

International and interdisciplinary conference

“B/ORDERS IN MOTION: Current challenges and future perspectives”

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PANEL C1: Forced Migration – Border Regimes. The Balkan Experiences 1990-2010s

Christian Voss (Berlin), Snežana Stanković (Frankfurt/Oder, Berlin)

In the wake of the so-called refugee crisis, the Western Balkans once again grabbed the attention of the public. During 2015, hundreds of thousands of migrants and refugees crossed the borders of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia. Hungary built a border fence along with Serbia and Croatia preventing illegal entries of the migrants and refugees; two years later, in 2017, this barrier was refurbished with cameras, heat sensors and devices which deliver electric shocks. 2016 was characterised by border closures along the Balkan route.

The panel seeks to address integration and exclusion policies within the coexisting local communities and the migrants/refugees on the Balkans. Moreover, it aims to compare the ongoing situation with that of the 1990s when affected people fled the wars in Bosnia, Croatia, and Kosovo, (il)legally moving both internally within the still existing Yugoslav borders and externally to the EU countries.

The focus of interest lies in bringing together diachronic and synchronic perspectives that will enable temporal and spatial translations of experiences of flight, displacement and border practices throughout Europe.

PANELISTS:

Caught in the Rails: Border transgression at the Balkan corridor

Rozita Dimova (Ghent)

This paper will focus on the refugee crisis as it had been experienced in the Republic of Macedonia throughout 2015-2016. It investigates the role of the rail companies involved in the transportation of displaced people through the Balkans, which had, in some cases, 'displaced' the usual passengers. The paper raises questions about the way in which rail services contribute towards changes in both the perceived and experienced significance and meaning of location, especially in such periphery regions which are bearing the brunt of both austerity and the refugee crisis. I begin the analysis by underlying an incident that took place on 23 April 2015 on the railroad connecting Gevgelija and Belgrade, when 14 migrants were run over and killed by the evening express train. The victims, refugees from Afghanistan and economic migrants from Somalia, used the railroad to orientate themselves on their passage from the Republic of Macedonia (RM) to Western Europe. Coming from Greece, the refugees were prohibited from entering RM legally and using public transport. As a result of this tragedy, the law was changed, and the rail companies have increasingly become involved in transporting the refugees. What followed after this change was an influx of approximately 500,000

people going through the Balkan corridor on their passage to Europe.

Stuck in Transit: Forced Migrants in the Western Balkans

Hariz Halilovich (Melbourne)

The Western Balkans continue to struggle with the consequences of forced population movements within and from the region caused by the 'Yugoslav wars' of the 1990s, which at the time created the largest refugee crisis in Europe since WW2. More recently, the region has been engulfed in another kind of migration crisis that has turned Macedonia, Kosovo, Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia into both transiting and receiving countries for many refugees/'illegal migrants' mainly from the Middle East and Africa. Unable to continue their journeys to the desired destinations in the EU countries, an increasing number of refugees on the so-called 'Balkan route' has had no other option but to remain in 'long-term temporary shelters'. Responses by the local populations about their passing through or staying in the communities have varied: from those helping or exploiting them to the groups of nationalistic vigilantes verbally and physically assaulting the unwanted people on the move. So far, the government institutions, national Red Cross societies and international humanitarian organizations have been struggling—and often unable—to provide adequate protection and meet basic needs of the refugees 'stuck' in the Western Balkans. This paper discusses how the evident lack of coordinated support to refugees in the Western Balkans has resulted in a largely unaddressed humanitarian crisis, especially escalating during autumn and winter months. The paper aims to contribute to understanding this crisis from three perspectives: of refugees as people 'stuck in transit', local communities and humanitarian organisations.

"Getting out of here": the effect of the increased border control on migration movements in Serbia

Marta Stojić Mitrović (Belgrade)

After the closure of the formalised corridor in March 2016, migration practices across the territory of Serbia underwent considerable changes. Closed borders and pushbacks are erasing differences between entrance and exit borders in Serbia, while every border is being crossed in all directions in attempts to avoid becoming stuck in Serbia and reaching final destinations. As the routes change, self-organised migrant settlements appear on previously unused spots. On the other side, the state-run camps are only partially occupied, and the newly adopted integration agendas are struggling to inspire people to participate since migrants perceive Serbia as merely a transit state, a territory to be crossed as quickly as possible. In this presentation, I would like to interpret these changes in migration practices in Serbia in view of the transformation of relevant policies and public discourses not only within Serbia but also in the region.

Forced to leave – Forced to stay: Detained by B/Orders

Snežana Stanković (Frankfurt/Oder, Berlin)

A flight is a matter of absence, an emptied space in the country of origin and furthermore of foreignness to all other places. I intend to present two stories of exile as told by a woman from Bosnia who fled the Yugoslav wars and by a man fleeing religious oppression in Iran. Their flights

along the Balkan route and arrival in Berlin as the reception point represent a unique chronotope of detention where all temporal and spatial relations fuse into a feeling of disquiet.

My dwelling on ethnography of emotions will look at how a fleeing person lives this state as well how they face a legal system and society burdened with 'receiving procedures' and anxieties. Furthermore, relying on narratology and theoretical concepts of audio-visual anthropology, this paper seeks a discussion on the methods of participating research in humanities and social sciences regarding the present-day traumatic experiences of flight, displacement and border regimes.