borders remain porous, some kind of "asymmetrical membranes" that "produce new hierarchies of people while categorize and process uncontrolled mobilities as different migrant categories" (Hess, 2018). Border violence therefore does not lead to the restoration of the nation state's sedentariness, but enables the stratification and segmentation of the social space; Mezzadra and Nielsen would refer to this as the "multiplication of labour", which is an effect of the mobility regime (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2013).

In an attempt to make an epistemological argument based on such an empirical insight, we claim that migration requires political categories to become immanent, i.e. for the opening of synthetic political categories and introduction of antagonism within them. It requires that essentialist ontology give space for relational ontology. Mignolo (2012) and De Castro (2009) demonstrate the way in which synthesised categories are the outcome of the coloniality of power. According to Mignolo (2012: 49-126), the critique of colonial power dismantles the universal site of enunciation and establishes hybrid sites of enunciation. De Castro (2009: 53-54) conceives epistemological decolonisation as the rejection of comparison as an objectifying triangulation (sovereign, state science) and the affirmation of comparison and translation as the mutual implication and transformation (the science of multiplicity). Elaborating on such claims, we might state that migration as excessive mobility evades (colonial) sovereignty and its identification and categorisation procedures and is thus a practical critique of coloniality. Migration co-creates assemblages of mobility, the notion we

have been using to narrate the mutual articulation of the mobility struggles and the local a(nti)hegemonic (antimodern and anticolonial) discourses and traditions along the Balkan Route (Beznec and Kurnik, 2020; Kurnik and Razsa, 2020). Assemblages of mobility are hybrid spaces of enunciation in which mutual transformation and contamination allow us to articulate a postcolonial critique in Europe's borderlands. For this reason, a precondition for reintroducing control over human mobility was to dismantle the assemblages of mobility, i.e. the joint agencies of migrant social practices and local anti-hegemonic social practices that allowed for some sort of self-management of the route. The criminalisation of solidarity such as the increased policing of the people who help migrants (Resoma, 2020) and the mobilisation of nationalist and racist sentiments in society are the two principal methods used for dismantling the assemblages of mobility.

At present, Bosnia and Herzegovina is like a disposal site, a location where the EU drastically decelerates the movement of people in transit after they have left the EU member states of Greece and Bulgaria in an attempt to reach other EU member states. The function of this disposal site is to normalise and curtail the excessive mobility of people on the move by using brutal selection mechanisms. The illegal and violent pushbacks are mostly directed against people who cannot afford smugglers and must therefore walk through the hostile territories of Croatia and Slovenia. Such a 'dumping ground' cannot be understood without taking account of the neo-colonial relations between the EU and its neighbouring states. The colonial prejudice that contends Others are incapable of ruling themselves (Heller, de Genova, Stierl, Tazzioli and van Baar, 2015) is clearly visible in the ways the EU is managing the migrant route in Bosnia and Herzegovina. By relying on global agencies such as the IOM, the EU is circumventing Bosnia and Herzegovina's national and local decision-makers and adding to the further deterioration of public authorities (Ahmetašević and Mlinarević, 2019). Bosnia and Herzegovina is a protectorate of the 'international community' and its Dayton Constitution enshrines nationalist aggression against the multicultural and plural Bosnia and Herzegovina by giving exclusive power to the ethno-nationalist oligarchies that paralyse any meaningful functioning of the public authorities. This leads to extreme forms of neglect and related tensions between local populations and people on the move. Another aspect of Europeanisation as a neo-colonial subjugation that is responsible for the plight of the people on the move in Bosnia and Herzegovina is the adoption of the European nation form (Balibar, 2004: 11-30) as the exclusive matrix of statehood and constitution of the political community, despite the rich regional history of inclusive conceptions of being in common based on diversity and heterogeneity (Mujkić, 2019). Europe's 'dumping ground' for the people on the move in Bosnia and Herzegovina thus emerges in the

context of the aggressive nationalisation of ethnic and religious belongings and state racism (Bjelić, 2018), which all contribute to dehumanisation of these people on the move.

Regardless of the growing hostility against the people on the move in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the ethnographic militant research we conducted in 2019 (Bez nec and Kurnik, 2020; Kurnik and Razsa, 2020) reveals mutual articulation between the mobility struggles and the local a(nti)hegemonic political legacies which may be referred to as the “Bosnian paradigm” (Mujkić, 2019). The solidarity with the people on the move turned out to be inspired by a new wave of politicisation that confronts the ethno-nationalist exclusivism⁴ and is historically rooted in a(nti)hegemonic discourses and traditions⁵ that made Bosnia a “corpus separatum of European modernity, as a body that is not uniform, homogeneous, but is made of differences in constant process of differentiation” (ibid.). These are the shared characteristics of political bodies that are shaped by their rejection of the logic of hegemony. Migrant subjectivity may be considered as such a political body. When migrants cross Europe’s borders and form assemblages of mobility with other political bodies that reject the hegemonic, European, Western and colonial conceptions of being in common, they encourage decolonisation processes. Migrant subjectivity may prove to be a formidable power that will physically and conceptually open up Europe. The end of history in which migrants figure as mere objects is the beginning of histories of mobility struggles.

Conclusion

Our principal intent with this text was to look back at the past 5 years from the current perspective to assess and discuss which developments in border and migration studies have been spurred by the ongoing European migrant situation, particularly the Balkan migrant route. Alliances of local solidarity activists and people on the move, that we together with some other researchers conceptualized as assemblages of mobility (Bez nec and Kurnik, 2020; Kurnik and Razsa, 2020), have clearly shown the necessity to consider agency of migrants and assemblages they form with local population and hidden a(nti)hegemonic political traditions. The necessity to

⁴ *Spanning from revolution in 2013, mass protests in 2014 and solidarity initiatives during the times of floods.*

⁵ *This is the history of the Bosnian church, of persistent attitudes of indifference when faced with imperial and hegemonic projects, of the communist idea of B&H statehood that informed the establishment of national liberation councils in WWII and thus the self-management and non-alignment ideas and practices, and finally of refugeeism as an escape from the dominant ethno-national matrix during the last nationalist aggression and war.*

consider centrality of what we also call migrant subjectivity is certainly the first answer to initial research question about the consequences of turbulent events on Balkan Route since 2015 for migration scholarship. Furthermore, the focus on the hybrid sites of enunciation (Mignolo, 2012) that are characteristic for such assemblages has led us to explore, referring to critical border and migration studies and ethnographies of migrant routes, epistemological potential of such Copernican turn in migration studies (Casas-Cortes, Cobarrubias and Pickles, 2015). Critical rejection of state centred approach on migration allows us to consider migration not as an object of study but as a perspective, as a hybrid site of articulation that allows us to open up notions used in political science, to make them immanent, to expose unequal and violent relations that are at their bases, to transform the border between us and Others into shared and common space of articulation and social transformation that seeks inclusive world that is commonly shared.

We established the important role played in public perception by the political invention of “migrant” and the associated terminology. This (political) reality-shaping discourse informs the rise of European populisms by feeding into fears and phantasms about Others on one hand and, on the other, it importantly intervenes in the EU accession process of EU candidate countries along the Balkan route, thus reaffirming neo-colonial power relations for anachronistic nation states squeezed between two empires, past and present: (Ottoman) Turkey and the European Union. However, as we have demonstrated, this space-between of the Balkan migrant route is a space of permanent crisis as much as an opportunity for a (conceptual) renewal based on local traditions.

The events that followed the amazing episode of Europe’s opening up in 2015 with a multitude of people on the move forcing the EU powers to temporarily suspend its border and migration regime may be interpreted as a manifestation of the central contradiction of postcolonial Europe. The status quo of the institution of a “border” of citizenship (Balibar, 2004: 76) that excludes former colonial subjects proves to be untenable, except at the cost of the extreme violence which people on the move are presently facing on the Balkan Route. The common struggle against this violence, for the dignity and rights of the people on the move reintroduces the promise of the universal emancipation of citizenship, making active citizens on both sides of a border, dismantling its institution that turned out to only be sustained by force.

When we stop observing the Balkan migration route through the lenses of rights and legal foundations and axioms of representation, the political subjectivity of migration that emerges in the space between origin and destination via de-identification, invisibility and imperceptibility as the main strategies of excessive mobility becomes detectable. The scandal of the

migration routes marked by dehumanisation, blatant racism, and state and para state violence demonstrates more than the declining rule of law or a state of exception that constitutes sovereignty and the rule of law. A subjectivity of imperceptible politics (Papadopoulus, Stephenson and Tsianos, 2008) can be identified there that emerges beyond the liberalist horizon and provides a glimpse of an a(anti)hegemonic political project while modern political forms recede irreversibly. Migrant struggles are therefore at the forefront of contemporary anti-capitalist and anti-colonial struggles.

Migrant routes such as the Balkan Route may be interpreted as worksites of Europe's opening (Kurnik, 2015). The assemblages of mobility which form on and along the route have the potential to stimulate the decolonisation of Europe's borderlands and Europe as a whole. On one hand, they articulate a critique of the coloniality of power that is easily perceived in the externalisation of Europe's border and migration regime. On the other hand, they point to the historical and latent presence of other (alter) conceptions of political community based on difference and heterogeneity and thereby to the alternatives to the modern, Western, European conception that is anchored in the notion of sovereignty and in nation form. The ethnographic research we conducted along the Balkan Route and especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina has led to a narrative on the migrant route that combines the affirmation of migrant subjectivity and affirmation of local a(anti)hegemonic epistemologies, and therefore combines the dignity of the people on the move and the epistemological dignity of the territory that historically produced inclusive notions of being in common based on difference and heterogeneity.

After the Arab Spring and the Summer of Migration, what we have come to witness may well be EUrope's Fall. We are about to see whether the 'fall' in question is the final failure of the unrealistic idea of an open, tolerant and humane EUrope, or if 'fall' may still translate into a period of maturity when past mistakes have been learned from, hollowed-out concepts have reached their expiry date and the (political) space will be truly shared by all inhabiting it, with dignity and humility.

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