Border Formation

The Becoming Multiple of Space

Grazia Tona

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A+BE | Architecture and the Built Environment | TU Delft BK

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Dissertation

for the purpose of obtaining the degree of doctor
at Delft University of Technology
by the authority of the Rector Magnificus, prof.dr.ir. T.H.J.J. van der Hagen
chair of the Board for Doctorates
to be defended publicly on
Wednesday 17 May 2023 at 10:00 o'clock

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To my parents, Maria and Raimondo

Acknowledgments

The achievement of this milestone would not have been possible without the precious support of a large number of scholars, colleagues, friends, and family.

First of all, my thanks go to my promotor, Marc Schoonderbeek, and my copromotor, Heidi Sohn, who trusted in my capacity to begin, perseverate, and conclude this doctoral research. I am grateful for the years I have spent at their side, learning from their experience and example.

I thank the members of the doctoral committee: Prof. Klaske Havik, Prof. Georg Vrachliotis, Prof. James Scott, Dr. Nishat Awan, and Dr. Catharina Gabrielsson, for their meticulous review and valuable comments. They have motivated me to reflect further on my work and explore lines of thinking that I had overlooked, favoring in this way my growth as a scholar.

In addition, I consider myself very lucky to have benefited the financial support of the Gerda Henkel Stiftung during part of my studies. I thank the Foundation and, in particular, Thomas Podranski.

I definitely owe heartfelt thanks to those who made the fieldwork possible: the Klikaktiv team, Milica, Vuk, Comi, the interpreters, Col. Lt. Nemeth and the University of Public Service Ludovika.

Thanks to Véro Crickx for the design of this book and her great help in making things easier in this final stage of my PhD.

Over the years at the Department of Architecture, many have contributed to the development of my work by generously sharing their knowledge and wise advice. Special thanks go to the Borders&Territories research group, Aleksandar Staničić, Andrej Radman, and Stavros Kousoulas. I also thank all those who I have met as colleagues but I can now count as friends (from the office to the corridor): Dirim, Nama'a, Gökçe, Chris, Stefan, Alberto, Ran, Ahmed, Wenwen, Piero, Negar, Alper, Geert, Tawfan, Fatma, Brook, Anthene, Burcu, John, Gabriel, Dorina, Gül, Mar, Cynthia, Arwa.

I cannot forget my friends outside of TU Delft, who over time have become my second family: my sister from another life and paranimph Yıldız, Fahimeh, Ranko, Hakan, Filippos, Francisco and Marjolijn, Alessandra, Silvia, Bushira, Sara and Pier, Laura, Marcello. Thanks to the very first people that I met here: Antonella, Supuck, Alessandro and, obviously, words are not enough to thank you, Joe... for being Joe! Haartlijk bedankt aan Hans en Mathilde voor het openen van de deuren van jullie huis en het geduld om naar mijn gebroken Nederlands te luisteren.

Many have also supported me from afar, listening in times of struggle and rejoicing for my achievements: Giulia Foglia, Gloria, Giulia Moriconi, Alessia, Lucrezia Pigini, Francesco, Lucrezia Gasparini, Viviana, Claudia, Lia, Anastasia, Livia, Francesca (e le sue lettere che ci hanno tenute sempre più vicine), la mia amica tascabile Tania, Lucia e Selene.

Il più grande ringraziamento va alla mia famiglia: ai miei genitori, per aver accettato delle scelte forse non sempre comprensibili, alle mie sorelle, Mahlet e Veronica, ai miei nipoti che riempiono di gioia il ritorno a casa, a Elisa la cugina più amica che si possa desiderare, i miei zii, i miei cugini e nonna Rita.

Finalmente gracias a León, que me ha tomado de la mano en esos años, por tu presencia sólida, tu paciencia y mucho mas. A ti va no solo mi agradecimiento, sino todo mi más profundo amor.

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Summary

Since the late 1990s, the study of borders has witnessed renewed attention and expansion that look beyond geopolitical structures and decision-making processes. The widening of border discourse has also reflected a redefinition of its spatial understanding through the refusal of linear simplifications and the search for spatial complexity. A growing number of concepts and methods try to account for the space of borders from many disciplinary angles. Nevertheless, in this investigative effort, an unsolved challenge remains in giving equal clout to theoretical and material aspects, considering them constitutive elements of the same process.

The present doctoral thesis contributes to this ongoing discussion by proposing an in-depth study of border spatiality, its material dimension, and agency. It introduces the idea of spatial formation as a concept and a method to analyse the border as a spatial system in becoming. The formation of space is understood as a diagrammatic process, in which semiotic and material relationships entangle and progressively emerge as a concrete, physical entity. Drawing from the theory of actualisation elaborated by Gilles Deleuze, the thesis examines how the border comes to be in the intricate operations of discourses, technologies, migratory movements, and actions of control. The doctoral study integrates and characterises spatial theory with the empirical research of a case study: the Hungarian Southern border with Serbia. This rather small territorial section has been recently sealed by metal fences and razor wire as an emergency response to the migratory movements of 2014-2016.

The case study is not considered an exception or an isolated intervention. On the contrary, it is regarded in the frame of the conceptual and spatial effort to define the "external border" of the European Union. The thesis traces the semiotic and discursive relationships that contain the border within established meanings, both in the European and Hungarian political debates. In the frame of the border's formation, meaning acts upon the concrete definition of spatial boundaries. This capacity becomes even more evident through the analysis of selected technologies of migration management and border control. Digital systems and infrastructures of remote surveillance put specific knowledge and information into operation, affecting the design, measurement, and visualisation of the border.

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While the first part of the dissertation (chapters one to three) mainly looks at the intersections between discursive and spatial relations, chapter four shifts the attention to the terrain where the material separation appears. The theoretical reasoning and the analysis of the architectural features of the border fence are integrated with the experiential dimension of the site survey. At a close distance from the border, the alleged linearity of national divisions complicates and reveals the plasticity of space. The border proves to have the capacity to move and de-form in the dynamic, often violent, interaction of forces of control and migratory movements. It does not simply follow a design established from above, but it emerges as a material, spatial system with an agency of its own. The border actively intervenes in the negotiation between human and non-human agents, natural topography, technologies, and historical traces. The logbook of site surveys reduces even more the scale of observation and guides the reader across this complex spatiality. It shows the border's actual form as a lived, crossed, and manipulated environment, in which manifold stories and struggles unfold and leave concrete traces. Chapter six examines these remains and connects the formation of space to the possibility of other modes of being at the border. Refusing any overarching, closed definition of the spatial sense of the border, the thesis is open to a multiplicity of forms, measures, and future interpretations of a space in becoming.

To conclude, the main scope of the thesis is twofold. First, it rethinks the border as a spatial system and a spatial process through materiality and the border's own becoming. Second, it builds a research method apt to expand diagrammatically in different directions. The thesis values complexity and makes room for a growing engagement in the understanding of spatial, material, and technological features of borders. It proves that this goal can be achieved through the involvement of the architectural discipline, its knowledge, and methods which are more closely committed with a material approach to space. The present doctoral study, therefore, invites to a more diverse and committed transdisciplinary expansion of the ongoing border dialogue.

Samenvatting

Sinds de late jaren 1990 is de studie van grenzen getuige geweest van hernieuwde aandacht en uitbreiding die verder kijkt dan geopolitieke structuren en besluitvormingsprocessen. De verbreding van het grensdiscours weerspiegelt ook een herdefiniëring van het ruimtelijk begrip door de weigering van lineaire vereenvoudigingen en het zoeken naar ruimtelijke complexiteit. Een groeiend aantal concepten en methoden probeert de ruimte van grenzen vanuit vele disciplinaire invalshoeken te verklaren. Niettemin blijft in deze onderzoeksinspanning een onopgeloste uitdaging bestaan in het geven van gelijke invloed aan theoretische en materiële aspecten, waarbij ze als constitutieve elementen van hetzelfde proces worden beschouwd.

Het huidige proefschrift draagt bij aan deze voortdurende discussie door een diepgaande studie voor te stellen van grensruimtelijkheid, de materiële dimensie en het agentschap. Het introduceert het idee van ruimtelijke vorming als een concept en een methode om de grens als een ruimtelijk systeem in wording te analyseren. De vorming van ruimte wordt opgevat als een diagram-proces, waarin semiotische en materiële relaties verstrikt raken en geleidelijk ontstaan als een concrete, fysieke entiteit. Op basis van de theorie van actualisatie, uitgewerkt door Gilles Deleuze, onderzoekt het proefschrift hoe de grens tot stand komt in de ingewikkelde operaties van discoursen, technologieën, migratiebewegingen en acties van controle. De doctoraatsstudie integreert en karakteriseert ruimtelijke theorie met het empirische onderzoek van een case studie: de Hongaarse zuidgrens met Servië. Dit vrij kleine territoriale gedeelte is onlangs afgesloten met metalen hekken en scheermesdraad als noodrespons op de migratiebewegingen van 2014-2016.

De case studie wordt niet beschouwd als een uitzondering of een geïsoleerde interventie. Integendeel, het wordt beschouwd in het kader van de conceptuele en ruimtelijke inspanning om de "buitengrens" van de Europese Unie te definiëren. Het proefschrift traceert de semiotische en discursieve relaties die de grens binnen gevestigde betekenissen bevatten, zowel in de Europese als in de Hongaarse politieke debatten. In het kader van de vorming van de grens werkt betekenis in op de concrete definitie van ruimtelijke grenzen. Deze capaciteit wordt nog duidelijker door de analyse van geselecteerde technologieën voor migratiebeheer en grenscontrole. Digitale systemen en infrastructuren voor bewaking op afstand brengen specifieke kennis en informatie in gebruik, die van invloed zijn op het ontwerp, de meting en de visualisatie van de grens.

Terwijl het eerste deel van het proefschrift (hoofdstukken één tot en met drie) vooral kijkt naar de kruispunten tussen discursieve en ruimtelijke relaties, verschuift hoofdstuk vier de aandacht naar het terrein waar de materiële scheiding verschijnt. De theoretische redenering en de analyse van de architectonische kenmerken van de grenshek zijn geïntegreerd met de ervaringsdimensie van het site-onderzoek. Op korte afstand van de grens compliceert en onthult de vermeende lineariteit van nationale divisies de plasticiteit van de ruimte. De grens blijkt het vermogen te hebben om te bewegen en te de-vormen in de dynamische, vaak gewelddadige, interactie van controlekrachten en migratiebewegingen. Het volgt niet zomaar een ontwerp dat van bovenaf is vastgesteld, maar het komt naar voren als een materieel, ruimtelijk systeem met een eigen agentschap. De grens grijpt actief in in de onderhandelingen tussen menselijke en niet-menselijke agenten, natuurlijke topografie, technologieën en historische sporen. Het logboek van site-onderzoeken vermindert de schaal van observatie nog meer en leidt de lezer door deze complexe ruimtelijkheid. Het toont de werkelijke vorm van de grens als een geleefde, gekruiste en gemanipuleerde omgeving, waarin zich vele verhalen en worstelingen ontvouwen en concrete sporen achterlaten. Hoofdstuk zes onderzoekt deze overblijfselen en verbindt de vorming van ruimte met de mogelijkheid van andere manieren om aan de grens te zijn. Het proefschrift weigert elke overkoepelende, gesloten definitie van het ruimtelijke gevoel van de grens en staat open voor een veelheid van vormen, maten en toekomstige interpretaties van een ruimte in wording.

Tot slot is de belangrijkste reikwijdte van het proefschrift tweeledig. Ten eerste heroverweegt het de grens als een ruimtelijk systeem en een ruimtelijk proces door materialiteit en het eigen worden van de grens. Ten tweede bouwt het een onderzoeksmethode die geschikt is om als een diagram in verschillende richtingen uit te breiden. Het proefschrift waardeert complexiteit en maakt ruimte voor een groeiende betrokkenheid bij het begrijpen van ruimtelijke, materiële en technologische kenmerken van grenzen. Het bewijst dat dit doel kan worden bereikt door de betrokkenheid van de architecturale discipline, haar kennis en methoden die nauwer betrokken zijn bij een materiële benadering van de ruimte. De huidige doctoraatsstudie nodigt daarom uit tot een meer diverse en geëngageerde trans disciplinaire uitbreiding van de lopende grensdialoog.

Belgrade (Serbia), September 2020. Source: photo by author.

1 Introduction

1.1 Borders, Borders, Borders

And what of the spaces between the hitos[1], or between them and the rivers? What course does the supposed straight line between these follow, given the complex topography? Indeed, exactly how long is the border? [... A] stretch that complicates measurement, different accounts provide considerably different lengths. In fact, no two accounts offer exactly the same figure.[2]

The short extract above is taken from "The Poetry of Boundaries" by James D. Sidaway, a text that I read at the very beginning of my doctoral research. In his argument, the author ponders the complexity of the border and its many possible representations. Sidaway introduces the problem of uncertainty and ambiguity related to the ground experience that challenges mathematical measurement and conventional forms of spatial representation.

At that time, in the first month of my doctoral studies, I had yet to visit a national border for the purpose of examining it. The only few images I had of a close encounter with one consisted of the crossing between Italy and Austria: a motorway, lines of cars, and random customs checks. The border, as I was used to imagining it, was only a passage. I could identify the point before the crossing and the one afterwards; yet the space between them was elusive and meaningless.

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[1]   The term "hitos" is the Spanish word for "border stones".

[2]   James D. Sidaway, "The Poetry of Boundaries", in *Borderscapes: Hidden Geographies and Politics at Territory's Edge*, edited by Prem Kumar Rajaram and Carl Grundy-Warr (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2007): 169.

Over the years, Sidaway's questions have accompanied my research thoughts as an invitation to take the spatial dimension of borders more seriously. They urge us to look beyond the idea of linearity and expand towards a multiplicity of measures and interpretations. However, in those sites where the distance between "*hitos*" has been sealed with razor wire and barricades, only the line appears evident and undisputable, while every other feature of space is obscured and silenced.

The present doctoral thesis places the spatial, material, and architectural dimension of borders at the centre of its inquiry. As part of the research program "Securing Democratic Society", it contextualises the study in the 21st century, an era in which the implementation of security measures and technologies has produced concrete spatial transformations. These manifest in the form of visible and invisible boundaries that challenge the democratic nature of public spaces and selectively regulate access to safety. Examples of such political and spatial developments proliferate continually across the globe. Although cases and geographies vary greatly, political rhetoric of emergency and related securitarian responses create a common, fertile ground for the multiplication of borders.

The terrorist attacks of 9/11 can be considered a precursor which marked the beginning of the Global War on Terrorism and a massive push to securitisation. Since that date, the main focus of security has shifted to the control of movement and national borders, targeting particular groups of people. The later attacks in Europe (such as the coordinated attacks in Paris in 2015, the Brussels bombings in 2016, the attacks in Manchester, London, and Barcelona in 2017, to name the most recent), along with the outbreak of the war in Syria, the events of the Arab Spring, and the related movement of refugees only helped to increase the existing climate of fear, hostility, and control. Over time, narratives of terrorism and religious extremism have mingled with other discourses of crisis (humanitarian, economic, environmental), contributing to the progressive political legitimisation of interventions of border protection.

In this context, the years 2014-2016[3] represent a crucial moment in which the fortification of the margins of nations powerfully dominated Western political debates and actions. New border fences started to appear across Europe, challenging the principles of free movement, safety, and justice, on which the European Union and, particularly, the Schengen agreement are founded. The relatively temporal closure of inner European borders was meant to tackle the growing influx of migrants escaping from poverty, war, famine, and persecution, mainly coming from Africa and Asia. In the same years, an almost analogous situation arose overseas. During Donald Trump's administration (2016-2020), the so-called "*Caravanas*" of Central and South American migrants walked northward to flee extreme violence and politico-economic crises. At the end of a perilous journey that exposed people to all sorts of risks and abuse by gangs, criminal organisations, and authorities, the *Caravanas* finally encountered the U.S.-Mexico border wall.

Nowadays, while the movement of migrants and refugees across borders has unabatedly continued, new dramatic events have caught global attention: the Hong Kong protests started in 2019, the turmoil in Lebanon and Iraq between 2020 and 2021, the withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan and, most recently, the ongoing war in Ukraine. Tensions and violence spreading across the world inevitably bring the movement of people and the multiplication of escape routes, while portending the future emergence of new barriers.

Along with the aforementioned political unrests, the health emergency of Covid-19 has highlighted even more the centrality of borders and boundaries, making them part of many people's daily experience. The introduction of restrictions of movement and the intensification of checks for the sake of (health) safety brought to the fore an already existing, well-rooted system of control. A system that, until now, has been regulating the journeys of selected travellers and been tested at the margins of nations. The health crisis, in this sense, has added to the numerous humanitarian, political, economic, and environmental causes that underlie the differentiation of human mobility and the establishment of boundaries. These causes are reminiscent of colonial and post-colonial histories of privilege, uneven distribution of wealth, labour, and safety.

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3   Indicating a precise time-frame to refer to the most recent migratory movements towards Europe is not only difficult but also inaccurate, given that these are still ongoing. If it is true that migration to and across Europe has no clear beginning or end, one can also affirm that the years 2014-2016 (often addressed by media as the period of the "migration crisis" or "refugee crisis") have made manifest a change in the management of borders and migration through a series of interconnected "crises" of politics, policies, decision-making and, especially, solidarity - cf.: Huub Dijstelbloem, *Borders as Infrastructure: the Technopolitics of Border Control* (The MIT Press, 2021): 19. This period marks what Milivojevic calls a "crisis of border regimes"; a phase of rapid intensification of actions of border protection on land and sea, as well as concrete militarisation of many border sections across the entire continent. See: Sanja Milivojevic, *Border Policing and Security Technologies: Mobility and Proliferation of Borders in the Western Balkans* (London and New York: Routledge, 2019): 15.

The examples above testify that borders are currently not only at the centre of political decisions and media debates but also play a decisive role in the daily life and experiences of individuals. Their function and operation are no longer restricted to the field of geopolitics, but open to discourses of gender, technology, economy, and philosophy. The growing relevance of borders is also reflected in the renewed academic interest in their study. The ever-expanding scholarly research has produced a manifold of theories, terms, disciplinary lenses, methods, and case studies that can be disorienting in the navigation of such a varied literary and documentary field. These involve the spatial dimension of borders as well. The following image (fig. 1.1) maps the emergence of space in the last two decades of border discourse to highlight the challenge of giving equal clout to its conceptual and material features. This problem causes the fragmentation of border spatiality into a multiplicity of definitions or metaphors which fail to address the border itself as a spatial system with its own transformative potential.

1.2 Mapping Space in Border Discourse

In the last few decades of border studies, the notion of space has been examined from a multitude of disciplinary perspectives, resulting in a large variety of terms, theorisations, and agendas. The figure 1.1 displays and connects in a synthetic diagram those studies of border spatiality that have been relevant for the elaboration of the concept of "spatial formation" that this thesis will discuss. In particular, the diagram emphasises three main aspects of space that are central in border discourse: relationality, becoming, and materiality.

overlapping geographies

relationality

socio-political space

BORDERLAND
Balibar

socio-geographic region

multiple political systems

BORDER-SPACE
Kolossov

regional dimension

BORDERWORK
Pallister-Wilkins

care/control spaces

humanitarianism

detention

outside space

militarized space

exclusion

actions

agents

BORDER REGIME
Trimikliniotis et al.

ARCHIPELAGO
Mountz

porous border

BORDER-ING
Van Houtum

epistemology

sovereign power

camps

multiple spaces

BORDER-ZONES
Mezzadra, Neilson

perforated border

practices of socio-spatial differentiation

escape territory

struggle

experiences

holding zones

precarious spaces

BORDER-SPACE
Mezzadra, Neilson

multiscalar

space-time

inequality

differential mobility

heterogeneous

multiplicity

becoming

relationality

culture

variation

BORDERSCAPES
Rajaram, Grundy-Warr Brambilla

SPATIAL CONDITION
Schoonderbeek

complexity

continuity

MOBILE BORDERS
Nail

becoming

event

method

material-kinetic assemblage

everyday bordering

becoming

in-between space

space of encounter

space of simultaneity

mapping

BORDER TOPOLOGIES
Awan

non-human agency

BORDERLAND
Anzaldua

physical and emotional

subjective space

shared space

connectivity

negotiations

transformation

materiality

shared experience

mutual exchange

NEIGHBORHOOD SCALE
Cruz, Rael

architectural space

permeability

natural and geopolitical intersections

design

construction

porosity

GENDER-BODY-TECHNOLOGY
Bieman

technological dimension

resistance

space as medium

BORDER ECOLOGIES
Cunningham

personalized

ELASTIC FRONTIERS
Weizman

conflict

violence of exploitation

unfixed lines

atomized

portable

3D spatialization of power

violence of separation

space-time dispersion

EMBODIED BORDERS
Popescu

mobile

AIRPORT
Salter

symbol

WALLS/FORTRESS
Brown, Vallet

post-national

SMART BORDERS
Topak et al.

DIGITAL BORDER
Amoore et al.

multiple sites

post-territorial

highly technological

spatial stretching

FIG. 1.1 Diagram of (selected) spatial concepts developed in border studies during the 21ˢᵗ century. Source: image by author.

Among them the relational dimension has occupied a prominent position in the theorisation of national borders and their spatial extension since the second half of the 20th century. The integration of time in the production of a lived space,[4] the study of social interactions, and the centrality of relations as embedded practices of phenomena[5] have progressively distanced borders from the idea of territorial fixity. New approaches to thinking about space have disrupted the opposition and hierarchies that separate the local from the global and place from space. They have introduced the possibility of considering wider relational arrangements beyond national limits, refusing static notions of demarcation that exclusively originate from political decision-making processes.[6] This change is also reflected in a revision of terminology, shifting attention to practices of differentiation, which are best expressed by the verb "bordering", rather than the noun "border".[7]

As shown in the diagram above, the relational approach re-envisions the space of borders as a "socio-geographic area", in the words of Vladimir Kolossov, "in which the most active interactions and conflicts between economic, cultural, legal, and political systems take place".[8] The border, in this sense, comes to resemble a "borderland", a region with unfixed margins, in which geographies and political systems overlap, expand, and redefine the limits of space.[9]

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[4]   See: Henri Lefebvre, *La Production de l'Espace: Société et Urbanisme* (Paris: Édition Anthropos, 1974).

[5]   See: Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage, 2005): 10. The work of Massey is particularly relevant for the development of the concept of spatial formation, as it analyses relations as practices of negotiation and struggle, in which both spatial and political matters intertwine. These aspects are examined in more detail in: Doreen Massey, "Power-Geometry and a Progressive Sense of Place," in *Mapping the Future. Local Cultures Global Changes,* edited by John Bird, Barry Curtis, Tim Putnam, Lisa Tickner (New York: Routledge, 1993): 60-69, and in: Doreen Massey, "Geographies of Responsibility," *Geografiska Annaler* 86 B, no.1 (2004): 5-18, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0435-3684.2004.00150.x.

[6]   See: David Newman, "Borders and Bordering: Towards an Interdisciplinary Dialogue," *European Journal of Social Theory* 9, no. 2 (2006): 171-186, https://doi.org/10.1177/1368431006063331.

[7]   See, in particular, the work of Henk Van Houtum in: Henk Van Houtum and Ton Van Naerssen, "Bordering, Ordering and Othering", *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie* 93, no. 2 (2002): 125–36, doi: https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9663.00189, and: Henk Van Houtum, "The Geopolitics of Borders and Boundaries", *Geopolitics*, 10, no. 4 (2005): 672-679, https://doi.org/10.1080/14650040500318522.

[8]   Vladimir Kolossov, "Theoretical Limology: Postmodern Analytical Approaches," *Diogenes* 210 (2006): 15, https://doi.org/10.1177/0392192106065968.

[9]   Etienne Balibar, "Europe as Borderland," Environment and Planning D: Society and Space 27, no. 2 (2009): 190-215, https://doi.org/10.1068/d13008.

The integration of relational thought in border discourse complicates the spatial sense of national borders and observes how multiple, heterogeneous, and dynamic human interactions unfold. In these early theorisations, however, it is possible to notice how the notion of space, its manifestations, and transformations are still strongly dependent on the action of human agents. The main focus is actually directed towards the socio-political dimension of changing relationships, while the matter of space fades into the background. The present doctoral study, instead, emphasises the importance of searching for the spatial-material component within relational arrangements, to place border spatiality at the centre of the inquiry. It examines how the structuring and re-structuring of connections among socio-political and discursive matters are inseparably related to the concrete spatial form of borders, yet, they are not its cause.

With this understanding of relationality, the present study values the contribution of the concept of "borderscapes" to the ongoing discourse.[10] Rethinking borders as borderscapes not only achieves the imagination of a different spatiality which is fluid and mobile, but also restructures the notion of scale. Borderscapes move between the global and the domestic and shift the point of view from the state's margins to other concrete sites of differentiation and exclusion. The concept dialogues with the earlier theories, which have brought attention to bordering practices within wider geographical spaces. But it advances their findings by deepening the role of temporality in the transformation of borders and their performances. By questioning not what the border is but rather what the border does and produces, borderscapes shift the focus to a reality in progress with a future orientation. In other words, the concept opens to the becoming of the border.[11]

Within the scope of this thesis, the concept of becoming is crucial not only to address temporality and dynamicity in connection with the spatiality of borders (an aspect already expressed by the relational thought and the borderscapes concept). More importantly, it entails the idea that difference may take over established structures and open to further material transformations. Becoming allows understanding space in another way, as to imagine alternative forms of organisation, life, and inhabitation.[12] This reinforces the idea of space as performative, differential in itself, and open ended.

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10 See: Rajaram and Grundy-Warr, *Borderscapes*, xxiv-xxv; Chiara Brambilla, "Exploring the Critical Potential of the Borderscapes Concept," *Geopolitics* 20, no.1 (2015): 20, doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/1465 0045.2014.884561.

11 Brambilla, op. cit., 26.

12 Elizabeth Grosz, *Architecture from the Outside: Essays on Virtual and Real Space* (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 2001): 7-9.

While the general concept of becoming draws from the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari,[13] an interesting and more specific application to space is offered by Elizabeth Grosz in *Architecture from the Outside*.[14] In Grosz's book, the recognition of difference within space (and time) disrupts ideas of measurability, infinite divisibility, and homogeneity, which are traditionally connected to it.[15] Through the concept of becoming, Grosz rethinks space as mobile, heterogeneous, multiple, yet, characterised by specificity and contingency. As she explains, "space, like time, is emergence and eruption, oriented not to the ordered, the controlled, the static, but to the event, to movement or action".[16] The acknowledgement of difference, movement, and change within space are particularly powerful when applied to the study of specific manifestations of borders. They push towards the search for other conceptualisations in both theoretical and material terms and underline the necessity for new methods to approach borders in becoming.

Among more recent studies, Thomas Nail's kino-political method engages with becoming by examining the border itself as a mobile entity.[17] The motion of the border, along with the agency of political bodies, human and non-human actors, reorganises migratory flows while materially modifying the two sides it separates.[18] From this perspective, matter and movement come to be part of the same assemblage and thus of the same transformative process.

The study of mobility and, more specifically, the way movement characterises the space of borders is detailed even more in the work of Nishat Awan. By connecting relational approaches to a spatial understanding, Awan shifts the frame of observation from the technology of separation to a wider space in becoming.[19] As displayed in the diagram (fig. 1.1), the concept of "border topologies" values transformability, connectivity, and multiplicity in both theoretical terms and in terms of permeability of spatial systems.

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13   Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003). The concept of becoming will be deepened later in this introduction in the paragraphs dedicated to methodology and throughout the entire dissertation, in connection with the concepts of virtuality and actualisation.

14   Grosz, *Architecture from the Outside*.

15   Ibid. 114.

16   Ibid. 116.

17   Thomas Nail, *Theory of the Border* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

18   See: Thomas Nail, "Moving Borders," in *Debating and Defining Borders: Philosophical and Theoretical Perspectives*, edited by Anthony Cooper and Søren Tinning (New York: Routledge, 2020): 196-198.

19   See: Nishat Awan, "Introduction to Border Topologies," *GeoHumanities* 2, no.2 (2016): 279-283, https://doi.org/10.1080/2373566X.2016.1232172.

Topology, in this way, seeks a connection with notions of ecology, according to which the making and re-making of social, political, economic boundaries intersect landscapes and natural features.[20] Border topologies place space and movement at the centre of the analysis and propose an alternative method of both investigation and visualisation.[21]

In the study of borders, the topological approach also helps explaining dynamic processes of filtering, exclusion, hierarchy, and partitioning. Mezzadra and Neilson, in particular, emphasise the heterogeneity implicated in the concept of topology to study the various forms that a differential modulation of inclusion and movement generates.[22] According to this interpretation, the space of borders develops and complicates into a multitude of holding zones, "borderzones",[23] or "archipelagos",[24] which function as laboratories for the enforcement of special norms. These comprise a manifold of concrete, precarious sites of in/exclusion that turn the spatiality of the border into a "regime" of migration control that can be diffuse, porous, and ever-expanding.[25]

The relevance of relational dynamicity and becoming as characters of borders' spatiality show the progressive engagement of researchers and academics in rethinking bordering processes and performances both at the level of meaning and, to a certain extent, of matter. By searching for difference within established structures and analysing the various manifestations of boundaries, such approaches push the idea of complexity and openness beyond the socio-political arena, extending them to the nature of space itself. Nevertheless, and with the exception of a few cases (such as Awan's understanding of topology), the main investigative focus of most of these studies is still inscribed within the humanities and the socio-political field.

20   On the concept of border ecologies see: Hilary Cunningham, "Permeabilities, Ecology, and Geopolitical Boundaries," in *A Companion to Border Studies*, edited by Thomas M. Wilson and Hastings Donnan (Wiley Blackwel, 2012): 371-386, https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118255223.ch21.

21   Nishat Awan, "Diasporic Experience and the Need for Topological Methods," in *Architecture and Movement: The Dynamic Experience of Buildings and Landscapes,* edited by Peter Blundell Jones and Mark Meagher (New York: Routledge, 2015): 251-257, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315764771.

22   See: Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, "Between Inclusion and Exclusion: On the Topology of Global Space and Borders," *Theory, Culture & Society* 29, no. 4–5 (2012): 58–75. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276412443569.

23   Ibid. 69. See also: Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, *Border as a Method or the Multiplication of Labour* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013): 235.

24   Alison Mountz, "The Enforcement Archipelago: Detention, Haunting, and Asylum on Islands," *Political Geography* 30 (2011): 118-128, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2011.01.005.

25   See: Nicos Trimikliniotis, Dimitris Parsanoglou, and Vassilis S. Tsianos, "Mobile Commons and/in Precarious Spaces: Mapping Migrant Struggles and Social Resistance," *Critical Sociology* 42, no. 7–8 (2016): 1035–49. https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920515614983, and: Vassilis Tsianos and Serhat Karakayali, "Transnational Migration and the Emergence of the European Border Regime: An Ethnographic Analysis," *European Journal of Social Theory* 13, no. 3 (2010): 373–87. https://doi.org/10.1177/1368431010371761.

This runs a risk of failing to characterise in detail the space of borders, their material design and construction, as well as the different forms of agency involved in their formation. A similar limitation also affects those studies that examine the functioning and malfunctioning of walls, fences, and barriers.[26] In these cases, even though physical aspects are addressed through the building of a concrete division, the main agential power is identified in the hands of governments and institutions.

When it comes to the material and spatial dimension of borders, the discipline of architecture has offered useful lenses to investigate the violence of separation, as well as daily practices of inhabitation across nations. The first, for instance, is examined in the work of Eyal Weizman, which gives centrality to the geographic and architectural features of Gaza and the West Bank.[27] The work of Weizman undoubtedly presents a very detailed approach to the militarisation of space in a particularly violent border zone. There, separation is not only expressed by the linear extension of the wall, but it extends from the earth's surface to underground tunnels and air surveillance. His architectural analysis values the specificity of the context in political, geographic, and topographic terms. Nevertheless, the emphasis of spatial transformations concentrates on the political rationale and planning. Space seems to be a tool of human intervention, which lacks the capacity to activate new transformations. This approach excludes the possibility of the space's own becoming and the performative emergence of difference.

From the side of architectural practice, instead, the experimental and provocative works of Teddy Cruz and Ronald Rael consider the "borderland" as an urban site.[28] Design experimentations integrate the analysis of the border as a complex urban fabric, in which everyday building practices, informal economies, and settlements intersect the militarisation of space. In their work, spatial analysis supports the study of various, overlapping manifestations of the border, in which political struggles, historical traces, and cultures intermingle. Considering material and social, subjective and objective features of space, architecture's design and analytical methods help to map a "condition",[29] more than a site, that considers the complexity of forms and interpretations.

26   See for instance: Wendy Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* (New York: Zone Books, 2010), and: Elisabeth Vallet, "Border Walls and the Illusion of Deterrence," in *Open Borders: In Defense of Free Movement*, edited by Reece Jones (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 2019): 156-168.

27   Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation* (London: Verso, 2007).

28   See for instance: Teddy Cruz and Anne Boddington, eds. *Architecture of the borderlands*, Architectural design 69, no. 7-8 (Chichester, West Sussex: Academy Editions, 1999).

29   See: Marc Schoonderbeek, "Complexity and Simultaneity. The Border as Spatial Condition," *Territorio* 72, no.1 (2015): 95-100, DOI: 10.3280/TR2015-072015.

Nevertheless, in the ever-growing implementation and sophistication of bordering techniques and the discourses around them, the materiality and design of borders cannot be limited to the architectural object of separation or the ground where it appears. Highly technological systems of control concretely intervene in the reorganisation of temporal and spatial practices of bordering. These achieve rapid dispersion, movement, and expansion of bordering actions without, however, implying a dematerialisation of border structures. Technological operations can concentrate in specific sites, such as airports, or physically stretch the scale of control from the infinitely small to the globally large.[30] Integrating the study of space with the technological and digital realm of borders can powerfully highlight the relationships that link human and non-human bodies, tools, environments, and selected modes of surveillance.[31]

In the present doctoral thesis, searching for the connections between the spatial-material and the technological-digital is with the intention to expand the field of agency and responsibility to non-human entities, critically address the link between expertise, knowledge, and meaning and recognise the role of financial resources and material availability in the concrete shaping of borders.

To summarise, and as figure 1.1 shows, the various concepts addressing the spatial dimension of borders tend to overlook the possible links among relationality, becoming, and materiality. Most of these qualities of space are studied separately or the attention focuses on one sole aspect over the others. In other words, the ongoing challenge in the study of borders' spatiality is that of considering relationality, becoming, and materiality together, so as to understand the border as a spatial system and a spatial process. The present thesis claims that this problem can be addressed by inquiring into the spatial-material dimension of borders, acknowledging its ongoing becoming. This means placing space at the centre of both theoretical and empirical analyses to re-think its conceptualisation, design, and material manifestations, while calling attention to its own agency and performativity.

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[30] Louise Amoore, Stephen Marmura, Mark B. Salter, "Editorial: Smart Borders and Mobilities: Spaces, Zones, Enclosures," *Surveillance & Society* 5, no. 2 (2002): 96-101, https://doi.org/10.24908/ss.v5i2.3429.

[31] In this sense, the written and visual production of Ursula Biemann is a relevant example, especially for what concerns the gender-body-technology relation. See: Ursula Biemann, "Performing the Border: On Gender, Transnational Bodies and Technology," *Rethinking Marxism* 1, no.1 (2010): 1-14, https://doi.org/10.1080/089356902101242044.

1.3 Research Question and Objective

As mentioned earlier, one of the shortcomings of existing studies in rethinking and documenting the space of borders is to be found in their disciplinary framing. Most of the research focusing on border spatiality develops within the fields of the humanities, migration studies, and social sciences. This implies that many of these works remain functional to answer questions of a socio-political nature. On the other hand, the study of borders is still marginal within those disciplines that are deeply committed to the analysis of space, its design, and material construction, such as architecture and urban studies. Therefore, to position and guide the research on borders across space, the present doctoral study poses the following question:

How can the spatial-material knowledge of the discipline of architecture foster a study of the border as a spatial formation and include a more in-depth understanding of the matter of space in the ongoing debate on borders?

The answering of the research question orients the goal of the thesis in two directions. First, it aims at rethinking the border itself as a complex spatial system and a spatial process, namely, a formation of space. This means inscribing the border in a wide and growing net of social, political, geographic, technological, and historical relationships and, at the same time, acknowledging its own material process of becoming. In this sense, the border does not only transform per effect of human actions and relational interaction. Its own matter is in becoming and, as such, it advances the border's conceptual and material transformation. Second, the method designed in this thesis approaches the border as a spatial system in becoming. The goal of this doctoral thesis is therefore onto-epistemological. In the effort to understand the border as a spatial system (ontological scope) the research dynamically shapes the way of knowing it (epistemological scope). Such an approach recognises that to understand the spatial becoming of the system, the method must also change, functioning as a material practice rather than an abstract framework.[32] In the material engagement with the border as a spatial system, the onto-epistemological approach acknowledges the responsibility of affecting it, while failing to comprehensively grasp its complexity. The entire doctoral research, therefore, can be understood as a methodological exploration: a heuristic device in progress, open to future adaptations and extensions.

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[32] Karen M. Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway. Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007): 89. Cf. also with the notion of "processual ontology" in: Brambilla, "Exploring the Critical Potential of the Borderscapes Concept," 26.

To address the main research question and the building of the method, five secondary questions have been formulated. Each of these investigates specific spatial characters of the border: scale, measure, visibility, plasticity, and multiplicity. While the specific meaning of the "characters" will be discussed in the paragraphs dedicated to the methodology, the questions are formulated as follows:

1   **Scale** – *How are spatial and political scales manipulated in the performance of interconnected bordering functions?*

2   **Measure** – *What are the tools used to understand and represent the spatial extension of borders, and how do they affect the design of border structures?*

3   **Visibility** – *How do surveillant regimes of vision impact the spatial dimension of borders in both conceptual and material terms?*

4   **Plasticity** – *How does the spatial form of the border morph through the modulation of control and the endurance of migratory movements?*

5   **Multiplicity** – *What other forms of space are possible along and across borders, beyond those of control and containment?*

The questions above do not aim at defining the border through a precise, quantifiable set of spatial features. They serve to map different fields of action, in which particular performances and negotiations render the spatial dimension of the border manifest and expose the constructed nature of traditional spatial parameters. The fields in which scale, measure, visibility, plasticity, and multiplicity emerge are not separate compartments, but they overlap, collide, and influence one another. In fact, these characters pertain to the same spatial system and are inscribed in the same process of becoming.

Methodology

If the doctoral research itself produces the methodology to study the border as a spatial system, the process and tools of knowing are perforce unfixed and contingent. They must develop the capacity to adapt to a moving phenomenon which is conceptually and materially ambiguous. The methodology, therefore, is not presented here as a rigid and reproducible scheme, but rather it consists of a theoretical and practical path with deviations and loose ends.[33]

Theoretical Foundations

The recent scholarship on critical border studies has increasingly stressed the changing nature of borders, addressing its contingency in both spatial and temporal terms. The concepts of "borderscapes", "border topologies", and "kinopolitics", previously discussed, offer relevant methodological explorations to move the research in this direction. Nevertheless, I agree with Vladimir Kolossov in that the older tradition of studies, which investigates the establishment of lines of division in relation to states' sovereignty, is not to be completely discarded.[34] For this reason, it is important to question how the two interpretations can be considered together and inform one another. The main methodological challenge here lies in the search for openness in the rigidity of fortified border structures, while accounting for material traces of division in shifting bordering practices and cross-border movements.

The answer to this problem is sought in the tradition of architecture theory and practice through the theory of actualisation and the concept of the diagram, as a tool of spatial thinking and analysis. As an architectural tool, the diagram is not only a means of synthetic visualisation (contrary to the colloquial use of the term). It is also a system in which semiotic and material contents are assembled and progressively turn into a concrete form in space. In the architectural practice, the diagram underlies the preliminary phase of design in which spaces, functions, and actions are conceptualised. At this stage, however, the diagram has no substantial dimension,

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[33] This approach aligns and takes inspiration from the idea of "messy method" by: John Law, *After Method. Mess in Social Science Research* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004): 4-9.

[34] Vladimir Kolossov, "Post-Soviet Boundaries: Territoriality, Identity, Security, Circulation," in The *Ashgate Research Companion to Border Studies,* edited by Doris Wastl-Walter (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011): 171-194.

nor does it contain extensive specifications (such as location, size, or volume). The architectural operation of the diagram consists of assembling relationships of a different nature and moving the project from the conceptual imagination, through the design process, to the materialisation in space. In more theoretical terms, the diagram is the tool used to understand the process of actualisation from virtual to actual form. The diagram itself, however, does never reach an actual dimension. It works as an abstract machine, in the words of Deleuze and Guattari,[35] which pertains to the field of virtuality. That is to say the diagram functions as a real structuring of relationships of heterogeneous nature (semiotic and material), yet it is still insubstantial, not actual. It arranges and displays a set of selected external conditions, in which concrete elements and agencies appear and interact. Their very interaction may destabilise and recombine the relational structure of the abstract machine itself.

In the work of Deleuze and his readers the functioning of the abstract machine is commonly connected to the features of an assemblage:[36] the concept and logic that theorises the ontological multiplicity of phenomena, ideas, and entities. While it is not possible to condense here the theory and logic that define the concept of assemblage in the work of Deleuze and Guattari,[37] one can clarify two fundamental aspects. The first consists of understanding ontological multiplicity not as the ensemble of elements of a different nature, hence, as simple plurality, but as the capacity of concrete elements and conditioning abstract relations of moving and changing. Second, due to this very movement and destabilisation of a condition of equilibrium, the assemblage is always becoming different within and from itself.

The logic of the assemblage and, particularly, the work of the "state assemblage" have had a strong resonance in political theory to analyse power dynamics and their differential functioning.[38] The assemblage has also proved helpful to conceptualise the ontological multidimensionality intrinsic to borders in topological terms[39] or from the perspective of movement,[40] as mentioned earlier in this introduction. A different application of the concept in the theorisation of borders' multiplicity comes from

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35 The theoretical functioning of the diagram draws from: Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault* (University of Minnesota Press, 2006). The concept of the abstract machine does not have a synthetic definition, but part of its capacities can be found in: Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 67-71.

36 Nail, Thomas. "What is an Assemblage?" *SubStance* 46, no. 1 (2017): 21-37. doi:10.1353/sub.2017.0001.

37 These are mostly discussed in *A Thousand Plateaus*, op. cit.

38 More specifically, the changing capacity of the assemblage and state assemblage in recognised in processes of territorialisation, de-territorialisation, and re-territorialisation discussed in: Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Nomadology: The War Machine* (Foreign Agents Series New York: Semiotext(e) 1986).

39 As in the work of Mezzadra and Neilson, and Awan. See footnotes 19 and 22.

40 See the work of Thomas Nail, previously mention in footnotes 17 and 18.

social semiotics. Sohn, for instance, discusses how the border may assume different meanings, according to the different practices attached to it.[41]

The theoretical framework of this thesis shifts the focus from the assemblage (whose multiplicity is recognised and validated) to actualisation: namely, the very transformative process and principles that underlie the becoming of a complex spatial system, to understand its multiplicity as performative capacity of difference. In the work of Deleuze,[42] actualisation is the process which leads to the genesis of form (morphogenesis) from the virtual to the actual realm. For the French philosopher, everything (an idea, concept, or entity) is a multiplicity and, thus, it contains difference.[43] The latter should not be confused with simple diversity, but indicates a productive force, which exists within the idea or entity; it divides it as much as it brings its elements together.[44] The differential elements within the multiplicity exist one in relation to the other, and the very relationships that hold them together constitute the condition of virtuality: the real (yet not actual) structure of form.[45]

In spatial terms, the diagram is understood as the virtual dimension of the border's actualisation. The virtuality of the diagram and its functioning are discussed in chapter two. In this chapter, the entanglement of discourses, policies, and their genealogies is mapped to explain how determinate sets of meaning are connected and relationships are fixed, as to mobilise a specific understanding of the border, its space, and the way to move across it. The establishment of a deliberate relational continuity becomes the abstract structure; hence, the virtual dimension of the border's spatiality as it is produced in the logic of control.

As explained earlier, however, virtuality does not possess a substantial form as the actual dimension. For virtuality to actualise, it must be differentiated. The very presence of difference within multiplicities disrupts any condition of equilibrium and allows matter to become an active agent of transformation.[46] This means that form is not imposed from the outside; structure itself cannot be fixed since it undergoes its own, material becoming. Actualisation, however, is not the direct passage from

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41 Christophe Sohn, "Navigating Borders' Multiplicity: The Critical Potential of the Assemblage," *Area* 48, no.2 (2016): 183–189. https://doi.org/10.1111/area.12248.

42 In particular: Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (London and New York: Continuum, 2001).

43 Ibid., 182.

44 Joe Hughes, *Deleuze's Difference and Repetition* (London and New York: Continuum, 2009): 41.

45 Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition,* 208.

46 Cf. Manuel DeLanda, "Extensive Borderlines and Intensive Borderlines," *Architectural Design* 69, no. 7-8 (1999): 78-79.

virtuality as a whole to actual, substantial form,[47] in the same way as the diagram does not directly translate into a concrete space. Actualisation progressively affects certain sets of relationships and generates "actual qualities", that is to say, a concentrated quantity.[48]

In this thesis, the aforementioned spatial characters of scale, measure, visibility, plasticity, and multiplicity are understood as actual qualities. These characters are observed in particular relational entanglements that actualise through the operation of specific agents (human, non-human, technological). Chapter three examines the emergence and manipulation of scale, measure, and visibility through the work of digital and visual infrastructures. As actual qualities, scale, measure and visibility attempt to contain the spatial dimension of the border within extensive quantities, following the structure diagrammatically predisposed by policies. These qualities, however, maintain a strong dependence from the virtual, diagrammatic dimension. Differently, the spatial characters of plasticity and multiplicity pertain to another line of actualisation, in which the spatial form of the border becomes substantial, detaches itself again from equilibrium, and starts a new becoming. The actualisation of specific spatial characters are discussed in the introduction to chapter three, four, and six, connecting the processes outlined in each chapter to the general framework of actualisation. Through the analysis of particular relational fields, technological operations, and actual qualities, the spatial form of the border becomes progressively manifest as multiple and in becoming.

In other words, scale, measure, visibility, plasticity, and multiplicity enhance the actualisation of the border as a spatial system: a process which this thesis refers to as the *spatial formation* of the border. Through the concept of spatial formation, this thesis accentuates the specific application in space of the more general "actualisation", which can interest any phenomena. By using the spatial formation of the border as both a concept and a method, the study opens to further expansion and growing complexity. Spatial formation, in fact, does not indicate an overarching process that leads the becoming of the border from an established beginning to a defined end. Rather, it makes room for other sets of relationships to be observed in the ongoing process of becoming, potentially actualise in the future, and originate different (spatial) forms.

Although actualisation is proposed as the theoretical framework of this study and guides the organisation of content from virtual to actual, it is important to remark that the most valuable aspect of it is recognised in its capacity of connection and

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47 See: Hughes, *Deleuze's Difference and Repetition,* 142.

48 Ibid., 145-146.

expansion. In other words, the tracing of different lines of actualisation serves as a base for the connection of other theoretical sources and approaches throughout the argumentation. This is particularly visible in chapter four and six of this thesis, in which the becoming of space entangles with other theoretical concepts to support the analysis of a system characterised by growing complexity. An example can be found in the concept of plasticity, elaborated by Catherine Malabou, which is introduced in chapter four. The concept provides the theoretical ground to understand the material interaction of multiple agents in the de-formation of the actual form of the border. It serves to highlight the non-correspondence between substantial and diagrammatic spatial form, and marks the beginning of a new becoming. In chapter six, moreover, the concept of habit remarks the mutual affective capacity of different systems involved in the formation of the border, showing how the becoming of space intersects the becoming of bodies and minds.

Therefore, drawing from actualisation, the concept of spatial formation has the purpose of bringing different theories, disciplinary angles, and methods into conversation, rather than choosing one sole preferential or overarching viewpoint. This thesis wants to engage with the border's complexity taking distance from any form of simplification and division, including epistemological ones. Constraining research into a defined methodological or theoretical positioning runs the risk of becoming a fertile ground for the reproduction and reinforcement of other sort of boundaries, be they disciplinary or ideological.

The choice of actualisation as framework of the spatial formation of the border aims at countering any sort of boundary making practices and related risks of incommunicability. Actually, the concept of spatial formation entangles the reinforcement of the border and its very disruption within the same transformative process. From this perspective it aims at addressing what has been earlier mentioned as ongoing methodological challenge —namely, searching for openness in the rigidity of borders structures without overlooking the permanence of traces of separation in cross-border dynamics. This, however, should not be misinterpreted as an attempt at blurring the responsibilities of national and supranational institutions for the militarisation of space and the structural perpetration of violence. Nor does it erase the actions and struggles of those who oppose it. On the contrary, understanding borders as formations enlarges the net of responsibility across different genealogies of exclusion, multi-level discursive and material practices, and epistemological and technological operations. In addition, it broadens the ground of opposition by considering the impossibility of separation from within the process of formation itself.

Empirical Research: The Hungarian-Serbian Border

Diagrammatic thinking and actualisation constitute the theoretical base of the methodology, but they do not exhaust the analysis of the concrete, spatial dimension of the border. To achieve this goal, theory is integrated with the empirical research of a case study. This, however, is not a way to test and prove the infallibility of the theory. The empirical research serves to observe specific material manifestations of the border and discuss the uncertainty related to the study of a phenomenon in becoming. Before diving into the methods of empirical research, some clarifications about the selection and relevance of the case are needed.

In the scholarly anxiety about novelty, selecting a case never studied before, yet emblematic enough to attract the attention of an academic audience, is a rather challenging decision (if not an impossible one). This thesis, perhaps fortunately, was exempted from this problem, since it started in the context of an ongoing project, whose case studies were already defined. Nevertheless, studying borders as spatial formations comes with the implication that any case has the potential to provide valuable and unique results, as well as inevitable and unbridgeable limitations. The study of any case will always be partial, incapable of containing the complexity of the spatial form of borders. As a space in becoming, the border is multiple, mobile, and differential in and of itself. It changes in the very moment it is being observed. On the other hand, while it is possible to trace connections and similarities with other cases (regarding, for instance, political discourses, legislative tools, or technologies) any border will be unique and unpredictable in the way it actualises in space. In the light of this, the present thesis values material specificity and temporal contingency; it dives into the complexity of one border condition and considers a comparative approach unnecessary.

The case study used to empirically observe the process of spatial formation is the southern border of Hungary, particularly, the section dividing it from neighbouring Serbia. This rather small border section became the centre of media debate and a symbol of the European response to the so-called "migration crisis"[49] in the second half of 2015. In that year, the Hungarian government started the construction of a metal fence to interrupt the transit of migrants, who were headed to Western Europe walking across the countries of the Balkan Peninsula.

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[49] See footnote 3.

The relevance of this case can be identified on at least two levels. From a political lens, this intervention, along with many others occurring not far away,[50] shamefully depicts an image of Europe that contradicts its foundational principles of democracy, safety, justice, and free movement. The building of the Hungarian fence highlights a region at the margins of the EU, where the unsolved questions of the integration process (such as the accession of former Yugoslav countries or the difficult economic liberalisation of the most recent members) became fertile ground for the success of illiberal democracies and the rise of anti-migrant sentiments. In addition to the political matters, the fortification of this border section suddenly called attention to a new axis of refugee-related migration to Europe.[51] The inland migratory path, colloquially labelled as the "Balkan route",[52] was added to the more notorious boat crossings in the Mediterranean Sea. The emergence of the route across the Balkan Peninsula complicates the linear understanding of the "external border" of the European Union. It exposes a more extended area of transit and control, in which spatial transformations are observable. The political and geographic specificity of the case offers the possibility to analyse discourses, technologies, actions of control, and modes of moving and inhabitation as material elements of a spatial system in formation.

In the selected case study, actualisation and becoming are not an abstraction but a reality. The conditions on the ground change rapidly and daily. Changes concern the redirection of routes and smuggling networks, the discovery of new crossing points, regulations, and political decisions. To navigate such a shifting context, the research refuses to reduce developments to a precise structure which follows a linear, chronological, or causal ordering of events. Instead, it values their relations and

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50 Such as the construction of fences between Greece and Macedonia, Bulgaria and Turkey, Macedonia and Serbia, as well as the more temporary barriers across Slovenia and Croatia, Austria and Slovenia and, more recently, Poland and Belarus.

51 See: Dragan Umec, Claudio Minca and Danica Šantić, "The Refugee Camp as Geopolitics: The Case of Preševo (Serbia)," in *Mediterranean Mobilities*, edited by Maria Paradiso (Springer, 2019): 37, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-89632-8_4.

52 Although the attention of media has only recently focused on the Balkan route, its origins date back to the times of the Hasburg and Ottoman empires, when the corridor was connecting the West and the East. Regarding refugee-related movements, the route used to be crossed from West to East during the years of the World War II. The direction of the path was inverted in 1960s, when labour migrants, mainly from Turkey and Greece, started moving towards Western European countries following guest work agreements. However, it is after the Yugoslav Wars in 1990s that a large number of refugees and asylum seekers resumed this path in search for safety in Europe. In the same years, Albanian nationals, Iraqi, Afghani, Turkish and other nationals, joined those who were fleeing the former Yugoslav Federation walking across the Balkans. Since then, the events of the Arab Spring, the outbreak of the Syrian War and other dramatic events across the world made an ever-growing and varied group of migrants walk the same route and attract global attention. See: Marijana Hameršak et al., "The Forging of the Balkan Route: Contextualizing the Border Regime in the EU Periphery," *movements* 5, no.1 (2020): 9-29.

composition, by starting from the "middle" of the ongoing process and observing the way things are, still in formation.[53] Such an approach intertwines in the border's formation different genealogies, images of fragmented experiences, places, and situations instead of giving a comprehensive history of events.

The empirical research started in 2020, five years after the official decision of the Hungarian government to build a border fence. This moment coincided with the first peak of the Covid-19 pandemic, a phase that added an extra layer of control, restrictions, and immobility to the already fortified border zone. For this reason, the empirical study has developed in two phases: remotely and on-site. The first phase was dedicated to the collection and revision of documentary sources, including academic publications on the case,[54] legislative documents, NGO reports, and online news. This moment of forced immobility served to remotely establish contact with local and international organisations based in Serbia and Hungary. Through online conversations and email exchange, I was able to collect some additional information especially concerning the latest developments in place. Textual materials and oral communications were also integrated with research on visual documentations. Photographic projects such as "I Am Warning You" by Rafał Milach, "Domestic Borders" by Tommaso Rada, "Trans Europe Migration" by Rocco Rorandelli, and "Yunan" by Nicola Zolin have offered a preliminary idea of the conditions on the ground.

The later on-site phase of research includes the visits to Serbia (from September 3 to 18, 2020) and those to Hungary (from January 17 to 24, 2022). The initial idea for the empirical research to conduct in Serbia was that of documenting through the analysis of makeshift encampments the endurance of transit migration across the country, the emergence of new routes, and the related spatial transformations occurring both along the border zone and the nodes of migratory paths. For this scope, the research was expected to be moving, as much as possible, as to grasp the development of a shifting spatiality.

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53 See: Erin Manning, "Towards a Politics of Immediation," *Frontiers in Sociology* 3, no. 42 (2019): 1-11, https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2018.00042.

54 The work of Marta Stojc Mitrovic has been particularly useful to have an overview of the history of Serbian policies, see: Marta Stojic Mitrovic, "The Reception of Migrants in Serbia: Policies, Practices, and Concepts," *Journal of Human Rights and Social Work* 4 (2019): 17-27, https://doi.org/10.1007/s41134-018-0077-0; and the changing dynamics of movement and reception: Marta Stojic Mitrovic and Ela Meh, "The Reproduction of Borders and the Contagiousness of Illegalisation: A Case of a Belgrade Youth Hostel," *Glasnik Etnografskog Instituta* 63, no.3 (2015): 623-639, https://doi.org/10.2298/GEI1503623S. Other publications have offered detailed and critical information on the Serbian reception system, to name the most relevant ones, see: Umec et al., "The Refugee Camp as Geopolitics", and: Danilo Mandić, "A Migrant "Hot potato" System: The Transit Camp and Urban Integration in a Bridge Society," *Journal of Urban Affairs* 43, no. 6 (2021): 799-815, https://doi.org/10.1080/07352166.2018.1490153.

Conscious of my limitations concerning both being unfamiliar with the context and, especially, being inexperienced with the research involvement of vulnerable groups (specifically, migrants in transit, undocumented, or with undecided political status), the empirical research was preceded by consultations with several NGOs engaged in the provision of services for refugee and migrant communities of Serbia. Eventually, after having established a contact with the Belgrade based organisation Klikaktiv,[55] I asked the NGO to act as a facilitator of my site visits. The choice of getting in touch with this organisation was related to both the local rootedness of the team and its political commitment to asylum rights, which facilitated my understanding of ongoing dynamics in the specific context of Serbia. These two aspects translate into a practice which blurs the boundaries of humanitarianism and activism, and it is committed to a constant, mobile presence on the ground. This approach, in particular, has helped me to have a sense of how inhabitation and crossing practices assume different features across the country, in relation to the distance of the border, policing strategies, or topographic features.

From my side, I preferred not to confuse my role with that of the Klikaktiv team —who is actually competent for providing legal support— during the visits and especially not to interfere with the provision of this service. The recognition of my external position to the dynamics on the ground does not imply a search for objectivity. Rather, it stresses the impossibility of having a complete understanding of them. My choice for the empirical research was based on transparency towards both facilitators and participants to the same extent. In practical terms, this consisted first in introducing myself to Klikaktiv, my university affiliation, the scope of the doctoral research, in general, and the empirical work, specifically, along with the future use of the information to collect on-site. On the field, instead, the introduction of both volunteers and me was always translated to those presents by Klikaktiv interpreters at the moment of arrival in makeshift settlements. This added to the choice of not conducting interviews, but rather engaging in informal conversations often initiated by participants themselves. In this way, I considered appropriate to detach from a hierarchical questioning-answering mode of interaction, leaving those presents the freedom of choosing whether to get involved in the research or not and how much

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55 KlikAktiv - Center for Development of Social Policies is a non-governmental and non-profit organisation based in Belgrade, Serbia, since 2014. The activity of Klikaktiv focuses on free legal counselling, psychological support, and humanitarian aid (provision of food, tents, blankets, hygiene items) to various vulnerable groups, including people on the move, asylum seekers, and refugees in Serbia. With the constant presence on the ground (currently reaching migrants who are accommodated informally along the northern borders between Serbia and Croatia, Hungary, and Romania) and the direct communication with people on the move, Klikaktiv engages in monitoring and reporting on migration developments, state policies and new routes across the Balkans, as well as episodes of violence and systematic push-backs from local authorities. Source: https://klikaktiv.org/about. Accessed on 25-11-2022.

time spending in conversation. Therefore, the methods of participant observation, informal conversation, and the collection of photographic material were preferred and performed throughout the entire investigation on-site.[56] As a result of these choices and in line with the main focus of the research (the spatial dimension of borders), the stories of those I met on the field are used to highlight the relationship between particular desires and actions of movement and specific material-spatial features of the sites in which those emerge.

The conditions are definitely different when it comes to the visits along the border on Hungarian territory. Being the southern border of Hungary a military zone, the access to the fence and its surroundings is only possible upon authorisation of the border police. The communication with the police headquarters of the counties of southern Hungary (Bács-Kiskun and Csongrád-Csanád) was facilitated by the University of Public Service Ludovika in the person of Col. Lt. Nemeth, who was also responsible for guiding me on-site. The preparation phase comprised four months of negotiation and communication, at the end of which I was asked to hand in a detailed plan of visit. My ideal survey of the Hungarian southern border would have involved a journey moving parallel to the fence for its entire length. This plan, however, was never carried out due to the restriction of my visit to few selected and previously agreed upon locations, which rendered the empirical work rather fragmented and partial.

During both visits in Serbia and Hungary, I was able to consistently document the spatiality of the different sites through photographs and personal notes. The spatiality of sites is understood as a system, in which social, political, geographic, topographic, and material conditions entangle and are brought to the fore in the form of a narration in the first person. Space, therefore, constitutes the focus of this empirical research, not to be confused with an ethnographic fieldwork that places at its centre individual life experiences. The spatial settings that in large part of ethnographic research serve as background of migratory experiences here are displayed in the foreground from a reversed perspective. This choice, however, does not aim at ignoring the presence of people at the border. Rather, it could be interpreted as the predisposition of a material ground for those studies that closely engage with migration to connect.

In these terms, the empirical research can be understood as a series of architectural site surveys: a concentrated, dense, and relatively short mode of investigation that is specifically oriented to analyse the spatial nature of phenomena and considers the

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[56] More details on the choices and methods of data collection are discussed in chapter five.

possibility of a future transformation to the site under observation. The attention mainly focuses on material traces: elements that testified to movement, crossings, the presence of individuals, or the occurrence of acts of violence. The scope of the site survey and its results is not one of proving some kind of truth or interpreting the experience of others. The findings are scattered and evocative, not translatable or reproducible. The series of site surveys builds a mode of exploration, a practice that is imperfect and unpredictable, in which spaces, stories, and reflections entangle.[57]

This aspect is particularly emphasised in the present dissertation by the choice of a narrative method in the first-person in chapters four and five. The subjective narrative introduces the dimension of the researcher's experience in the theoretical argumentation, bridging physical elements with contingent understandings and reactions to space. The change of narration style is also emphasised graphically, by differentiating the colour of the text. This choice underlines the shift of perspective onto the ground and marks the emergence of a different form of knowledge, which is inevitably subjective, ambiguous, and non-evidentiary. It also reflects a choice of transparency of the author towards the reader: the partiality of the observer's view, the situated nature of research, and the ambiguities of the spatial condition are openly brought to the surface and call for the reader's attention. The narrative instils doubt towards the alleged self-explanatory character of photos and makes room for other layers of interpretation of the material realm.

In chapter four, the narration of the site has a prevalent descriptive connotation and it is based on the researcher's experience at the border: a safe experience and a privilege of moving freely, which also entail a partial comprehension of dynamics on the ground. For this reason, the narrative of the site is intertwined with the theoretical argumentation. In chapter five, instead, the complexity on the ground increases, stories and experiences overlap and multiply. Theory, therefore, is set temporarily aside as to favour the reader's immersion and create a disruption in the argumentation. The latter emphasises the non-correspondence between the virtual dimension of border spatiality and its substantial, actual form. Nevertheless, it is important to remark that the purpose of chapter five is not that of reporting the stories of others and consistently document "what happens beyond the border fence." Rather, the stories that inevitably emerge through the voice of the author contribute to understand how particular atmospheres, desires, and interactions affect and are affected by specific spatial-material conditions.

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[57]   See: Thomas-Bernard Kenniff, "Making Room for Difference: Altering Architectural Research through Interviews and Fieldwork," in *Speaking of Buildings: Oral History in Architectural Research*, edited by Janina Gosseye, Naomi Stead & Deborah van der Plaat (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2019): 175.

Terminology

Dealing with a case study in ongoing transformation is a challenge on many different levels. It renders difficult the planning of activities on-site, the forecast of results and, in general terms, shadows the entire research process with uncertainty. As the state of facts is in dynamic redefinition also the terminology that refers to it undergoes critical revisions. The way to address those who are on the move is certainly part of this problem. While some preferential tendencies emerge from the literature, the academic debate on the appropriate language is still ongoing.[58] This thesis does not engage in a legal categorisation of the terms: "migrant", "refugee", "asylum seekers", or "undocumented". The use of the term "migrant" is generally preferred over the others to emphasise a durable condition of transit, in which there is no alternative but to move. This term does not want to disregard the violence of forced migration. Instead, it addresses the impossibility of containing the multiplicity of reasons which underlie the individual's decision to move and avoids reinforcing discourses of deservingness.

Nevertheless, this choice is neither categorical nor immutable. Throughout the chapters, it is possible to note the use of other terms depending on their role in the argumentation. In chapter two, "asylum seeker" and "refugee" refer to the specific classification imposed by law. In chapters four and six, the term "border crosser" appears with more frequency; it calls attention to the actions, potential or concrete, and reiterates the determination of migrants to move forward. It is therefore important that the approach of openness proposed in the methodology also extends to terminology, considering the possibility of future revisions and adaptations.

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[58]   See, for instance: Heaven Crawley and Dimitris Skleparis, "Refugees, Migrants, neither, both: Categorical Fetishism and the Politics of Bounding in Europe's 'Migration Crisis,'" *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 44, no.1 (2018): 48-64, https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2017.1348224.

1.5 Outline of the Dissertation

Following the theoretical foundations of the border's formation, the entire dissertation is conceived as a diagram, in which discursive and material elements, theoretical and empirical research entangle. The chapters guide the process of spatial formation from the virtual level of discursive relationships to the actual form observed on-site. Each chapter focuses on how the spatial content of relationships actualises, meaning that each one is functional to discuss a different phase of the spatial formation. Although each chapter identifies spatial content within specific fields (such as the legislative, the digital, the technological, etc.), the purpose of the dissertation is not to delve into their details but to observe relational fields in their systemic, diagrammatic composition.

Understood in diagrammatic terms, the structure of the dissertation is not rigid. Each chapter examines the actualisation of particular relationships, which are not causally or chronologically linked to the ones of the previous or following chapter. Lines of actualisation are co-constitutive, intertwined with each other, yet they are independent in the process they activate. The dissertation proposes an organisation of content that, without being causal, accentuates the distinction between virtuality and actuality and progressively unfolds the material and spatial form of the border. Chapters two and three prepare the reader by extracting spatial content from the relational fields that are not commonly associated to the materiality of space (such as those of policy, digital technology, and remote surveillance). The concrete aspects of the border's formation emerge more explicitly in the following chapters, inviting the reader to reconsider the assumptions related to the construction of borders and retrace the links with its virtual dimension.

More specifically, chapter two presents the diagrammatic approach and opens the process of actualisation by rethinking European policies as a diagram of discursive/legislative and material/spatial elements. Positioned in the realm of virtuality, the diagram engages with the organisation and display of relationships. It presents a non-chronological reading of the (hi)stories, instruments, and actions that intervene in the design of the border at the level of discourse. In other words, chapter two investigates the processes that lead to the formation of the meaning of migration, borders, and security and its organisation in the form of knowledge.

Chapter three moves from the production of knowledge to its operation. It examines the functioning of digital tools and technologies of surveillance and analyses the way they re-organise spatial relationships. The operations of digital and

visual infrastructures reassemble knowledge into actual spatial qualities of scale, measure, and visibility. In this way, they predispose space for the design of specific interventions of control. At this stage of formation, scale, measure, and vision are still strongly connected to the diagrammatic structure of policies, hence, to the virtual dimension and do not generate actual form.

In chapter four, a different line of actualisation emerges: namely, that which develops from the interaction of migratory movements and operations of border reinforcement. The attention shifts to the ground, where the border fence appears, and the theoretical argument mingles with experiences, images, and narratives of the site. At this stage of spatial formation, the quality of plasticity provides for the genesis of actual form. This phase of actualisation marks a rupture with the diagrammatic structure and initiates the border's own becoming.

The logbook of site surveys, which constitutes chapter five, accentuates this rupture. It marks a turning point in the argumentation, which reverses the perspective of investigation and faces the conditions on the ground. It changes the tones of narration and accompanies the reader on a close-up encounter with the border from its outer side. The logbook introduces new characters, voices, and stories reorienting the point of view from the general to the specific, from the analytical to the experiential. The choice of inserting the logbook in its entirety, without discussing findings separately in different parts of the dissertation, reiterates that what happens at the border escapes any structural organisation or theoretical explanation. The unpredictability or incomprehensibility of the situation at the border requires particular attention, a total immersion that leaves theory aside and can do without additional commentary.

The following chapter six discusses selected findings and reflections on the site surveys. On the basis of field experiences, it challenges the spatial characters of scale, measure, and visibility as they were conceptualised by the infrastructures of control. Multiplicity is presented here as the main feature of the border's spatial form and enhances a conceptual and material redefinition of the characters in plural terms. Chapter six suggests the application of indexical modes of knowing to approach border spatiality, fostering an indeterminate and ambiguous study of spaces in formation.

The dissertation concludes by discussing the potential of the concept of spatial formation in the current architectural debate on borders, and examines expectations met and limitations of the present doctoral research. Lastly, it addresses the academic audience, particularly architects and border scholars, inviting them to a more committed knowledge exchange.

Tompa (Hungary), January 2022. Source: photo by author.

2 Diagramming Security

Policies of Migration and Border Control

2.1 From Securitisation to Diagram

Since the early 1990s, the study of security has undergone a process of redefinition and reformulation of its main questions.[59] The link between the threat and the threatened branched out into manifold intricate relationships, stretching outside the traditional fields of the state and the military. In 1998, Buzan, Wæver, and De Wilde elaborated a new analytical framework and introduced the concept of securitisation.[60] Inquiring how something comes to count as a problem for security, they abandoned the focus on the threat as a defined object. They stressed, instead, the mechanisms leading to the demarcation of two opposing concepts: the existential threat and the referent object.[61] Their analysis was informed by the post-Cold War condition, in which political agendas evolved and shifted, bringing in non-universal notions of enemy and risk. That prepared the path for a critical approach to theories and methods in security studies, engaging with multiple social, political, institutional,

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[59] Although this thesis does not examine the details of the evolution of security studies, but rather focuses on the notion of securitization, some additional references can be found in the works of: Barry Buzan, *People, States and Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991); Karin, M. Fierke, *Changing Games, Changing Strategies: Critical Investigations in Security* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998); Rob J. B. Walker, "Security, Sovereignty, and the Challenge of World Politics", *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 15, no.1 (1990): 3–27. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40644668.

[60] Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap De Wilde, *Security. A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publisher, 1998).

[61] Ibid., 21-26.

and technological practices. The attention moved towards the performative, the way in which the spheres of security and insecurity can be manipulated.[62] About a decade later, the attacks of 9/11 and the implementation of the Global War on Terrorism expanded even more the meaning of (in)security and threat. Accordingly, the boundaries between discourses and actions of securitisation have become increasingly difficult to discern. The proliferation of actors and the implementation of technologies, both in the individuation and the management of security issues, complicate the framework proposed by Buzan et al.

In this scenario of shifting meanings and growing complexity, the present chapter aims to look into the construction of the "outside" (space) and the "outsider" (individual) as a relational and situated process. This serves to create distance from an emergency approach to the migratory phenomena of 2014-2016. The "outside" and the "outsider" are regarded as part of a long-term process, in which discourses of security and risk are reorganised and specific moments of tension appear. This chapter highlights the turning points in which emergency discourses translated into concrete actions of policy-making. The instrument of policy not only advances the discursive articulation of security, it also fixes roles and functions and prepares for the actualisation of spatial operations.

The context in which the work of policy is observed is the European Union and its surroundings, composed of neighbouring states, candidate countries, and border zones. This reflects a larger spatial-political system that evolves from the state, the territorial realm, to the regional, supra-national scale. In this larger system, spatial and logical relationships undergo a redistribution and redefinition that inevitably affects the understanding and management of security. New connections are formed in a "transnational" and "intergovernmental" field,[63] in which spaces and discourses move. Policy is hence understood as the tool to delimit and stabilise spatial-discursive relationships and allow security to perform by identifying problems to manage, actions and points of application, and agents and hierarchies of power. In this sense, security policies operate not only by means of discourse, but as a legislative tool at the inter-governmental level. They also engage with material and spatial forms, when it comes to the specific spaces where security becomes effective.

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[62]   Jef Huysmans, *The Politics of Insecurity. Fear, Migration and Asylum in the EU* (London: Routledge, 2006): 24; Claudia Aradau, Jef Huysmans, Andrew Neal, and Nadine Voelkner, eds., *Critical Security Methods: New Frameworks for Analysis* (London and New York. Routledge, 2015): 61.

[63]   As regards the notion of transnational European space and the relative management of security issues see: Didier Bigo, "When Two Becomes One: Internal and External Securitizations in Europe", in *International Relations Theory and the Politics of European Integration*, eds. Morten Kelstrup and Michael Williams (London: Routledge, 2000).

By phrasing the problem in these terms, it is possible to interpret the working of policy as *diagrammatic*. The diagram indicates a methodological device to analyse how elements of a heterogeneous nature (i.e., semiotic and material) converge in a specific system or process.[64] This is achieved by focusing on the way the connections among such components are structured, changed, and established. The elements constituting the policy-diagram, in this case, are characterised by items of a discursive nature referring to meaning-making processes.[65] They include discourses on threats and danger, which guide the arrangement of objects and spatial limits of security actions. Objects and boundaries, in turn, form the matter: the spatial and material component of the diagram. Due to the presence of both matter and discourses, policy is not simply an instrument to construct meaning. It also shows the potential for acting on space. Through the articulation of meaning and matter, policy sets the structure for security to perform. This means that policy establishes the relational base through which security operations can be legitimised, planned, and eventually activated.

In the tradition of philosophical and sociological thought, the diagram is one of many concepts that deal with the study of relational systems. Similarly, the "dispositif" in the Foucauldian study of biopolitics,[66] the "assemblage" in Deleuzian terms,[67] or the "network" in the actor-network theory of Bruno Latour,[68] engage with the arrangement of heterogeneous ensembles. In this analysis, nevertheless, the use of the diagram allows understanding in discursive-material relations, in general terms, and their spatial effects, more specifically. The spatial and temporal distribution of relations is examined as a diagram in Deleuze's reading of Foucault—particularly,

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[64] The understanding of diagrammatic functioning proposed in the following analysis draws mainly from the work of Deleuze in: Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault* (University of Minnesota Press, 2006). The concept of the diagram is then related to the architectural application in design processes, through which programs and functions are connected to a spatial structure.

[65] Discourses in the work of Foucault are inscribed in the operative field of power-knowledge that organizes culture and society. They are not an abstract category but relate to concrete, material structures, which include spaces and architectures as described in: Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995). In this sense, the forming of meaning is recognized as inextricably related to matter, as later conceptualized by Karen Barad, see: Karen M. Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter", *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 28, no.3 (2003): 801–831, https://doi.org/10.1086/345321.

[66] Paul Rabinow, and Nikolas Rose, *The Essential Foucault: Selections from the Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984* (New York: New Press, 2003)

[67] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003)

[68] Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-network-theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); on other applications of the concept of "dispositif" see also: Aradau et al., *Critical Security Methods*, 64.

in the analysis of the Panopticon.[69] In this emblematic example, control is exercised through the visual exposure of spatial-temporal relationships. The government of individuals presupposes the containment of spaces and a rigorous, repetitive ordering of time. The Panopticon brings together the "system of language" and "the system of light".[70] These two can also be interpreted as elements characterised by an articulated, discursive nature (namely, the norm or the law) and the environment, the material field on which vision operates in the form of control. Their systemic entanglement presents similar features with policy—namely, the conjunction of spatial organisation and discursive, legislative elements. However, the Panopticon reveals a clear, well defined material dimension that is missing in the framing of policy. The latter does not engage with finite forms or objects but rather tries to shape a new reality that is about to come.

The diagrammatic work of policy, in this sense, is understood in architectural terms. From an architectural perspective, the diagram is a design instrument committed to the organisation of functions, programs, and relationships in space. It is not a thing in itself, but a projection of potential arrangements and connections among elements. It does not represent the existing reality, but anticipates new dispositions and prescribes the structure of relationships.[71] An architectural reading of the diagram helps to clarify how a set of functional conditions must be read in spatial terms, even though it remains insubstantial. Different from other forms of representation, diagrams in the architectural understanding do not inform on precise measures and details. Rather, they propose new modes of living and identify spatial limits.[72] In a similar way, the potential of the diagram in the work of policy lies not in its analytical and explanatory capacity, but rather in its generative power.[73] Dwelling only on the diagrammatic role of policy as that of manifesting relationships, one would risk confusing the diagram with a representational device.[74] Representation techniques present a problem in the convergence with reality that does not provide a fertile ground for new structures.

[69] Deleuze, *Foucault*, 72.

[70] Ibid., 32

[71] Stan Allen, "Diagrams Matter", *ANY* 23 (1998): 16-18.

[72] See: Toyo Ito, "Diagram Architecture", *El Croquis* 77 (1996): 18-24.

[73] Peter Eisenmann, "Diagram: An Original Scene of Writing", *ANY* 23 (1998): 27-29.

[74] Manuel De Landa, "Deleuze, Diagrams, and the Genesis of Form", *Amerikastudien / American Studies* 45, no.1 (2000): 33-41, https://www.jstor.org/stable/41157534.

The diagram, instead, does not engage with a concrete, finite reality. It pertains to the realm of the virtual, which provides for the genesis of a new form. Virtuality, in Deleuzian terms, means the functioning of the diagram as an abstract machine, which is able to relate matter and functions. The abstract machine does not transform the realm of the existing, but prepares for the process of actualisation, through which completely new forms come into being.[75] The policy, as a diagram, functions in the realm of the virtual. It serves to reframe a specific problem, such as that of security, and organise it into a new relational entanglement. In this sense, its functioning is transformative. This indicates that the relationships constituting the diagram of policy can move and change; they are not simply displaying an image of what already exists. What the diagram presents, as a fixed set of connections and elements, only appears to be stable, but is in fact oriented toward the generation of a different spatial form.

This movement and transformability of relationships also characterise the spatial component, the matter of policy. Working as a diagram, policies can select a concrete space—a specific point of application for relationships to become operative. For instance, security policies may identify national borders as the place where special measures must apply. They can specify the arrangement of materials and technologies necessary for activating the project of securitisation. The establishment of a physical location, however, cannot be confused with the clear definition of a spatial form. There is always a gap between the diagram and the reality, a problem of non-correspondence due to the virtual nature of this device.

The diagram anticipates and triggers actualisation—the material completion of spatial form—without establishing a resemblance or correspondence. It does not have control of the products it generates. This is crucial in acknowledging that things can become different than what they appear to be in a diagrammatic setting.[76]

In a nutshell, the diagram suggests a new organisation of the real that does not yet exist. It presents a certain degree of abstraction of functions and structures, the action of which is still potential. In the same way, the policy does not build a physical object itself, even though it contains information on material components. The potential action of policy, in the case of securitisation, lays in the projection of new boundaries, within which security operations are to be circumscribed.

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75 Ibid.

76 Robert E. Somol, "The Diagram of Matter", *ANY* 23 (1998): 23-26.

In the Europe of the early 1990s, the need for a "transnational" and "intergovernmental" security inevitably called for a redefinition of spatial limits. Since the state's boundaries were no longer effective to cope with new concepts of threat and risk, different borders had to be drawn. Tracing new boundaries by means of policy serves to establish the point from which the threat must be kept at a distance. Nevertheless, such borders are only diagrammatically, thus virtually, designed and do not correspond to any actual, self-evident form of space. The same applies to the discursive component of the diagram: the articulation of threats. The definition of these threats is not universally recognised, nor is it fixed. Rather, it is the result of particular meaning-making processes. This aspect introduces a contingent character both in securitisation and, accordingly, in the framing of policy.

Working diagrammatically, policy instruments make certain relationships visible at a precise moment in history and in specific social-political realms. It is important to understand the contingency of policy in order to claim that, while some relationships are selected to be visible, others remain hidden. Forms of connecting discourses and matter are manifold, and a single policy only presents one possible solution. Hence, the aim of this chapter is to problematise what a certain organisation of meaning-matter entails, whether certain links are unknown (whether deliberately or unintentionally), and how the existing ones can be open to future manipulations. If the condition of possibility emerges, it proves that things can be overturned, material and discursive relations can be recombined and, accordingly, boundaries can assume different shapes.

2.2 Genealogical Lines: The Regulation of Movement in the European and Hungarian Debate

Acknowledging policy instruments as situated in particular historical contexts implicates temporal relationships in diagrammatic work. In a diagrammatic arrangement, time connections can be selected and recombined in a non-chronological order. This selective procedure does not provide for an exhaustive historical documentation of phenomena. Rather, the display of relationships through the diagram marks specific moments of passage that represent a shift in the linear development of events. In other words, a diagrammatic approach allows for the tracing of genealogical lines of continuity among discourses and actions occurring in different spatial-temporal contexts.

Figure 2.1 displays various discursive fields (i.e., European policies, local Hungarian processes, global discourses of crisis, far right political rhetoric) developed in different spatial-temporal contexts. Within such fields it is possible to trace different, yet interconnected, genealogical lines. Understood in the terms of Michel Foucault, genealogy is not an explanatory procedure, such as history. Rather, it opens the study to a multiplicity of processes and networks of relationships,[77] through which one aims at reconstructing singular emergences and placing them in a larger relational field. Although the resulting genealogy is inevitably partial, it allows us to observe the impact of a single action on many other events, to which it would not be immediately attributable in a chronological reading.

The proposed genealogy moves across the time-space of Hungary during the peak of migratory events in 2015 and the developments of the European integration process. The purpose is to allow for the examination of the mechanisms in parallel through which multiple links between issues of security and migration can be arranged. To achieve this goal, the analysis necessarily reduces the complexity that characterises the political and spatial integration of Europe, starting from the very use of the term.[78] By deliberately leaving aside processes relating to monetary integration and other economic arrangements, this part of research focuses exclusively on the management of human mobility.

The genealogical analysis traces three main lines of reasoning, guided by the concepts of national identity, political extremism, and crisis. In a diagrammatic approach, additional lines could also be traced on the basis of ethnicity, cultural heritage, or economic and political relations, just to name a few. This is to say that no phenomenon can be fully explained by following one single line of events. The proposed genealogical lines suggest three possible paths but, more importantly, remain open to future expansions. What is crucial to stress is that the increase of tensions in a specific context is the result of an accumulation of various forces over time.

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[77] Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France*, 1977-78, trans. Graham Burchell, eds. Michel Senellart, Ewald François, and Alessandro Fontana (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009): 238-239, 117-119 (texts of lecture 8 March 1978 and lecture 8 February 1978).

[78] What is commonly referred to as Europe, in fact, is a very ambiguous political entity, characterised by the superimposition of multiple regimes. The EU, the Eurozone, Schengen, and NATO are some of the most relevant institutions that define and, at the same time, confuse the boundaries of the European space.
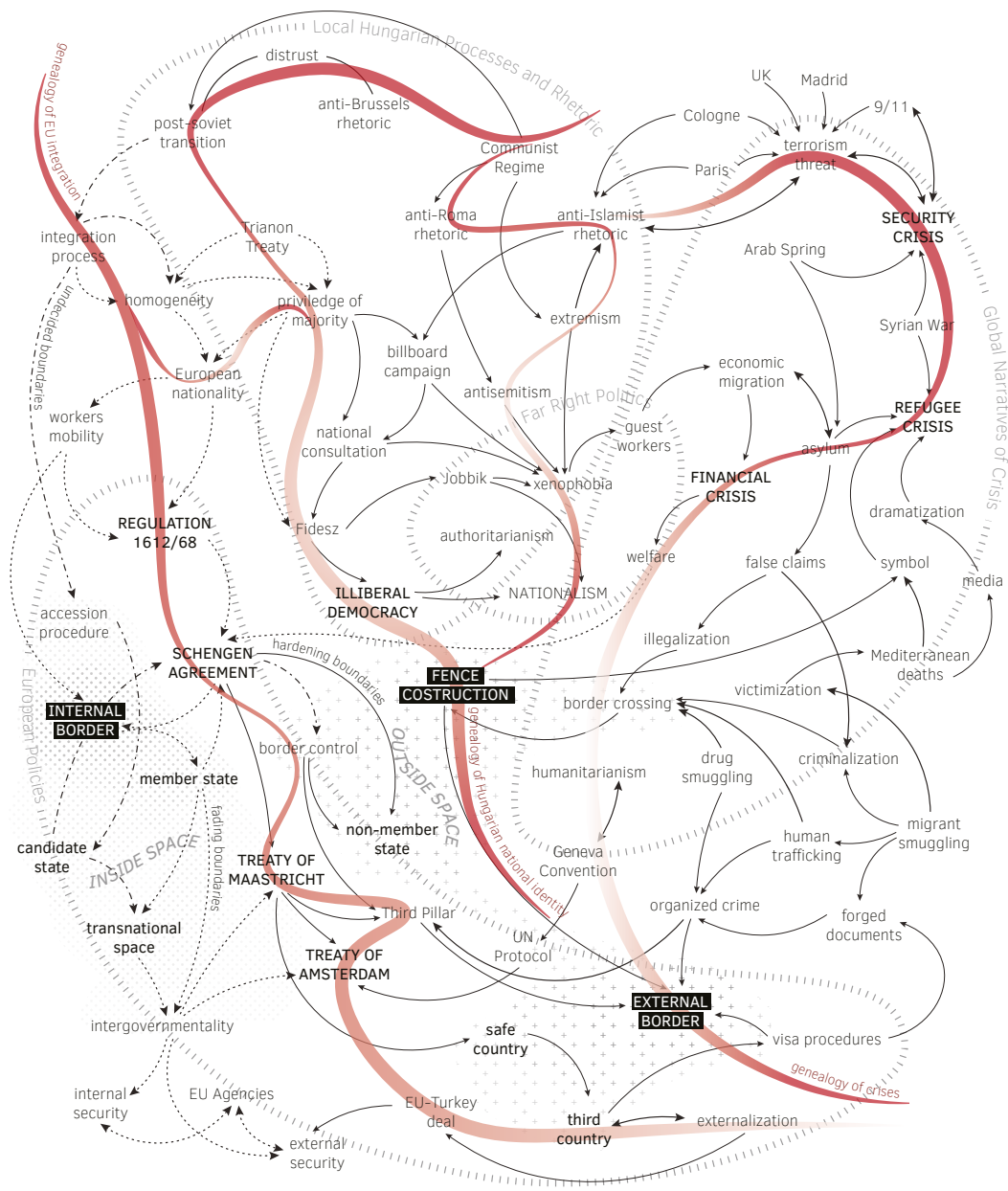
FIG. 2.1 Diagram of securitisation processes displaying the intricacy of discursive fields (European policies, far-right politics, local Hungarian rhetoric, and global narratives of crisis), genealogical lines (EU integration, Hungarian national identity, political extremism, and crisis) and emerging spatial-material content (inside and outside space). The different lines connect the events and concepts leading to a reinforcement of existing boundaries (solid lines) or their progressive fading (dotted lines). Source: image by author.

First Genealogical Line: European Integration and National Identity

The push towards globalisation and the increasing ease of circulation are at the base of the creation of the European Area of Freedom of Movement. However, the opening of market and mobility to a larger and diverse group of people also introduced questions of legitimacy. For the area Schengen to materialise, new policy instruments had to be adopted to define who was allowed to move freely and who should be kept outside the legal and geographic space of freedom. The management of inclusion and exclusion, therefore, has progressively assumed the form of legal procedures meant for the identification and differentiation of categories of wanted and unwanted travellers.[79]

The first legal means that specified the conditions of free movement within European states, before the official formation of Schengen, was the Regulation 1612/68.[80] This document targeted the movement of workers within the European Community[81] on the basis of a states' membership and the necessities of the labour market. While it erased any discrimination and inequality of treatment for European workers, the regulation was the first policy instrument to establish a criterion of differentiation. This, in particular, was grounded on the notion of national identity. The right to move was linked to nationality, as to certify the worker's belonging to a member state. By establishing this link, the regulation automatically excluded non-European nationals from this right.[82] From this perspective, one can note that this legal document contributed to a preliminary conceptualisation and diffusion of the perception of a European identity. This allows the separation of legal possibilities on the basis of what is the same and what is not.

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[79] Elspeth Guild, "The Legal Framework: Who is entitled to move?", in *Controlling Frontiers: Free movement into and within Europe*, ed. Didier Bigo and Elspeth Guild (Burlington: Ashgate, 2005): 14.

[80] Council of the European Communities, Regulation (EEC) No 1612/68 of the Council of 15 October 1968 on Freedom of Movement for Workers within the Community, *Official Journal of the European Communities* L 257, (October 19, 1968): 2-12, bit.ly/3MoxNy5. Accessed on 21-11-2022.

[81] One refers to European Community as the ensemble of three institutions: European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), the European Atomic Energy Community (EAEC or Euratom), and the European Economic Community (EEC). The European Community officially dissolved into the European Union with the signing of the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009. Nevertheless, the term "European Union" was introduced for the first time in the Treaty of Maastricht, 1993, when the three institutions of the EC converged into the first pillar. Source: https://europa.eu/. Accessed on 21-11-2022.

[82] Mehmet Ugur, "Freedom of Movement vs. Exclusion: A Reinterpretation of the 'Insider'– 'Outsider' Divide in the European Union", *International Migration Review* 29, no.4 (1995): 964-999, https://doi.org/10.1177/019791839502900406.

As the privilege of member states' nationals was made explicit, the presence of "the other" was progressively delegitimised. The Non-European started to be perceived as a destabilising factor to the proper functioning of the labour market, an element that may undermine the process of integration.[83]

The long summer of migration of 2014-2016 represents a crucial moment in contemporary history (although not the only one), when the sudden arrival of non-European nationals had to be managed. This phenomenon was given the colloquial label of "crisis" in both media and political debates in order to highlight the problematic and undesired character of migrant arrivals. Various EU member states became the frontlines of access to Europe, either by sea (as in the case of Greece and Italy) or by land (via the Balkan Peninsula and Eastern Europe). Among these, Hungary constitutes a very emblematic case, in which the notion of identity returned to be central in the political discourse. The precedence of the majority over the newcomers and the protection of the nation's interests are just some of the arguments supporting the identity principle.

Exploiting the distorted perception of an impact without precedents and the fear of the unknown, the ruling party, Fidesz, took the occasion of migratory events to spread its radical message. With the increasing xenophobic tone, it brought forward the idea of the primacy of the Hungarian community. The majority was dialectically constructed as traditional and organic, standing against "the other", whether individual or community, which was framed as a threat.[84] Such a discriminative ideology served to advance ethnocentric, cultural, and religious foundations to describe and, more importantly, to legitimise the dominant community.

This process was facilitated by the specific context of Hungary, a country which seems to be one of the most ethnically homogeneous in Europe. Despite a long history of migration and ethnic diversity (including Serbian, German, Romanian nationals, and Jewish ethnics as major components) Hungary became more and more ethnically homogeneous since the Treaty of Trianon concluded World War I in 1920. Since then, the past of migration slowly receded from the memory of

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[83]   See: Jef Huysmans, "The European Union and the Securitization of Migration", *Journal of Common Market Studies* 38, no.5 (2000): 751–77, https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5965.00263.

[84]   Péter Krekó and Attila Juhász, *The Hungarian Far Right: Social Demand, Political Supply and International Context* (Ibidem Press, 2017): 107. Krekó and Juhász, however, also point out that xenophobic attitudes were already present and increasing in Hungarian society since the early 2000s, when a "migratory threat" did not actually exist, ibid.,48-49. See also: Attila Juhász, Bulcsú Hunyadi, and Edit Zgut, *Focus on Hungary: Refugees, Asylum and Migration* (Prague: Heinrich Boll Stiftung, 2015): 23.

society.[85] In addition, the portrayal of the immigrant as an elusive, puzzling figure was progressively constructed in the collective imagination of Hungarians through images, posters, and media.[86] The domestic political narrative, counting on a general distrust of the different, accentuated the association of migration with national problems of public safety, labour, and cultural values.[87] This rhetoric merged with a pre-existing negative connotation of migration intended as emigration. In Hungarian society, emigration is linked to ideas of loss and failure. It is often associated with the political refugees of the communist regime, the resettling of Hungarian nationals from neighbouring territories, or young generations in search of a better life abroad.[88]

In contrast to defining identity at the national scale of a single country, doing so at the supranational scale of Europe is a more complex task. While the "non-European" can be easily classified by exclusionary principles as anyone who lacks the member state's nationality, the "European" identity is not a self-evident category. The inside space of Europe is, in fact, a very heterogeneous societal group in continuous redefinition. The things that define identity at the European level are not simply historical memories and narratives, but an ensemble of diverse political authorities, institutions, forms of government, and social entities. Such a varied conglomerate is neither enclosed in a unitary space nor clearly delimited. It comes out of one discursive boundary that implicates multiple spatial limits, which are variable and discontinuous.[89] These reflect fragmented social-political entities, contested geographies, and shifting geological edges.

In essence, the elements that populate and delineate the "inside" of Europe are particularly uncertain and unstable. They make it evident that the construction of Europe as a unitary system is in fact a long-term and multi-layered project, which is characterised by institutional, discursive, and spatial-material complexity that cannot be contained in the idea of nationality. Given this very complexity, the endeavour at building unity and homogeneity appears to be rather idealistic.

85 András Hettyey, "Hungary and the Migration Challenge: Anatomy of an Extraordinary Crisis", in *Mapping the Migration Challenges in the EU Transit and Destination Countries,* ed. Erzsébet N. Rosza (Euromesco Joint Policy Study 6, 2017): 105-116. https://bit.ly/3MJuSQG. Accessed on 21-11-2022.

86 To consider, in particular, the anti-immigration billboard campaign launched in June 2015. See: Juhász, et al., *Focus on Hungary*, 25.

87 See also: James W. Scott, "Border Politics in Central Europe: Hungary and the Role of National Scale and Nation-building," *Geographia Polonica* 91, no. 1 (2018): 17-32. https://doi.org/10.7163/GPol.0101.

88 Juhász, et al., *Focus on Hungary*, 23.

89 William Walters, "Mapping Schengenland: Denaturalizing the Border", *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 20 (2002): 561-580, https://doi.org/10.1068/d274t; see also: Didier Bigo, "Frontiers Control in the European Union: Who is in Control?", in *Controlling Frontiers: Free movement into and within Europe*, ed. Didier Bigo and Elspeth Guild (Burlington: Ashgate, 2005): 49-99.

On account of the fact that the aspired-for unification cannot be reached from the inside, there are attempts to shape it from the outside. At the preliminary phase of integration, the focus shifted to potential exterior challenges that could compromise the integrity of Europe, threaten the realization of the integration process, and undermine its stability. New threats to the survival of Europe needed to be constructed, and new spaces had to become the symbol of the political process of protection. From this perspective, the problem of European identity included in Regulation 1612/68 prepared the framing of migration as a security problem.[90]

Nevertheless, observing the case of Hungary in the migratory peak of 2014-2016, one can notice that other temporal lines, as well as local economic and political developments, add to the larger European integration process. The evolution of integration policies cannot, by itself, capture the different historical events that have shaped, and continue to shape, identities and threats at the national level. Hence, it is important to look at the Hungarian case as a site of increased tensions, emerging as both a European and local phenomenon.

2.2.2 Second Genealogical Line: Extreme Politics

From the time of Regulation 1612/68 until the early 1980s, the management of migration to Europe was mainly connected to the economic sector and the handling of the work force. The presence of migrants was supposed to follow the necessities of the labour market. For this reason, its governance had, for the most part, a temporary connotation. The idea of temporary migration was reflected in the lack of procedures meant for the legalisation of immigrants' stay in terms of residency and status. Nevertheless, the debate around migration had started to change in the late 1970s, when guest workers from non-EU and, especially, non-European, countries had progressively turned into permanent residents. Family reunifications increased and the presence of people with a migrant background became more visible.

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[90] See: Jef Huysmans, "Migrants as a Security Problem: Dangers of "Securitizing" Societal Issues", in *Migration and European Integration: The Dynamics of Inclusion and Exclusion*, ed. Robert Miles and Dietrich Thränhardt, (London: Pinter, 1995): 53-72; see also: Huysmans, *The Politics of Insecurity*, 45.

Although in the 1970s a unitary migration policy was not yet developed, the Commission started to prepare the legislative ground for ending the recruitment of non-European workers with the proposal for the Social Action Program in 1973.[91] The political debate, moving toward a stricter regulation of guest workers, was largely supported by European nationals and was accompanied by discourses of de-legitimisation that started to gain attention during the economic recession. Non-European nationals began to be perceived as rivals of member states' citizens in the struggle for accessing economic and social rights, and the demand for the exclusion of these other nationals increased.[92] These growing tensions ended up feeding the political propaganda of far-right parties across all of Western Europe. The emergence of the NPD in Germany and the National Front in France are just two examples of nationalist and xenophobic tendencies entering the European political scene in the 1980s.[93]

In the ongoing migration to Europe, particularly in the case of Hungary, the growing success of far-right politics appears to be related. Extremist rhetoric plays a decisive role in the construction of the enemy image, which accompanies and legitimises a securitarian management of reception. Xenophobic and nationalist discourses influence the perception of the migratory phenomenon, presenting it as more dangerous for the stability of the country than what it actually is. In 2015, Hungary was the leading European country in number of asylum applications, yet, it has never stood out as an actual destination.[94] The application simply represents a formality for those who wished to continue the journey to Western Europe before a decision on their status could be made. To date, only a few thousand refugees have decided to stay in Hungary.[95] However, due to the lack of experience with an immigrant community, along with unrealistic perceptions and misguided information, the idea was conveyed that there was an unprecedented impact. The emphasis on danger and threat has helped the ruling party to not only reinforce the population's fear and anxiety, but also intensify the desire for order and public security. This discursive strategy facilitates the emergence of an authoritarian political formation and sets the ground for its concrete interventions.[96]

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91 For a more detailed historical and legislative analysis see: Ugur, "Freedom of Movement vs. Exclusion," 980.

92 Huysmans, *The Politics of Insecurity,* 77.

93 Ugur, "Freedom of Movement vs. Exclusion," 986.

94 For more details on the statistical data see: Juhász, et al., *Focus on Hungary*, 9.

95 Ibid.

96 Krekó and Juhász, *The Hungarian Far Right*, 42-49.

Nevertheless, the development of far-right ideologies in Hungary is not only related to the recent migratory phenomena. As Krekó and Juhász discuss in their book "The Hungarian Far Right", nationalist and extremist ideas persisted through the communist regime, were partly assimilated by the dictatorship, and survived in the Hungarian diaspora, and among other groups. With the democratisation process, the extension of civil and political rights—especially those of free speech, association, and assembly—have been extended to extremist groups. These rights were manipulated to favour the development of anti-Semitic, anti-Roma, and intolerant political attitudes.[97] Until the early 2000s, however, such tendencies had never translated into a coherent political message and failed to address the most urgent economic problems of the nation.[98]

By considering the historical specificity of Hungary's far-right, the current extremist tendency appears particularly ambiguous. On the one hand, it is in line with the populist trends of Western countries in the management of migration. This reflects the long European tradition of regulation of movement, which founds its principles on the exclusion of non-European nationals. But, on the other hand, it also shows traces of a Soviet past. The two main far-right parties, Jobbik and Fidesz, openly express a strong critique of Western approaches.[99] This attitude, in particular, testifies to the difficulties of the transition period of many post-communist countries. From this perspective, which is both local and European, long-established norms and the rule of exception intertwine.

2.2.3 Third Genealogical Line: Crises

The entanglement of long-term processes and sudden emergencies is even more evident in the articulation of the concept of "crisis". Starting from 2015, the Hungarian government stressed two main arguments to reiterate the exceptional and critical character of migration. Narratives of economic crisis and terrorism risk stirred up the general hysteria, while securing the party with a large support. The discourse of economic threat was aimed at framing the migrant as a competitor in the Hungarian job market, especially for workers with a lower level of education.

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[97] Ibid., 89

[98] Ibid.

[99] Ibid., 120; for a more detailed overview of the development of Eurosceptisism in Hungarian politics see also James W. Scott, "Hungarian Border Politics as an Anti-Politics of the European Union", *Geopolitics* 25, no.3 (2020): 658–677, https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2018.1548438.

In addition, the growing expenses for the processing of asylum applications and the allocation of state subsidies for migrants fed discourses of illegitimacy and damage to the state's finances.[100]

Along with local issues, the migratory "crisis" was also inscribed in a larger, global scenario of securitarian emergency. The year 2015 was identified as period of exceptional danger for Europe. The terrorist attacks in Paris followed by the New Year's Eve turmoil in Cologne served as a pretext for the Fidesz party to mingle narratives of migration with those of criminality and terrorism.[101]

To manipulate the local public attitude towards migration, the Hungarian ruling party actively operated by various means of communication. Two of these means were interventions of political propaganda, which were intended to convince the domestic audience of the existence of a concrete danger. The first one was a survey of the National Consultation on Immigration and Terrorism, in April 2015.[102] The Consultation was presented as a preliminary investigation in view of designing policies on immigration. The survey included 12 biased questions, which openly linked the issue of migration to the problems of security and income.[103] The real purpose of the questionnaire, however, was far from providing reliable data that could be used for new policies. It served as an additional instrument to distort voters' perception on immigration and asylum.

As migratory pressure increased, the militant tones of the anti-immigration rhetoric assumed a more visible and tangible form in the second piece of political propaganda: the billboard campaign. In June 2015, different posters started to appear along the streets of Budapest. A conditional sentence written in capital letter stood out from the blue background: "Ha Magyarországra jössz..." ("If you come to Hungary..."), followed by messages that reflected the forms of threat discussed above: "you have to respect our culture", "you have to respect our law", and "you cannot take the Hungarians' jobs".[104] The linguistic choice of the billboard campaign, however, made it explicit that the intended recipient of the message was the Hungarian population.

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100 Yet a clear estimation of the costs of reception was never made public, as Hettyey notes in: Hettyey, "Hungary and the Migration Challenge", 106.

101 Juhász, et al., *Focus on Hungary*, 24-27.

102 See: "National Consultation, 2017: 'Let's Stop Brussels!'", *Hungarian Spectrum* (April 2, 2017) https://hungarianspectrum.org/2017/04/02/national-consultation-2017-lets-stop-brussels/. Accessed on 06-06-2022

103 An unofficial English translation of the questionnaire is available at the following link: https://theorangefiles.hu/2015/05/19/national-consultation-on-immigration-and-terrorism/. Accessed on 06-06-2022.

104 Juhász, et al., *Focus on Hungary*, 25.

The emphasis on "crisis" in migration discourse, whether it stresses financial or terrorism risk, establishes a clear link between migrants' movement and public security. This was also the case of the political debates that characterised the Western European scene in the 1970s and 1980s. At that time, the notion of risk to the stability of Europe began to be associated with the movement of non-European nationals. Asylum started to be included in and confused with discourses of economic migration. It was progressively politicised as an alternative way to enter Europe from non-European countries.[105] The idea of migrants presenting false claims of asylum, without being entitled, marked a new connection between issues of migration and criminality. This link has been reinforced even more after 9/11. The terrorist attacks contributed to the claim of asylum not just as an option for economic migrants but also a way for terrorists to move across continents and enter the country under threat.[106]

In association with security and crisis discourses, the access of migrants and asylum seekers is easily understood as something to control and, if necessary, punish through coordinated policies and actions. The introduction of such a conception of asylum represents the first step towards the illegalisation of migration. It is important, therefore, to be aware of the ease with which current narratives of criminalisation inform restrictive and securitarian approaches to the management of migration. What is at stake is a discursive transfer of fears, which prepares the logical passage from the field of mobility regulation to that of security. In this way, a relational continuity[107] is built between issues that used to be disconnected and managed separately. Security can extend to other fields, such as that of finance or crime, include various institutions and expertise, and cover the territory of many states. It emerges, therefore, as a multi-layered process. This approach prepares for the modulation of new meanings related to migration, the production of specific forms of knowledge, and the legitimisation of multiple, interdependent policies.

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[105] Huysmans, *The Politics of Insecurity,* 66; see also: Guild, "The Legal Framework", 33–41.

[106] Huysmans, op.cit., 68.

[107] Cf. with the concept of "security continuum" discussed by Huysmans, op.cit., 71.

2.3 Migration-security-border: Fixing the Relational Continuity

As argued at the beginning of this chapter, policy is the instrument that structures discursive and material relationships in the management of specific issues, such as that of security. But what happens when multiple fields intersect in the same discourse? What sort of material relationships emerge from the conjunction of the issues of migration, border control, and security? To answer these questions, the following section shifts the attention to selected policies that led to the creation of Schengen, as an area of free movement, and the European Union as a territorial entity.

These two spatial-political systems complement and contradict one another in the definition of an inside and outside space, according to criteria that refer to and expand conventional territorial logics. In particular, the following argument stretches the link between migration and security and connects it to the act of constructing boundaries. It examines how the external border is progressively delineated in a context of transnationality and multiple regulatory regimes. The analysis of policies aspires to challenge the assumptions related to migration, security, criminality, and border control. However, it is important to note that it is beyond the scope of this thesis and, especially, beyond the expertise of the author to engage in a detailed discourse analysis of policy documents. The aim, instead, is that of mapping a series of discursive connections that have progressively delineated the concept of "external border(s)", establishing it in relation to issues of migration, security, and various threats. This serves to question existing meanings attributed to these issues, while taking distance from the perspective of exceptionality and danger often attributed to the "external border".

The policy document which introduces the first material and spatial effects of the association of human mobility and security is the Schengen Agreement.[108] It represents the first intergovernmental action in the constitution of not just a legislative but also a spatial unity of the European Community. The core principle of the Agreement is the establishment of free movement and trade among the signatory nations. The main strategy to achieve this goal consists of removing border checks among European member states.

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[108] Commission of the European Union, The Schengen Acquis as referred to in Article 1(2) of Council Decision 1999/435/EC of 20 May 1999, *Official Journal of the European Communities* L239 (May 20, 1999), bit.ly/3ayatAE.

However, as Huysmans notes in *The Politics of Insecurity*, the document carries with it the concern that not only European nationals could benefit from this freedom. A securitarian problem related to the interest of criminal organisations, terrorism, and illegal immigration was also introduced. This was presented as a side effect of the elimination of internal border control.[109]

Until the signing of the Schengen Agreement, the policing of illegal activities, serious crime, and terrorism was dealt with at the national level. It was, therefore, a matter of internal security. With the institution of a transnational entity, the traditional concept of security called for an expansion, both at the legislative and the spatial level. The need for control, removed from the internal borders, was pushed towards the external ones as the point of access of security threats.[110] In this sense, the material, spatial component of the border was implied in the Schengen Agreement but it still lacked a clear delineation. The gradual definition of the external border of Europe emerged, instead, through the progressive standardisation and homogenisation of access procedures.

After a decade of discussions on the regulation of entry at the intergovernmental level, the Treaty on European Union finally integrated security, access, and border control in one legislative field.[111] The treaty specifies the functions of the institutional bodies of the European Union and organises their powers in three pillars. The third pillar, in particular, which regulates the cooperation in the field of justice and home affairs, brings together issues of various domains. It includes the rules on external border crossing, the fight against terrorism, drug trafficking, and serious crime, the creation of the European Police Office (Europol) and a system for information sharing among national police forces, the control of illegal immigration, and the definition of a common asylum policy. Among these tasks, it is possible to note the convergence of matters relative to both penal and administrative law, along with policing and control functions. The treaty which marks the establishment of the EU is also the policy which frames and fixes a relational continuity. It connects not just migration and security, but also asylum law and external border crossings. Through this relational connection, the space, however vague, of the external border becomes closely involved with illegal activities of various kinds. Discursively, it is already a site of risk.

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[109] Huysmans, *The Politics of Insecurity*, 70.

[110] See: Huysmans, "Migrants as a Security Problem"; Bigo, "Frontiers Control in the European Union"; Malcolm Anderson, "The Transformation of Border Controls: A European Precedent?", in *The Wall around the West: State Borders and Immigration Control in North America and Europe*, eds. Peter Andreas and Timothy Snyder (Lanham, Boulder, New York, Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2000), 15-30.

[111] Treaty on European Union as signed in Maastricht on 7 February 1992, *Official Journal of the European Communities* C191 (July 29, 1992), 1–112, bit.ly/3tjGJhw.

The Treaty on European Union was later amended by the Treaty of Amsterdam in 1997.[112] The new document shows a reinforcement of the link between migration and border control, obtained through the standardisation of visa procedures for non-European nationals. This new measure not only facilitates the management of entries at the intergovernmental and transnational level, but also reduces the range of legal possibility to access and move across Europe for "outsiders". As a result, the ones who are mostly affected by this restriction are the asylum seekers. Indeed, the establishment of a unitary visa system as requirement of entry makes it almost impossible for those fleeing their country of origin to obtain any legal documents before applying for asylum.[113]

The adoption of unitary measures to regulate access to the European territory suggests the existence of precise limits, within which these apply. This is obviously a discursive simplification that does not take into account the actual complexity of the transnational space. In the formation of the EU, the assemblage of many different and discontinuous boundaries encloses an equally heterogeneous group of political, social, and spatial systems. Therefore, by fixing a relational continuity between discursive fields of migration and security, these policies intervene diagrammatically on the material and spatial content of the external border. They select which lines to dissolve and which to strengthen, while designing an apparently continuous limit, at which control must be enforced.

This mechanism is particularly visible along the land borders of Europe. The boundaries separating member states have been changing since the signing of the Schengen Agreement, in accordance with the various negotiations for the accession of new countries. When a nation is a candidate to enter the area of free market, territorial limits have to be redrawn and their role must be established. The borders facing a member state are destined to disappear, while the ones shared with another candidate country are temporarily secured in view of a future fading. The national boundaries that separate the country in question and a non-European state must remain and prove the ability to perform as a European border.[114] This means they should show the capacity to exercise securitarian functions and guarantee the exclusion of unwanted travellers from the territory.

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112 Treaty of Amsterdam amending the Treaty on European Union, the treaties establishing the European Communities and certain related acts. *Official Journal of the European Communities* C340 (November 10, 1997), 1–144, https://bit.ly/3Ntjl9h.

113 See: Roland Bank, "Europeanising the Reception of Asylum Seekers: The Opposite of Welfare State Politics", in *Immigration and Welfare: Challenging the Borders of the Welfare State*, eds. Michael Bommes and Andrew Geddes (New York and London: Routledge, 2000),148-169.

114 See the example of Poland in: Leszek Jesien, "Border Controls and the Politics of EU Enlargement, in *The Wall around the West*, eds. Peter Andreas and Timothy Snyder (Lanham, Boulder, New York, Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2000), 185 - 202.

From the 1990s to the early 2000s, the ability to perform as a secure European border became the route to accession for many East-central countries, such as Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Republic, and Slovenia.[115] Before their accession, these states had to deal with the consequences of the increasingly restrictive migration policies adopted in Europe.[116] A growing number of refugees, economic migrants, Roma groups, and other ethnics moved across central and eastern countries, in an attempt to move northward and westward. Hungary, in particular, held a central position in this process, providing refuge to the many ethnic Hungarians fleeing from neighbouring countries. Those included a first wave of refugees, who escaped Romania under Ceausescu's dictatorship in 1990. In less than a year later, a second influx of Hungarians fled the Serbian region of Vojvodina, followed by another exodus in 1999, caused by the NATO bombing.[117] Facing an increasing pressure of transit migration, the candidate countries most affected responded with more severe policies, especially targeting asylum channels. The Hungarian strategy of reception, for instance, favoured Hungarian ethnics over other refugees. The logic of an ethnic-based naturalisation and the idea of a homogenous national identity persisted in the domestic politics even after their accession to the EU, in 2004.[118]

In the more recent times of migration, the responsibility of dealing with transit movements has been transferred to the Western Balkan states. These nations find themselves in the same condition as East-central countries in the 1990s. While proving the capacity to protect EU external borders in view of accession, they function as buffer zones, in which unwanted travellers can be contained and controlled. From the perspective of accession, it becomes clearer why most of the newly built border fences are appearing around the countries of the Balkan Peninsula.[119]

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115 For more details on the case of Hungary see: James W. Scott, "Border Politics in Central Europe."

116 Milada Anna Vachudova, "Eastern Europe as Gatekeeper: The Immigration and Asylum Policies of an Enlarging European Union" in *The Wall around the West*, eds. Peter Andreas and Timothy Snyder (Lanham, Boulder, New York, Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2000): 153-154.

117 See: Sandra Lavenex, *Safe Third Countries. Extending the EU Asylum and Immigration Policies to Central and Eastern Europe* (Budapest: CEU Press, 1999): 137-138.

118 Vachudova, "Eastern Europe as Gatekeeper", 162.

119 Patrick Kingsley, "Balkan Countries Shut Borders as Attention Turns to New Refugee Routes", *The Guardian* (March 09, 2016), https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/09/balkans-refugee-route-closed-say-european-leaders. Accessed on 21-11-2022; UNHCR, "Border Fences and Internal Border Controls in Europe" (April 03, 2017), https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/55249. Accessed on 21-11-2022; Joanna Plucinska and Kacper Pempel, "On the EU's Eastern Border, Poland Builds a Fence to Stop Migrants", *Reuters* (August 26, 2021) https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/eus-eastern-border-poland-builds-fence-stop-migrants-2021-08-26/. Accessed on 21-11-2022; RadioFreeEurope/Radio Liberty, "The Fences of the Balkans", *RFE/RL* (September 03, 2020). https://www.rferl.org/a/the-fences-of-the-balkans/30817163.html. Accessed on 21-11-2022.

To respond to the increasing arrivals of migrants, starting from 2015, Hungary, Bulgaria, Greece and, lastly, Serbia have fortified their borders with razor wire walls. These recent strategies of securitisation, however, carry some contradictions. The Hungarian fence, for instance, does not only separate a member state from a candidate country. It also stretches along the Hungarian-Croatian border, dividing the EU territory. Similarly, but in an opposite condition of exteriority, the fence construction initiated by Serbia in 2020 was aimed at closing the border with North Macedonia, separating two countries which are candidate for accession.[120] Such a proliferation of fences dividing not only member and non-member states, but also countries of the "same kind" raises doubts about the actual role of these structures.

Along with the procedure for accession, other strategies and policy instruments contributed to materially delineate the external border of the EU. Among these, in November 1992, the London Resolution introduced the concept of "host third country", also referred to as "safe country principle".[121] The concept identifies the national territories beyond the borders of the EU, in which the life and freedom of asylum seekers might not be considered under threat. According to this principle, claims for asylum must be presented in the country identified as "safe", instead of any member state.[122] While limiting the chances of entering the EU, this regulation becomes a powerful tool to legitimise expulsions and contain migrants at the threshold of Europe. The practice of expulsion, along with its more infamous and violent counterpart "pushback", offers an option of exclusion relatively cheaper than the procedure of deportation. Hiding behind an apparent legitimacy, the pushback practice consents to the transfer of responsibilities from one country to another, while increasing the distance to travel before reaching the EU.

The institution of the "host third country" represents the first step towards the implementation of externalisation strategies. These indicate a series of policies and practices aimed at expanding border control and the securitisation of migration outside the European territory.[123] Strategies of externalisation mainly consist of collaboration among member states and third countries in a joint effort to stop migratory

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[120] Klikaktiv, "*Border Fence at the Serbian-Macedonian Border",* borderline-europe (August, 2021), https://bit.ly/3NZdZT2. Accessed on 21-11-2022.

[121] Council of the European Union, Council Resolution of 30 November 1992 on a Harmonized Approach to Questions Concerning Host Third Countries (November 30, 1992), https://www.refworld.org/docid/3f86c3094.html. Accessed on 21-11-2022.

[122] The origins and functioning of the safe country principle are oversimplified here due to the scope of this dissertation. A more thorough analysis can be found in: Lavenex, *Safe Third Countries,* 49-54.

[123] See: Maribel Casas-Cortes, Sebastian Cobarrubias, and John Pickles, "Good neighbours make good fences: Seahorse operations, border externalization and extra-territoriality," *European Urban and Regional Studies*, 23 no.3 (2016): 231–251. https://doi.org/10.1177/0969776414541136

movements before they reach EU ground. This cooperation might take various forms: the training of coast and paramilitary guards, courses of sea and land monitoring, financial support, and equipment to reinforce the country's surveillance capacity.[124]

The multiplication of policies regulating relations between member states, candidate nations, and third countries allows for the ability to move territorial limits and redefine border functions. This capacity not only highlights the unstable character of EU boundaries, but also reveals a progressive effort at widening the geography of the border from a simple line of demarcation to a zone of extensive control. This exposes the very arrangement of material and spatial relations within the diagrammatic work of policies.

On 23 September 2020, the European Commission presented a new pact on migration and asylum.[125] In light of the analysed role of policies in defining EU borders, the document offers ground for some important reflections. This recent legislative proposal is aimed at reforming the Common Asylum System to ensure preparedness and efficient response in the face of crisis events. Among the key actions it lists, the pact highlights the necessity to introduce new measures of screening "at the border" and connecting asylum procedures with new border operations. These strategies are especially meant to reduce the long wait time of asylum application and processing, as well as limit the conflicts related to relocations and returns.

According to the pact, the section of the EU external border crossed by a person seeking asylum will become not only a place of control, but the very location where asylum and return procedures will be managed. In other words, the two functions of enforcing control and processing applications will converge in the pre-screening phase. This was developed as a way to accelerate procedures of legal entry or immediate return.

While the pact positively emphasises the rapidity of the measure, it is important to pay attention to *where* this new policy is supposed to apply. The place where asylum claims will be processed is neither "inside" the member state nor "outside". It is supposed to be "at the border". But what is the spatial extent of this site? How will the external border be designed and equipped in order to perform pre-screening functions?

124 See: Mark Akkerman, *Expanding Fortress Europe: The Policies, the Profiteers and the People Shaped by EU's Border Externalisation Programme.* (Amsterdam: Transnational Institute and Stop Wapenhandel, 2018), https://www.tni.org/en/publication/expanding-the-fortress. Accessed on 21-11-2022.

125 Commission of the European Union, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on a New Pact on Migration and Asylum. COM/2020/609 (September 23, 2020), https://bit.ly/3MrkGwf. Accessed on 21-11-2022.

The problem of managing asylum and return at the external border emerges also as a strategy to transform its spatial understanding and organisation. The pre-screening seems to suggest the establishment of a pre-entry zone that belongs neither to a member state nor to a safe country. This arrangement would risk legitimising the construction of a physical area of containment in which the chances of protection will be reduced even more.

2.4 Enacting Trans-national Security

In the entanglement of migration, security, and border control, multiple policies intervene in framing and fixing their relational continuity. This mechanism highlights the capacity of the diagrammatic work of policy instruments to expand across various fields. The multiplication and extension of connections is then projected on space, specifically, on external borders as the sites at which to enforce control. This is to say that the increasing complexity reflects not only the conceptual definition of borders but also their actual localisation, design, and management. Once the need to implement security functions across internal boundaries was removed, a larger ensemble of policing and surveillance activities was redirected along external borders. However, in the expanded field of European security, national police competencies and external functions of the military and defence are not easy to discern.[126]

Returning to the theory of securitisation proposed by Barry Buzan et al., security actors are classified into two main categories: "securitising" and "functional" actors. The first have the authority to declare something existentially threatened, while functional actors are capable of affecting the dynamics of a specific sector and significantly influencing decision making processes.[127] Moving from a securitisation to a diagrammatic approach in the European context, it is difficult to mark a clear separation between these two categories. The identification of new threats and the framing of policies actually manifest as intertwined and co-dependent procedures.

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[126] See: Bigo, "When Two Becomes One".

[127] Buzan et al., *Security*, 36.

As analysed earlier, policies do not only act in response to a threat: in the establishment of new connections, they also construct the very problems to be managed as a matter of security. Accordingly, with the creation of the Schengen Area and the EU, the work of security professionals had to adapt to the interconnected character of governance. They started to operate in a much more networked, relational, and transversal manner.[128]

Multiple and diverse professional figures appear in the management of migration and borders. Accordingly, their coordination requires major efforts at homogenisation. Unity is often sought in the principle of standardisation, which influences methodologies, terminologies, and information.[129] The endeavour at harmonisation in the integration process of the EU, however, does not come without ambiguity and conflicts of interest, authority, and expertise.[130] Colliding understandings of security remain among the agents involved in migration and border control. Each of them brings into the process different techniques of operation, traditions, and forms of knowledge that do not easily align.[131]

The following section does not provide a complete and detailed overview of all those who intervene in the management of EU borders. Rather, the purpose is to question the modalities at play in the creation of common or diverging understandings of threat, risk, and protection. In the relational continuity between migration, security, and borders, particular attention must be given to the passage from policies to practices of control. In this transition, the capacity of actors to frame new forms of knowledge becomes central. If, on the one hand, knowledge contributes to foster practical cooperation, on the other hand, it sets new priorities for policy agendas.[132]

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128 Didier Bigo, Philippe Bondotti, Laurent Bonelli, and Christian Olsson, "Mapping the Field of EU Internal Security Agencies", Paper produced for the Changing Landscape of European Liberty and Security (CHALLENGE) Project of the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS) (2007), 8, http://www.open.ac.uk/researchprojects/iccm/library/58.html.

129 This is especially evident in the work of Frontex, see for instance: Regine Paul, "Harmonisation by Risk Analysis? Frontex and the Risk-Based Governance of European Border Control", *Journal of European Integration* 39, no.6 (2017): 689-706, https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2017.1320553.

130 See for instance: Satoko Horii, "It is about more than just Training: The Effect of Frontex Border Guard Training", *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 31, no.4 (2012): 158-177, https://doi.org/10.1093/rsq/hds015.

131 See for instance the different modes of operation at the EU borders analysed by Bigo in: Didier Bigo, "The (In)securitization Practices of the Three Universes of EU Border Control: Military/Navy - Border Guards/Police - Database Analysts", *Security Dialogue* 45, no.3 (2014): 209– 225, https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010614530459.

132 Claudio M. Radaelli, "The Public Policy of the European Union: Whither Politics of Expertise?", *Journal of European Public Policy* 6, no.5 (1999): 757-774, https://doi.org/10.1080/135017699343360.

Knowledge, hence, marks the link between "governmentality" and "technicity";[133] it legitimises and supports not only the performance of security actions but also sustains the development of specific technologies to render operations successful. This will be discussed further in chapter three.

<p>2.4.1</p>

EU Agencies and Agents

In the panorama of EU integration, one of the main moves towards an operative harmonisation was the progressive establishment of the nine European agencies.[134] Each agency is in charge of advancing cooperation among European and national bodies, covering different policy fields. Among those, the agencies that conduct operations within the area of migration and border control are: the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, commonly known as Frontex, the European Asylum Support Office (EASO), the European Agency for the Operational Management of Large-scale IT Systems (EU-LISA), and the European Police Office (Europol) that, more specifically, is involved in issues of smuggling and human trafficking.

As border and migration cannot be enclosed in a delimited security compartment, the work of these agencies intersects other fields. In particular, they engage with matters related to policing and justice. This results in a close collaboration with two other EU bodies: the EU Agency for Judicial Cooperation (Eurojust) and the European Police College (Cepol).[135]

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[133] The terms "governmentality" and "technicity" refer to the work of Michel Foucault, see: Ulrich Bröckling, Susanne Krasmann, and Thomas Lemke, "From Foucault's Lectures at the Collège de France to Studies of Governmentality: An Introduction", in *Governmentality: Current Issues and Future Challenges,* eds. Ulrich Bröckling, Susanne Krasmann, and Thomas Lemke (London and New York: Routledge, 2011),1-33. However, Foucault's studies on governmentality are not used here as an overarching theoretical framework. What the following analysis takes from his work is the understanding of governmentality and, more generally, of power as a wide set of actions, rationalities, and technologies, which have to be considered in their complex interplay. Knowledge production is also involved in this interaction and it is conceived with a practical orientation, in such a way that acting and thinking become interconnected and mutually constituted.

[134] The nine EU agencies in the European Union Area of Freedom, Security and Justice include: Europol (European Police Office), Cepol (European Police College), Eurojust (European Union's Agency for Judicial Cooperation), Frontex or EBCG (European Border and Coast Guard Agency), EU-LISA (European Agency for the Operational Management of Large-scale IT Systems in the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice), EASO (European Asylum Support Office), FRA (EU Agency for Fundamental Rights), EIGE (European Institute for Gender Equality), EMCDDA (European Monitoring Center for Drugs and Drugs Addiction). Source: David Fernández-Rojo, *EU Migration Agencies: The Operation and Cooperation of FRONTEX, EASO and EUROPOL* (Cheltenham and Northampton: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2021): 2. For the purpose of this study, special attention will be dedicated only to the work of Europol and Frontex and their different capacities in producing expert knowledge.

[135] Fernández-Rojo, *EU Migration Agencies,* 2.

The main task of EU agencies is focused on the implementation of operative and technological solutions instead of political ones. In other words, they do not have the authority to directly make decisions. In the management of migration and borders, the European bodies are in charge of supporting member states in the process of achieving the goals of EU policies via joint interventions. In practical terms, they engage in coordination and facilitation activities, knowledge and information sharing, monitoring, and training.[136]

Although the European Commission makes it very clear that EU agencies do not hold decisional powers, the practices of coordination and facilitation leave space for controversial interpretations. For instance, in the case of Frontex and Europol, numerous legislative revisions have expanded their competences and shifted from mere supervision and monitoring to planning functions and the initiation of interventions.[137] To that, one can add the increased on-site autonomy and the prolongation of operations, which facilitate the emergence of informal modes of operation. Over time, unofficial practices have become accepted and, eventually, established, raising questions on accountability.[138] The different distribution of powers easily generates conflicts and disagreements, both among agencies and in the collaboration with member states. These may concern the deployment of human and financial resources, power positions among local and European authorities, priorities of political agendas, and competition.[139] All these frictions prove how the cooperation between EU institutions, agencies, and member states is in fact more complex and ambiguous than the idea of harmonisation may suggest.

The following paragraphs zoom into the legislative premises and the operative mechanisms of the main agencies involved in migration and border management. EASO, Frontex, and Europol share similarities in their implementation of actions on the ground and their cooperation with national and external parties. Nevertheless, they also present differences in the conditions of establishment, degrees of autonomy, and operational capacities. While the work of EASO focuses mostly on

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136 Ibid., 3

137 Sergio Carrera, Leonhard den Hertog, and Joanna Parkin, "The Peculiar Nature of EU Home Affair Agencies in Migration Control: Beyond Accountability versus Autonomy?", *European Journal of Migration and Law* 15, no.4 (2013), 337-358.

138 Johannes Pollak and Peter Solminski, "Experimentalist but not Accountable Governance? The Role of Frontex in Managing the EU's External Borders", *West European Politics* 32, no.5 (2009), 904–924, https://doi.org/10.1080/01402380903064754; Madalina Busuioc, "Accountability, Control and Independence: The Case of European Agencies", *European Law Journal* 15, no.5 (2009), 599–615, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0386.2009.00480.x.

139 Rikard Bengtsson, *The EU and the European Security Order: Interfacing Security Actors* (New York: Routledge, 2010): 20.

practical and organisational matters, Europol and Frontex actively engage in the collection, processing, and sharing of information at large scale. Their very capacity for producing knowledge on borders and migration and the way it affects the meaning associated to border events are at the centre of the inquiry. The focus is on the ambiguity of knowledge, its constructed nature, mechanisms of reproduction, and operative effects.

2.4.2   Acting by Intelligence

Different from other European agencies, which have a pragmatic focus, Europol is the only body established with the purpose of knowledge and information exchange among member states. This specific task was oriented to the more practical scope of developing a criminal intelligence at the European scale. The council decision of 6 April 2009 specified the conditions for the agency to directly assist national police forces on the ground through the deployment of Joint Investigation Teams (JITs).[140] One of the main responsibilities of Europol in joint interventions is that of supporting local forces with professional staff. This includes analysts and specialists in charge of interpreting and evaluating the available data. The importance of Europol's professionals resides not so much in the collection of documentation, but more in the power of reorganising and assessing data. Through analyses and processing, they provide the necessary evidence to inform regarding specific events.[141]

When talking about data in the work of Europol, one must consider that the agency depends on member states and other parties for the collection of material.[142] The net of actors involved in the production of information, therefore, expands way beyond Europol's teams. A large group of contributors introduces multiple methods and varying degrees of commitment to cooperation. This may translate into gaps in the dataset and, consequently, into a possible fragmentation, or even distortion, of the resulting information.[143] However, despite its diverse nature and origin, the data gathered ends up in Europol's Information System (EIS) and in the Analysis Work Files (AWF).

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[140] Fernández-Rojo, *EU Migration Agencies*, 68.

[141] Cf.: Michael Naughton, "'Evidence-Based Policy' and the Government of the Criminal Justice System - Only If the Evidence Fits!" *Critical Social Policy* 25, no. 1 (2005): 47–69. https://doi.org/10.1177/0261018305048967.

[142] Fernández-Rojo, *EU Migration Agencies,* 24.

[143] Joanna Parkin, "EU Hume Affairs Agencies and the Construction of the EU Internal Security", *CEPS Paper in Liberty and Security in Europe 53* (2012): 10.

In these two systems, the data undergo a processing phase, for which Europol is the only responsible body.[144] This grants Europol the sole authority to access the databases and interpret the data.

In other words, Europol is the only one in charge of structuring raw material into information. This monopoly grants the agency a unique role in the definition of risk and threat, and the consequent orientation of political debates.[145] It decides what is worth being regarded as a threat and advises on the best way to tackle it.

In this sense, Europol works as an intelligence body. It stores a large set of data and makes sense of it in view of an ensuing management. The logic of intelligence, therefore, is one of anticipation, intended for the proactive handling of future events.[146] It manipulates the time of phenomena, by the capacity of reorganising temporal relations among different items of data. Current development and past events can be carefully selected and brought together in the dedicated systems. The larger the data set, the more associations the system can provide.[147] Such associations allow for assembling, relating, and regrouping different objects so that they acquire meaning as a whole.

As Bigo points out, intelligence mechanisms mark a difference from the traditional operation of criminal justice.[148] While the latter searches for individuals (which one could identify as a single data item), the work of intelligence focuses on groups (the associated dataset). Singular details can be selected among general common characteristics, recognised, and shared in a large ensemble. They are then structured together and declared relevant by the expert eye of the profiler.[149] Only at this stage do they become evidence. This logic plays a decisive role when the threat is still unknown and constitutes the basis of the main security matters, such as terrorism investigations.[150]

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144 Ibid., 8-9

145 See: Radaelli, "The Public Policy of the European Union," 762.

146 Bigo et al., "Mapping the Field of EU Internal Security Agencies", 37.

147 On the logic and functioning of digital associations see: Louise Amoore, "Data Derivatives: On the Emergence of a Security Risk Calculus for Our Times", *Theory, Culture & Society* 28, no.6 (2011): 24–43, https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276411417430.

148 Bigo et al., "Mapping the Field of EU Internal Security Agencies", 37

149 Ibid., 38

150 See for instance: Louise Amoore, "Lines of Sight: On the Visualization of Unknown Futures", *Citizenship Studies* 13, no.1 (2009): 17-30, https://doi.org/10.1080/13621020802586628.

The application of Europol's intelligence logic becomes relevant in the analysis of border control and migration when the cooperation between the agency and Frontex is at stake. With Regulation 2016/794, Europol established a new centre of specialised expertise, the European Migrant Smuggling Centre (EMSC), dedicated to the investigation of criminal networks involved in migrant smuggling and illegal border crossing.[151] The EMSC collaborates closely with Frontex and through their interagency cooperation the link between criminality and border crossing is strengthened at the operative level. In terms of practice, in fact, the EMSC localises the surveillance of smuggling activities at the EU external borders, giving a spatial dimension to the overlapping actions of the police and the military.

What is important to remark on in this collaboration is the fact that Europol can integrate Frontex activities with the deployment of specialised intelligence professionals. Through the joint effort in collecting and processing data on both criminal activities and migration, new knowledge of the events is produced. The cooperation of the two agencies redefines what will count as evidence of facts (for both justice and administrative matters), while reinforcing the association between the security domains of criminality, smuggling, human trafficking, and non-European mobility, which also includes asylum.[152] In this way, the knowledge produced through the collaboration of the two EU bodies prepares the political ground on which migration debates can shift on the question of risk.

2.4.3 Acting by Risk

When considering joint operations of security, national borders and crossing points emerge as the sites where the activities of European agencies converge with those of national authorities and other local bodies. The number of actors multiplies at the border, and their interactions become materially visible. NGOs, CSOs, international organisations, independent volunteers, research institutions, activists, journalists, and private bodies all supply various sorts of equipment and participate in the enactment of border control. They all contribute to shape different images of the border that move around ideas of emergency, whether securitarian or humanitarian.[153]

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[151] Fernández-Rojo, *EU Migration Agencies,* 81

[152] See: Carrera et al., "The Peculiar Nature of EU Home Affair Agencies in Migration Control," 349.

[153] Paolo Cuttitta, Jana Häberlein, and Polly Pallister-Wilkins, "Various Actors: The Border Death Regime", in *Border Deaths: Causes, Dynamics and Consequences of Migration-related Mortality,* eds. Paolo Cuttitta and Tamara Last (Amsterdam University Press, 2020): 35-52, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvt1sgz6.

Hierarchies and boundaries divide these actors into who has concrete governing powers and who does not. The strongest authority lies in the capacity to orient political debates in the direction of a policy change. This ability, in turn, influences the way borders are managed and designed. In particular, the capacity of accessing and interpreting the available documentation on border events grants certain actors with a major responsibility in knowledge production about these phenomena, giving them more autonomy in the implementation of interventions.[154]

Among European agencies, Frontex is the one who has experienced the largest growth of power and autonomy over time, both in operational capacity and availability of resources. Since the time of its establishment in 2004, the initial function of assisting member states in the surveillance of external borders has evolved on the ground with several regulations.[155] Along with the introduction of new tasks on site, Frontex also expanded the range of professional figures involved in the collection of data on migration and border events.

Regulation 1168/2011 established the European Border Guards Teams (EBGTs), extending the duration of Frontex activity on the ground. It appointed debriefing, screening, and interview experts, who are responsible for collecting different sorts of documentation on site.[156] In particular, the first are in charge of debriefing interviews, which produce data on countries of origin of undocumented migrants, reasons for attempting an illegal entry, routes, modus operandi of crossings, and involvement of facilitators. To this material, screening experts add the nationality assessment of individuals, which results from interviews conducted in collaboration with national authorities. The nationality assessment serves to coordinate registration or return procedures, rendering certain data immediately operative. Finally, interview experts are responsible for intercepting and questioning migrants at border crossing points. They gather a wide range of personal and sensitive data, through more or less official practices that remain mostly unclear.[157]

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154 Bigo et al., "Mapping the Field of EU Internal Security Agencies", 32.

155 In particular, Regulation 2016/1624 and Regulation 2019/1896 set the legal basis of the agency and are currently in force. Source: https://frontex.europa.eu/about-frontex/legal-basis/. Accessed on 21-11-2022.

156 Fernández-Rojo, *EU Migration Agencies,* 71.

157 Ibid., 72.

All these scattered, varied, at times subjective and qualitative, and, in most cases, sensitive items of data feed into the Frontex risk analysis database. In the same system, not only the documentation derived from Frontex experts but also a large set of data from border guards, national authorities, EU institutions and partner agencies, NGOs, and online open sources converge.[158]

Similar to the logic of intelligence, the analysis of risk does not simply identify a threat but reflects a more dynamic procedure. Through the assemblage of a very diverse set of data gathered in the past, the unknown future is rendered manageable.[159] In this process, risk analysis engages with a redefinition of migration phenomena, by restructuring the data concerning variable trends and shifting routes in the form of a calculable magnitude. On the basis of this redefinition, the analysis of risk also evaluates the response capacity of member states' borders. It assigns "impact levels" (high, medium or low) according to the estimated effects produced by migratory events on such borders.

In this sense, two main actions can be identified in the working of risk analysis. The first one consists of reducing the complexity of phenomena.[160] By rendering migration a calculable entity, the large ensemble of data and fragmented documentation that end up in Frontex's Risk Analysis Unit undergoes a process of simplification and standardisation. Through this procedure, gaps and frictions that can be present in the dataset are manipulated and approximated, as to become readable in the form of statistics, graphs, charts and maps.[161]

Risk goes from being unknown and mobile to being visualised in a numerical form and localised to a precise geography, specifically, at the border. In this way, it gains an alleged scientific value that unifies the understanding of different actors, provides a commonality of language, and suggests a shared method of communication.[162]

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[158] Parkin, "EU Hume Affairs Agencies and the Construction of the EU Internal Security", 14.

[159] The relation between risk logic and power in the management of unknown phenomena is analysed in-depth in: Louise Amoore, *The Politics of Possibility: Risk and Security Beyond Probability* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013); Brian Massumi, *Ontopower: War, Powers, and the State of Perception* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).

[160] cf. Paul, "Harmonisation by Risk Analysis?"

[161] Amoore, *The Politics of Possibility,* 31.

[162] Satoko Horii, "The Effect of Frontex's Risk Analysis on the European Border Control", *European Politics and Society* 17, no.2 (2016): 242-258. https://doi.org/10.1080/23745118.2016.1121002.

However, the work of risk analysis does not end with the reorganisation of data into information—that is to say, structuring data in a form that can convey a precise meaning.[163] The second main action of risk analysis consists of making information operational.[164] If risk is concrete and defined in calculable terms, the capacity of acting upon it can also be measured. Member states' responsiveness and vulnerability can be assessed by the same agency which shapes the magnitude of the threat.[165] This increases the authority of Frontex, by rendering it capable of deciding where it is necessary to intervene and for how long, and it can set priorities and justify the allocation of funding.

What is important to stress is that decisions can be taken and legitimised on the basis of a perceived objectivity, reliability, and scientific value of risk analysis procedures. Yet, the mechanisms that underlie processes of data gathering, selection, and re-elaboration remain obscure.[166] Both in the working of intelligence and profiling, as well as in Frontex's risk analysis, the production of information consists of a set of practices in which certain items of data are assembled to acquire meaning, while others are erased. Accordingly, what emerges as measurable is not necessarily, nor objectively, what really matters.[167] Rather, it reflects a functional and political purpose: that of designing security interventions at/on the border.

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163 Stavros Kousoulas and Dulmini Perera, "Five points towards and Architecture In-Formation", *Footprint* 15, no.1 (2021): 3-9, https://doi.org/10.7480/footprint.15.1.5663.

164 In the words of Massumi: "It is not about information. It is about taking information to the edge. It is about making information 'pointy': a direct weapon of war." Massumi, *Ontopower,* 99.

165 As Horii indicates, threat, vulnerability, and impact constitute the key concepts of risk in the analysis and operation of Frontex. While threat defines risk from the outside of the external border, vulnerability and impact direct the attention to the border itself and inside the territory of the member state, assessing the capacity of local authorities to respond to the threat and the potential consequences: Horii, "The Effect of Frontex's Risk Analysis on the European Border Control," 247. See also: Andrew W. Neal, "Securitization and risk at the EU border: The origins of FRONTEX", *JCMS Journal of Common Market Studies* 47, no.3 (2009): 333-356, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5965.2009.00807.x.

166 Cf.: Pollak and Solminski, "Experimentalist but not Accountable Governance?".

167 See: Marion Fourcade and Jeffrey Gordon, "Learning Like a State: Statecraft in the Digital Age", *Journal of Law and Political Economy* (2020): 78 - 108.

From the capacity of EU agencies to inform regarding migratory phenomena, namely, to attribute to them the meaning of threat, risk, and security problem, a new form of knowledge is produced. Such knowledge, however, does not reflect traditional criteria of evaluation, critical acknowledgment, and coherence. It is based solely on principles of immediate activation, operation, and effectiveness.[168] Therefore, if it is true that EU agencies do not hold decisional powers, the knowledge they produce seems to acquire an agency of its own. Knowledge, in fact, has a decisive impact on the way of thinking about certain phenomena; it defines what one assumes to know about migration and borders.

By structuring the conceptual understanding of borders, this knowledge anticipates their concrete transformation. In fact, it legitimises and substantiates the way to act on them. This capacity does not only concern the impact on policies to govern migration, but also translates into a set of techniques and technologies to intervene at borders. As it will be discussed in the following chapter, knowledge uses a technological apparatus to govern and to shape the border it conceptualises. In other words, it constitutes the bridge from the virtuality of the diagrammatic work of policies to the actualisation of the border's spatial form.

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[168] Cf. Antoinette Rouvroy, "The End(s) of Critique: Data Behaviourism versus Due Process", in *Privacy Due Process and the Computational Turn: The Philosophy of Law Meets the Philosophy of Technology*, eds. Mireille Hildebrandt and Katja De Vries (London and New York: Routledge, 2013): 143-167; see also Claudia Aradau and Jef Huysmans, "Assembling Credibility: Knowledge, Method and Critique in Times of 'Post-truth'" *Security Dialogue* 50, no.1 (2019): 40–58, https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010618788996.

Röszke (Hungary), January 2022. Source: photo by author.

3 The Technical Apparatus of Knowledge

Digital and Visual Infrastructures

3.1 Actualising the Diagram

Understanding the functioning of border policies in diagrammatic terms reveals the capacity of legislative tools to establish relationships among a diverse set of elements and display them as apparently fixed. In this process, potential actions on the organisation of space are defined, boundaries are set, and a spatial structure is suggested. Nevertheless, the diagram does not engage with precise definitions or dispositions of objects and spaces. It does not aim at resembling a given reality, nor does it physically intervene on it. Instead, it is generative and transformative on a virtual level. By building new links and stabilising certain connections between concepts, actors, and objects, the diagrammatic functioning of policies sets the basis for the emergence of new forms of knowledge related to phenomena. The close entanglement of EU policies, actors, and processes of knowledge production, on the one hand, manipulates the meaning of migration and borders. On the other hand, it establishes hierarchies of actors and networks of cooperation, while preparing the design of border operations. In particular, the expert knowledge derived from the fields of intelligence, risk analysis, and data processing moves the virtual character of policies towards the actual governance of borders and migration.

Knowledge alone, however, does not perform governing functions, and neither does it define the spatial form of borders. To execute such operations, it requires a technological apparatus, which initiates the actualisation of the diagram of policies by identifying and dimensioning the spatial components contained in it.

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In other words, knowledge prepares for actualisation by arranging the spatial information contained in virtual relationships into *actual qualities*.

As explained in the previous chapter, diagrams operate at the virtual level. They project a certain set of relationships onto space (such as functions and programs), but lack a proper definition of spatial extensions (such as distances and volumes). In the diagrammatic arrangement of relationships, actual qualities emerge through the organisation of intensities. According to Hughes, actual qualities originate from the organisation of contracted potential quantities.[169] In this thesis, actual qualities refer to the process of spatial actualisation: the formation of the border. Therefore, they are called *spatial characters* to emphasise that what is at stake is, in fact, the actualisation of spatial form (and not the passage from the virtual to the actual in general terms).

As actual qualities depend on the quantities organised by virtual relations, the spatial characters of *measure*, *scale*, and *vision* analysed here depend on the information produced on migration and borders, which is not yet applied to the sensible world. Such information is expressed in the form of magnitude, pressure, vulnerability, and responsiveness. These define phenomena in terms of intensity (a non-divisible quantity, non-extensive yet). In more general terms, actual qualities prepare for the process of actualisation by rendering intensive quantities extensive.[170] This means that what was originally organised as intensities becomes not only quantifiable but also divisible. In this process, an actual form comes to be.[171] More specifically, the actualisation of spatial form is possible through the operation of the spatial characters of scale, measure, and vision, which reorganise spatial differences into distances.[172]

In the process of actualisation, it is important to consider that the actual object does not directly originate from the virtual. Rather, it emerges from a creative, generative process steered by different actual qualities. In the development of the border's formation, the technological apparatus intervenes by mediating the gap between virtuality and actual form. It mediates the passage from differences (intensities) to distances (extensities), by ordering, structuring, and partitioning space.

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[169] Joe Hughes, *Deleuze's Difference and Repetition* (London and New York: Continuum, 2009): 145-146. See also: Deleuze, Gilles, *Difference and Repetition*, (London and New York: Continuum, 2001): 183.

[170] Hughes, *Deleuze's Difference and Repetition*, 155.

[171] As Hughes explains, an actual object contains in itself both the quality, as the organisation of intensive quantities, and extensity, that is to say the organisation of qualities, see: ibid., 147. In simpler terms: quality and extensity are co-existent and co-dependent in the actualised form.

[172] As intensities are indivisible magnitudes, they can be understood as difference. In this sense, they are not a quantity in opposition to extensity, but rather represent its generative principle. See: ibid., 149.

The present chapter analyses a selected set of technologies that facilitate the emergence of the three spatial characters of scale, measure, and vision. The focus on these three characters serves to frame and limit the following analysis, for which some clarifications are needed.

The first clarification concerns the proposed differentiation of the technological apparatus into categories of infrastructures, which render knowledge operative in the construction and governance of borders. The term "infrastructure" stresses the complexity of a material aggregate, in which multiple techniques and technologies are deployed. In its most common understanding, an infrastructure is a built system that facilitates the circulation of things, people, and ideas over space.[173] It has a concrete dimension (it is a physical object) and a relational one, as it exists as the very connection between things. This determines a systemic mode of operation, which makes it impossible to study infrastructures as mere tools, but rather pushes to examine the way they establish a ground for multiple objects and powers to operate.[174] This thesis classifies infrastructures as digital, visual (in the present chapter), and physical (discussed in chapter four). The three categories are designed, exist, and function in relation to one another. The classification proposed in this chapter reflects the way digital and visual infrastructures mediate the spatial characters of scale, measure and vision, advancing different phases of actualisation, while progressively shaping the border's spatial form.

Like any categorisation, the distinction of the three infrastructures is very general and definitely not sufficient to explain the detailed functioning of each technology taken into consideration. What is central in this thesis is their performative capacity: their peculiar ability to mediate difference over distance. While infrastructures of communication or transport are generally conceived to reduce spatial distances and increase the speed of mobility, the infrastructures involved in the control of borders and migration manipulate measures, distances, and speed in a differential way.

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[173] Brian Larkin, "The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure", *Annual Review of Anthropology* 42, no.3 (2013): 27-43. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-092412-155522.

[174] Ibid. 329. According to this interpretation Huub Dijtelbloem conceptualises borders themselves as infrastructures that vehicle concrete political ideas and actions, see: Huub Dijstelbloem, *Borders as Infrastructure: The Technopolitics of Border Control* (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 2021). This thesis, instead, insists on the spatial-material complexity of borders and re-thinks them as both a system and a process, namely, a spatial formation, in which infrastructures are a component.

This differential functioning characterises them not only as technological systems but also as instruments of power.[175]

As a sole ensemble, digital, visual, and physical infrastructures can be considered the technical apparatus of knowledge, referring to the co-constitutive link between the framing of specific knowledge and its operativity. Actually, through the working of each infrastructure, various sorts of data are extracted and assembled into information. This information eventually substantiates the elaboration of new knowledge on border and migratory events. In this way, the value associated to specific knowledge is closely related to the trust attributed to the technologies that allow its production. In this sense, the connection between power, knowledge, and technology is reinforced.[176]

The second clarification concerns the distinction in this chapter between the material and physical dimension, as well as the separation of digital and visual infrastructures from the physical infrastructure. Digital and visual infrastructures are not insubstantial; they do possess materiality, as will be discussed in the next pages. Nevertheless, they operate in a phase of the actualisation process, in which the activation of specific spatial characters still holds a connection with virtuality. The physical infrastructure, instead, advances a different phase of the border's actualisation, in which the impossibility of correspondence between actualised and virtual forms becomes manifest. This means that, while digital and visual infrastructures initiate actualisation, the physical infrastructure intervenes at the final stage of the process, when the actual form differs substantially from the diagrammatic projection. As it will be argued in chapter four, the actual quality that the physical infrastructure deals with is that of *plasticity*, which operates in the moment of clash between the substantial and the potential.

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[175] Cf. with the concept of "differential inclusion" elaborated by Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson in *Border as a Method*. This concept refers to the way border and migration regimes articulate inclusion and exclusion not just as a neat division between inside and outside. Rather, they modulate movement by filtering, channelling, and selecting migratory flows according to a more dynamic mode of control. Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, *Border as a Method or the Multiplication of Labour* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013): 157-166.

[176] See: Paul N. Edwards, "Knowledge Infrastructures under Siege: Climate Data as Memory, Truce, and Target", in *Data Politics: Worlds, Subjects, Rights*, eds. Didier Bigo, Engin Isin, Evelyn Ruppert (London and New York: Routledge, 2019): 21-42.

Finally, however similar in scope they may be, infrastructures of border control vary greatly in extension and capacity according to the geographical and political contexts in which they are deployed. Satellites and radars for the surveillance of seas, land border walls, national databases, and digital systems may share common logics across the globe, but they also express different levels of technological innovation, institutional protocols, and financial and material availability. For the purpose of this thesis, the analysis focuses on digital infrastructures at the level of the European Union. It then zooms into the selected case study of the Hungarian-Serbian border to examine the functioning of visual and physical infrastructures in the present and following chapter, respectively.

The next sections (3.2 and 3.3) inquire into how new spatial relationships are generated through the interaction of knowledge and the technical apparatus of digital and visual infrastructures. The two are observed in their co-constitutive connection. As argued in chapter two, risk-oriented knowledge identifies zones of tension, quantifies the response capacity of member states, and sets the basis for the governance of borders. This includes the implementation and deployment of selected technologies in specific locations. At the same time, through the functioning of digital and visual infrastructures, a large amount of data is produced, collected, and assembled. Such a large set of documentation feeds risk analysis and intelligence databases, informing knowledge in turn. In this sense, as mentioned earlier, knowledge and technologies are considered co-constitutive.

One must note, however, that, for the purpose of this thesis, not all kinds of data and technological functioning will be taken into account. The present analysis will only highlight those elements and procedures which show the potential to materially affect the spatial dimension of borders. This is due to the fact that the analysis serves to understand how the selected technologies advance the spatial formation of the border through the manipulation of scale, measure, and vision.

3.2 Reduction: The Spatial Mechanisms of Digital Infrastructures

The increasing circulation of information through digital platforms, the growing capacity of datasets, and the ever-expanding networks of data-sharing dominate the current activity and the logic of future development of private and public enterprises. This trend interests governmental and educational institutions, the healthcare system, finance, private companies, and single individuals. Ordinary apps are regularly and widely used to record steps, heart rate, calories, and working productivity, rendering everyone at ease with the constant measurement of bodily, social, and technical functioning.[177] Such a tendency favours the acceptance and normalisation of a certain understanding of data, digital networks, and their operations. They are commonly connected to the idea of speed, efficiency, and performance and are received with general enthusiasm. At the same time, however, their capacity to activate processes of control, differentiation, and exclusion easily fades into the background.[178]

As Aradau and Blanke note, the field of security surely occupies a prominent position in the "computational turn", especially after 9/11.[179] Processes of data mining, predictive analytics, and algorithmic matching have taken the lead in the constant effort at preventing the next terrorist attack.[180] The emphasis on prevention, pre-emption, big data, and continuous monitoring, in particular, dominates the logic and practices of digital security. Nevertheless, a growing number of scholars of security

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[177] David Beer, *Metric Power*. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016): 4, https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-55649-3.

[178] See for instance: David Lyon, "Surveillance Capitalism, Surveillance Culture and data Politics", in *Data Politics* (op.cit.): 64–77.

[179] Claudia Aradau, and Tobias Blanke, "The (Big)Data-Security Assemblage: Knowledge and Critique", *Big Data & Society* (2015): 1-12, https://doi.org/10.1177/2053951715609066. In this sentence the "computational turn" refers, in very general terms, to a societal phenomenon. It indicates a large set of modes of governing events, which act through computational operations (such as machine learning, data mining, profiling etc.). However, the term is much more complex. It includes multiple concepts and constitutes a multifaceted process, in which computational techniques intervene in the production of knowledge, in the sense-making of phenomena and, accordingly, in the way to govern them. Obviously, there is no space in this thesis to develop this argument further. A more detailed analysis of the various facets, notions, and interpretations of the "computational turn" can be found in the edited volume: Mireille Hildebrandt and Katja de Vries (eds.), *Privacy, Due Process and the Computational Turn: The Philosophy of Law Meets the Philosophy of Technology* (New York and London: Routledge, 2013).

[180] Ibid. 2.

studies,[181] as well as philosophy of technology[182] and media studies,[183] have taken a critical stand in opposition to the general positivism that gravitates around the digital transformation of security. They warn that a shift in focus is needed from data itself to the relationships linking it with power and control, paying attention to the emerging implications with authority and decision-making processes.

In the reinforcement of border control, the recruitment of professional figures coming from the fields of mathematics, statistics, and information technology has had a profound impact. It has not only affected the way hierarchies of authorities are established, but also transformed the modes of knowledge production about phenomena and, accordingly, the meaning of events. Thanks to the expertise of data scientists and analysts, it is possible to reassemble and disassemble information, framing data in a specific arrangement that acquires relevance for new policies. In other words, the manipulation of data assemblages shows the ability to reorganise the connections between meanings and events, affecting the way of governing determinate phenomena. Data is, therefore, generative of new forms of power.[184]

Examining the digital infrastructures of border control serves to shed light on how datasets and databases can function as a "system of capture", which has very material implications for bodies, objects, and spaces. When speaking of assemblages of data, one indicates a multiplicity of items of information that are brought together with the specific function of becoming operative in unity. [185] In the work of Deleuze and Guattari, the assemblage pertains to the working of the state machine; it refers to the capacity of gaining control over flows by striating space.

181 See for instance: Louise Amoore, "Biometric Borders: Governing Mobilities in the War on Terror", *Political Geography* 25, no.3 (2006): 336-351, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2006.02.001; Louise Amoore, and Rita Raley, "Securing with Algorithms: Knowledge, Decision, Sovereignty," *Security Dialogue* 48, no. 1 (2016): 3-10, https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010616680753; Aradau et al., *Critical Security Methods;* Bigo et al., *Data Politics*; David Lyon and Kevin D. Haggerty, "The Surveillance Legacies of 9/11: Recalling, Reflecting on, and Rethinking Surveillance in the Security Era," *Canadian Journal of Law and Society / Revue Canadienne Droit et Societé* 27, no.3 (2012): 291-300, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0829320100010516.

182 See: Mireille Hildebrandt and Katja de Vries (eds.), *Privacy, Due Process and the Computational Turn,* and particularly in this volume the contribution of Antoinette Rouvroy, *The End(s) of Critique: Data Behaviourism versus Due Process*, 143-167.

183 See: Alexander R. Galloway, *Protocol: How Control Exists after Decentralization* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2004); Alexander R. Galloway and Eugene Thacker, *The Exploit: A Theory of Networks* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007); Rob Kitchin, *The Data Revolution: Big Data, Open Data, Data Infrastructures and their Consequences* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2014).

184 Bigo et al. *Data Politics,* 4.

185 Kevin D. Haggerty, and Richard V. Ericson, "The Surveillant Assemblage," *The British Journal of Sociology* 51, no. 4 (2000): 605-622. https://doi.org/10.1080/00071310020015280.

This means organizing, containing and channelling what is in motion and escapes the structures of territorialisation by performing functions of capture.[186] Similarly, digital infrastructures activate selected sets of data in the material design of borders. By rendering data operative through information, they initiate the bounding of physical spaces, while capturing and channelling groups in motion.

In the previous chapter, it was highlighted that the data at play in the exercise of border and migration control is manifold and differs greatly in nature. It may include numerical and statistic material, such as the data produced for risk analysis purposes, digital signals coming from systems of remote surveillance spread over more or less wide geographic areas, and textual or physical evidence collected on the ground by police officers, authorities, and border guards. Taken in their raw and original forms, all these elements constitute partial and fragmentary pieces of documentation about one or multiple events. They are not yet organised in a unified arrangement, thus, they cannot inform nor be put into action. For scattered material to turn into an operative dataset, it has to be readable in the same form, namely in the form of digits. That implies the translation of the various features of a phenomenon into quantifiable units that can be regrouped and put into a precise order.[187]

In this way, one can say that data can be framed, or assembled, as to acquire significance. When selected pieces of data are counted, combined with items of the same nature, and evaluated, they can be constructed as the problem to manage.[188] In other words, becoming an assembled set of data gives raw material a purpose and a meaning oriented towards action.[189] Nevertheless, it is important to stress that the process of datafication involves selection, meaning that it inevitably involves the loss of something. As Rottenburg and Marry observe, only the items suitable for numerical simplification are preserved, while the other pieces of documentation are cut off.[190]

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[186] The concepts of territorialisation and de-territorialisation, in particular, are analysed in: Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Nomadology: The War Machine* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1986) and Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

[187] Richard Rottenburg and Sally E. Merry, "A World of Indicators: The Making of Governmental Knowledge through Quantification," in *The World of Indicators: The Making of Governmental Knowledge through Quantification*, eds. Richard Rottenburg, Sally E. Merry, Sung-Joon Park, and Johanna Mugler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015): 12.

[188] Cf. Lisa Adkins and Celia Lury, "Introduction: Special Measures," *The Sociological Review* 59, no.2 (2011): 5–23. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954X.2012.02051.x.

[189] In the words of Louise Amoore, items of data make sense and become actionable only "in associations to one another", cf: Louise Amoore, "Data Derivatives: On the Emergence of a Security Risk Calculus for Our Times," *Theory, Culture & Society* 28, no.6 (2011): 24–43. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276411417430.

[190] Rottenburg and Merry, "A World of Indicators," 8.

Thus, the resulting ensemble of comparable, transferable, and easily manageable data does not originate from an automated and neutral procedure. On the contrary, it stems from an accurate process of selection and abstraction, not free of biases.[191]

Without entering into the technical details of the selection and aggregation mechanisms, the following paragraphs will direct the attention to the epistemological and governing power of European digital infrastructures deployed in migration management and border control. Such power consists not only in the creation of a certain knowledge of phenomena but, especially, in the normalisation of determinate associations between events, their (re)presentation, and modes of governance.

3.2.1 Databases

Since the early 2000s, the policy efforts aimed at regulating movement across the transnational European space have been strengthened through the development of digital tools. Databases and platforms have been designed with the intent of facilitating the application of specific legislations, promoting the idea of speed, efficiency, and progress commonly connected to the digital realm. Nevertheless, the push towards the implementation of automated systems to quickly regulate the entrance into the European territory has just as quickly led to the multiplication of processes of bordering and exclusion. The quantity and variety of data accumulated, the multiple networks in which they circulate, and the involvement of different actors open questions to the capacity of digital infrastructures to go beyond the mere application of law. The following section inquires into this capacity by focusing on the way digital systems produce concrete effects on the conceptualisation and design of borders, as well as their bodily impact on migrants.

The first intervention towards the digitalisation of administrative procedures can be found in the Council Decision 512/2004. [192] With this document, the European Council established the adoption of the Visa Information System (VIS), a common database for the exchange of visa data among member states. Building upon the council decision, the later Regulation 767/2008 of the European Parliament and European Council specifies the functioning of the aforementioned infrastructure and distinguishes its main components: namely, the Central System (CS-VIS) and the

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[191] Ibid. 11.

[192] Council of the European Union, 2004/512/EC Council Decision of 8 June 2004 establishing the Visa Information System (VIS), *Official Journal of the European Communities* L213 (June 15, 2004): 5–7, https://bit.ly/3pkCyAw. Accessed on 11-03-2023.

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National Interfaces (NI-VIS).[193] Through the NI and its network of communication, member state authorities share with the Central System data on visa application procedures, personal information of applicants, and biometrics (specifically, photographs and fingerprints).

Although the main scope of VIS is identified in the effective application of the common visa policy, additional purposes are also connected to the achievement of this goal. For example, article 2 of Regulation 767/2008 lists, among other things, the facilitation of checks at external border crossing points and within the territory of member states, the identification of any person who may not fulfil the conditions for entry or stay, and a general "prevention of threats" to the internal security of the state.[194] The prescriptions of article 2, therefore, make explicit the link between individuals in need of an entry visa, border control actions, and security threats. This connection, which had already been established at the relational level of policy,[195] is operatively reaffirmed and strengthened by the digital system.

One of the main implications of the operative connection between the visa policy and security issues is the changing conditions for access to data by other authorities.[196] In order to contribute to the prevention, detection, or investigation of serious criminal offences, terrorist offences, and exceptional cases of urgency, the data of VIS may be rendered accessible to Europol, other non-European authorities, and international organisations. This implies that the data contained in VIS may be opened to other forms of processing and usage. If one considers the intervention of Europol, for instance, the possibility that biometric data may be used for profiling purposes cannot be excluded. This operation is anything but neutral; it is already influenced by the selection criteria embedded in the collection process, which results in the data in the system representing only non-European nationals. Since they are the only category of persons for which a visa is required upon entry to the EU, non-European individuals risk being more exposed to discrimination and targeting, when it comes to investigations on serious crime and terrorism.[197]

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193 European Parliament and Council of the European Union, Regulation (EC) 767/2008, Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 July 2008 Concerning the Visa Information System (VIS) and the Exchange of Data between Member States on Short-stay Visas (VIS Regulation), *Official Journal of the European Communities* L 218, (August 13, 2008): 60–81, https://bit.ly/3zCA1Y3. Accessed on 11-03-2023

194 Ibid., Chapter I, Art. 2.

195 See chapter two of this dissertation.

196 Regulation (EC) 767/2008, Chapter III, Art. 3.

197 Vildana S. Kenk, Janez Križaj, Vitomir Štruc and Simon Dobrišek, "Smart Surveillance Technologies in Border Control," *European Journal of Law and Technology* 4, no. 2 (2013), https://ejlt.org/index.php/ejlt/article/view/230/378. Accessed on 23-11-2022.

This problem becomes even more relevant if regarded in relation to the possibility of errors. Actually, the greater the number and variety of data contained in a system, the higher the chance of mismatches and incorrect associations.[198] This risk affects not only the Visa Information System, but it can be observed in larger European digital tools. The Schengen Information System (SIS), for instance, represents another emblematic example, in which an even wider and more diverse set of data is regrouped and put to work.

The design of a common information system for the application of the provisions of the Acquis was promoted since the signing of the Schengen Agreement in 1985.[199] According to this intention, SIS was aimed at facilitating the gradual abolition of checks at common internal borders of member states, at first including only the Benelux countries, Germany, and France. With Regulation 1987/2006, the first plan for the Schengen Information System developed into SIS II, and more detailed operations and uses have been specified.[200] Similarly to the Visa Information System, SIS II is designed for facilitating the exchange of information among member states by sharing "alerts" on persons, vehicles, and other items, concerning issues of immigration, policing, and criminal law.

By the term "alert", Regulation 1987/2006 indicates a varied set of data that may allow the competent national authority to identify persons or objects with the aim of taking "specific action".[201] Alerts are classified according to different ranges of risk, from arrest warrants, to missing persons, refusal of entry, stolen vehicles, suspect objects, and so on. In the case of alerts concerning individuals, personal data and biometrics also end up in the system, along with the reasons for the alert, actions to be taken, links to other incidents reported, and additional considerations.[202] In such a diverse assortment of data, it is the responsibility of the national authority to establish whether a case is adequate and relevant to enter SIS II and under which category it falls.

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198 Aradau and Blanke, "The (Big)Data-Security Assemblage", 8.

199 See: Vildana et al., "Smart Surveillance Technologies in Border Control."

200 European Parliament and Council of the European Union, Regulation 1987/2006: Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 December 2006 on the establishment, operation and use of the second-generation Schengen Information System (SIS II). *Official Journal of the European Communities* L 381 (December 28, 2006): 4–23, https://bit.ly/3QkFngn.

201 Regulation 1987/2006, Chapter I, Art. 3.

202 Regulation 1987/2006, Chapter IV, Art. 20.

It is worth noting that much of the data assembled in SIS II and, accordingly, the resulting information is closely connected to the arbitrary judgement of national authorities. This may easily result in discrepancies among member states' procedures concerning both the assessment of risk and related categories of alert, as well as the modalities of gathering and storing data. Accordingly, the necessary simplification, which makes it possible to translate different material into data and exchange information among member states, inevitably brings with it a greater predisposition to error and/or misinterpretation. This is particularly problematic if one considers the link that SIS II establishes between penal law and administrative law (that is to say, between criminality and migration) and its orientation towards concrete interventions. Due to the propensity of digital infrastructures to build new associations within the same system, it is easier for non-European nationals to be linked to any sort of criminal investigation just because their personal data is already stored in SIS II.[203]

In both databases, VIS and SIS II, procedures of selection, standardisation, and association allow translating phenomena into quantifiable units, facilitating their communication among different authorities, and reinterpreting their meaning. Despite the alleged neutrality attributed to the functioning of these systems, processes of selection and association see the active involvement of specific bodies and expertise. The decision of experts underlies the collection and filtering of data and the rules behind their associations. These procedures directly impact certain individuals, making them more exposed to digital actions of profiling and targeting, but how do operations of standardisation, selection, and association affect space and, particularly, the spatiality of borders?

From a spatial perspective, the simplification of phenomena to data for the purpose of aggregation in determined datasets can be understood as the capacity to manipulate the scale of the space to govern. Or better yet, these datasets can establish specific associations between the scale of objects moving across borders, which are reduced in the form of data, and the scale of the territory, namely, the space to secure. On the one hand, reduction refers to the process of simplification and numerical abstraction that the writing in digits allows for. Through this mechanism, pieces of information become readable and combinable with similar entities and eventually fit into the same infrastructure. Simplification implies the selection of some details and the exclusion of other details considered unnecessary to the functioning of the system. On the other hand, reduction also refers to the manipulation of spatial qualities, namely the scale in which phenomena are observed. This aspect highlights two correlated implications.

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203 Cf. Kenk et al. "Smart Surveillance Technologies in Border Control."

First, the reduction of details characterising a specific border event allows for the enlarging of the frame, hence the scale, in which it is contained and observed. Second, reduction enables the movement of data on this event, without apparent modification to its meaning, across a potentially expansible space. That is to say, reduction mechanisms of digital infrastructures manipulate the scale of the space, across which data circulate. This is possible through both a numeric reinterpretation of the observed phenomenon and a mathematic, geometric understanding of space.[204] The latter implies the assumption that the use of different scales maintains invariable measures while moving across smaller or larger distances.

This interpretation, however, is refused and contested by critical studies on cartography.[205] They point out how spatial measurement and representation are not neutral but, on the contrary, are closely connected to the exercise of power. For instance, Harley's book *The New Nature of Maps* examines how the language of mathematics used in cartography has the capacity to grant symbols the value of facts. In doing so, it hides the technical activities that underlie the process of writing in symbols which are performed by different actors and serve several needs at once.[206] In the standardisation and selection of the features to include in maps, the unknown is rendered manageable, hierarchies are established, and omissions (or "silences" in Harley's words), as well as emphasised features, become vehicles for political messages.

In the reduction mechanisms activated by digital operations, scale serves a very similar political function. It displays on a spatial surface what to measure and how to measure, showing a close connection of metrics, judgement, and intervention.[207] Facilitating the movement of spatial information through measurement and representation, scales actively engage in the redefinition of boundaries within which phenomena are to be observed.

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204 See also the notion of "immutable, mobile inscriptions" theorized by Bruno Latour in: Bruno Latour, "Visualization and Cognition: Thinking with Eyes and Hands", *Knowledge and Society Studies in the Sociology of Culture Past and Present* 6, no.1 (1986): 1–40. Through the simplification of inscriptions, according to Latour, it is possible to mobilise a larger and larger number of events, combine, shuffle, and recombine them with other inscriptions, and flatten them to merge with geometry, measures, and calculations as to finally guarantee their full domination.

205 A large body of literature investigates in detail the political implications of spatial measurement and representation in cartography. Some relevant examples can be found in the work of Mark Monmonier and J. B. Harley. See: Mark Monmonier, *No Dig, No Fly, No Go: How Maps Restrict and Control* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2010); J. B. Harley, *The New Nature of Maps: Essays in the History of Cartography* (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 2001).

206 Harley, op. cit.

207 Cf. Beer, *Metric Power*, 23-24; cf. also: Lury and Adkins, "Introduction: Special Measures."

Accordingly, they influence the design of interventions to govern them. Understanding reduction not only as a process of simplification and abstraction but also as a manipulation of scales shows the emergence of a link between digital systems, the meaning of phenomena, and their governance through the material organisation of space.

In a nutshell, the reduction mechanism activated by digital infrastructures allows for framing the phenomenon as a problem, moving its boundaries, and measuring it in terms of concrete interventions of containment, channelling, and exclusion. Reduction establishes new spatial relationships in the diagram of border and migration control: a set of connections that are not only virtual/discursive but move in the direction of the actual, the operative.

The working of digital infrastructures as mechanisms of reduction can be made more evident by examining the case of Eurodac. This database is the one that more closely connects to the manipulation of spatial scales in the management of borders and migration. Designed to implement the application of the Dublin Convention, Eurodac contains biometric data, in particular, fingerprints of non-European nationals, as well as their related personal information. Reflecting the application of the Dublin Convention, the main goal of the system is that of determining the member state responsible for examining an asylum application.[208]

According to the Dublin Convention, only one state can be considered responsible for the examination of an application and the related issuing of asylum. That shall be the first country in which a non-European national requests asylum, whether at the nation's borders or- within its territory.[209] In other words, if an individual has irregularly crossed the EU external border into a member state by land, sea, or air, the country of first arrival is the only state responsible for his/her procedure.

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[208] European Parliament and Council of the European Union, Regulation 603/2013 on the establishment of 'Eurodac' for the comparison of fingerprints for the effective application of Regulation (EU) No 604/2013 establishing the criteria and mechanisms for determining the Member State responsible for examining an application for international protection lodged in one of the Member States by a third-country national or a stateless person and on requests for the comparison with Eurodac data by Member States' law enforcement authorities and Europol for law enforcement purposes, and amending Regulation (EU) No 1077/2011 establishing a European Agency for the operational management of large-scale IT systems in the area of freedom, security and justice (recast), *Official Journal of the European Communities* L180 (June 29, 2013):1–30 doi:10.3000/19770677.L_2013.180.eng.

[209] Council of the European Union, Council Regulation 343/2003: Council regulation of 18 February 2003 establishing the criteria and mechanisms for determining the Member State responsible for examining an asylum application lodged in one of the Member States by a third-country national, *Official Journal of the European Communities* L50 (February 25, 2003): Chapter II, Art.3, https://bit.ly/3HccwFL.

This implies that a member state, to which an immigrant first arrives (without regular permission), may take back an application when it is examined in a different country.[210]

Given the conditions above, the fingerprints collected in Eurodac should serve as evidence to locate, move, and re-locate asylum seekers across the EU territory. In this way, each asylum application is supposed to be processed in the "right" country, designated by the policy. Nevertheless, critical approaches to migration studies have discussed the practical problems related to data collection and assessment by local authorities.[211] Institutional differences, arbitrary interpretations, and varying times of registration cause large margins of error. In addition, they prove the capacity of experts to manipulate data and reconstruct the necessary information on routes and individuals.

The predisposition of error and the role of experts, however, do not change the fact that Eurodac traces a material and operative link between the individual and the spatial boundary, where he or she must fall, whether this is strategically or erroneously constructed. This is possible by associating biometric data and spatial information, hence, manipulating the scale of the border: an operation of reduction that renders it almost atomised.[212] The digital infrastructure reduces the territorial scale of the border which has been crossed to the smallest measure of the fingerprint. This is nothing but a trace left in the act of crossing, yet, it becomes actionable for purposes of containment and exclusion. Combining the fingerprint with data on countries of origin and arrival, the scale of the border stretches again to the European territory and, hence, it becomes performative at the transnational level. This example makes it evident how scale and measures are anything but neutral numerical tools; while the data changes from spatial to bodily elements, different interventions of control can be enacted.

If the exact technical workings of the digital infrastructures remain obscure to most migrants and border guards, their spatial functioning is familiar to both. This may emerge from the observation of migrants' tactics of crossing and, in some cases, authorities' misbehaving. In the first case, most of those who are still on the move are well aware of the political measures that will apply in case of identification.

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210 Council Regulation 343/2003, Chapter V, Art. 16.

211 See: Brigitta Kuster and Vassilis Tsianos, "How to Liquefy a Body on the Move: Eurodac and the Making of the European Digital Border," in *EU Borders and Shifting Internal Security,* edited by Raphael Bossong and Helena Carrapico (Springer International Publishing, 2016): 45-63.

212 On the concept of "atomization" of mobility and "portable" borders see: Gabriel Popescu, "Topological Imagination, Digital Determinism and the Mobile Border Paradigm" as already mentioned in the introduction to this thesis.

They know that being fingerprinted along the way may risk stopping and bounding them in that specific location until they obtain a response on their status. For this reason, migrants stranded at the doorstep of Europe attempt to plan the best route (the one which reduces the risk of identification and registration), before reaching their desired destination. Only then will they request asylum.

In the meantime, on the other side of the border, not all authorities comply with their duties in matters of asylum policies and human rights. The so-called practices of pushback enacted by many border guards not only represent an unspeakable act of violence, but they can also be seen as a tactic to avoid the relocation procedures prescribed by the Dublin Convention. By exercising regular pushback, border guards and police officers deny the possibility of presenting any asylum application at the border of their country. Accordingly, no fingerprints are collected and shared in the Eurodac database. In this way, there is no risk for the member state to be identified as responsible for the processing of applications or for taking back asylum seekers.

At present, only the member states of the European Union contribute in sharing data through Eurodac. Nevertheless, a plan to expand the operational capacity of EU tools and render them accessible to candidate countries has already been discussed.[213] In light of the considerations above, such a decision would have serious consequences on the enlargement of the space of exclusion and violence. New national authorities could take advantage of the opportunity to perpetrate pushback, and migrants' routes could become even more dangerous.

From the analysis of the main European databases, digital infrastructures manifest the potential to reproduce and strengthen the relational links established at the level of policy while moving them forward. Digital systems, in fact, actualise policies' prescriptions and enhance concrete actions. This exposes the material power of digital infrastructures. As discussed above, thinking of digital processes as reduction mechanisms highlights their capacity to affect a concrete spatiality. The operations of databases have direct implications on the way certain borders are crossed, the routes migrants decide to take, and the mode to govern liminal territories. Working with data, therefore, is not simply an abstraction of border phenomena; it has concrete effects on the way border zones are lived.

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[213] See: Commission of the European Union, *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on a New Pact on Migration and Asylum* (September 23, 2020), https://bit.ly/3MrkGwf.

The power to produce and exchange information on a selected category of migrants reflects on the exposure of their bodies at the border. Only those who come into contact with the border and its regimes of (digital) control become subject to a greater risk of targeting and profiling, as well as that of spatial exclusion, relocation, and detention. At the same time, by experiencing the material, spatial effects of digital infrastructures, migrants develop new hiding mechanisms and new ways of manipulating these regimes in turn.

3.2.2 Platform

The analysis of European databases proves the capacity of digital infrastructures to manipulate spatial relationships and scales, by selecting and associating different items of data. The concrete effects of their operations manifest in the way border zones are crossed and experienced by specific groups of migrants. Nevertheless, the aggregation of data in these systems is not the only way in which digital tools can affect space and, particularly, the spatial dimension of borders. Technologies of border surveillance, for instance, can visualise data associations on a graphical interface with the scope of planning and coordinating concrete interventions on the ground. These, in turn, have the capacity to impact the spatial conceptualisation of the border, as well as its very design. In this case, following Bratton's definition, one can speak of platforms instead of databases as the digital infrastructures that, while simplifying and assembling data, render it more easily interpretable and prone to action.[214] Platforms aggregate different items of data into information, follow principles of standardisation, and connect networks of actors in the same vein of databases but, in addition, they attach a normative value to data. This is possible through means of visualisation; the platform renders information visible in the form of an icon, a graph, or a symbol, which contains a prescriptive meaning. In this sense, as Bratton explains, the platform works as a scheme, a master plan with strong connotations of design;[215] it distributes information on a spatial base, while giving instruction on effective operations.[216]

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214 Benjamin H. Bratton, *The Stack: On Software and Sovereignty*, (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 2016): 41.

215 Ibid. 44.

216 On the more specific functioning of the platform see: Ibid., 46-51.

In the panorama of European border management, the technical tool that accomplishes platform functions is the European Border Surveillance System (Eurosur). Eurosur differs from the other EU digital infrastructures analysed above, since it is not concerned with the application of a specific policy. Instead, it is intended to serve many functions at once. These functions all gravitate around the idea of cooperation between Frontex and EU member states in the monitoring of external borders, exchange of information, and coordination of interventions. As stated in Regulation 1052/2013, the main goal of the system is that of "detecting, preventing and combating illegal immigration and cross-border crime and contributing to ensuring the protection and saving the lives of migrants".[217]

To achieve this objective, Frontex, member states, and EU partner bodies continuously exchange a wide variety of data and information. These include data on the single bodies, persons or objects, which approach and cross external borders, as well as any sort of material able to document what is happening at the border in (near to) real time. One must stress, however, that the temporality of the "real" in the work of this platform does not reflect a universally recognised reference of time. Instead, it refers to the specific mechanisms activated to gather and process data in a variety of ways and in different temporal frames.[218] This causes the content reaching the platform to be much more varied than the one contained in databases such as VIS, SIS II, or Eurodac, as it comes from a larger variety of sources and comprises more heterogeneous items. It includes, first of all, Frontex risk analyses data, as well as national police and border guards' reports, Europol's communications, alerts transmitted by systems of remote surveillance, and satellite data. All these items merge with other sorts of documentation coming, for instance, from the field of meteorology, geo-data and radar alerts.[219] Digital, numerical, statistic, visual, and textual elements converge in the same platform and must be rendered legible not only by the system but, especially, by its many users.

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[217] European Parliament and Council of the European Union, Regulation (EU) No 1052/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 October 2013 establishing the European Border Surveillance System (Eurosur), *Official Journal of the European Communities* L295 (November 6, 2013): 11–26, https://bit.ly/3OauWe1. Accessed on 23-11-2022.

[218] See: Joseph Pugliese, "Technologies of Extraterritorialisation, Statist Visuality and Irregular Migrants and Refugees," *Griffith Law Review* 22, no.3 (2013): 577, https://doi.org/10.1080/10383441.2013.10877013; and: William Walters, "Live Governance, Borders and the time-space of the Situation: Eurosur and the Genealogy of Bordering in Europe," *Comparative European Politics* 15, no.5 (2016): 797, https://doi.org/10.1057/s41295-016-0083-5.

[219] Pugliese, "Technologies of Extraterritorialisation", 581-582; see also: Sabrina Ellebrecht, *Mediated Bordering: Eurosur, the Refugee Boat and the Construction of the External EU Border* (Transcript, 2020): 86, https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839447536.

To be readable by Eurosur, the data collected undergoes a process of selection and standardisation, which categorises events, distinguishes them or makes them comparable. In this aspect, the platform functions similarly to a database, in which different contents can be quantified, thus, ordered according to a pre-determined hierarchy. However, the criteria to organise are not purely numerical. In the platform, precise normative value is attached to the categories in view of the calculation of risk and the related assignment of impact levels operated by Frontex. In particular, the classification of events in Eurosur differentiates "illegal immigration", "crime", "crisis situations" and "other" occurrences.[220] These, in turn, expand into multiple sub-categories that better define the type of incidents.[221] Such distinction sets the basis for the design of operations to manage each event.

The sorting into categories, in this way, serves multiple purposes. While monitoring phenomena, it also allows expressing a judgment on what is happening at the border (giving it a meaning) and substantiate decisions on how and where to allocate resources. In this sense, even though the diverse types of documentation collected in the system appear to be simplified and abstracted into data, they are in fact rendered more detailed. The data deepens and expands through the platform, while increasing the capacity for immediate action.

If Eurosur grants data with complexity in the process of classification, at the level of users' legibility it integrates the categories with visual forms and encoded meanings. For its users, Eurosur works as a graphical interface on which information appears as coloured icons. Border phenomena are, from this perspective, subjected to mechanisms of both reduction and codification. As explained earlier, the process of reduction allows moving and expanding the boundaries of the space to be governed by minimising the details of the events being observed. In Eurosur, reducing information to icons leads to having an overall vision on the European territory and, through the densification of signs, identifying its external borders on a neutral background. The resulting image is a base map with icons appearing as coloured dots in a zoomed-out visualisation and is called the "situational picture" of Europe (fig. 3.1). Such a graphical device has the purpose of informing on what is happening at the border, designing the border itself, and prescribing how to govern it.[222] For this very capacity of concurrently displaying and constructing, the situational picture is the most powerful tool of the platform.

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220 Ellebrecht, *Mediated Bordering*, 91.

221 Ibid., 94.

222 See: Walters, "Live Governance, Borders and the time-space of the Situation," 797.

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FIG. 3.1 Border police officer managing Eurosur platform data. The larger screen displays the situational picture of Europe. Source: https://frontex.europa.eu/media-centre/multimedia/photos/eurosur-Tx7j0f. Accessed on 23-11-2022.

To better understand the functioning of the situational picture as an instrument of both design and governance, it is useful to dissect it and examine the role of its graphic components. In a zoomed-out view, the map shows the agglomeration of coloured dots. These are not just conventional signs; on the contrary, they carry most of the information on border related incidents. In the icon assigned to each dot, a message of fundamental importance is encoded. Its content links geographical location, gravity of the incident and, consequently, urgency of intervening. Zooming in closer on the dot, it is possible to extend the data field, visualising it as a symbol, and read additional information on the border incident.[223] The symbols assigned to border events are chosen, not by chance, on the basis of the traffic iconography—a connection with a strong relevance at the level of significance.[224]

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[223] For a more detailed explanation of the iconography of border incidents see: Ellebrecht, *Mediated Bordering,* 95-99.

[224] Ibid., 96.

It immediately links the icon to the application of norms regulating movement and charges the sign with a meaning determined by laws or conventions that are universally recognised.[225]

The processes of collection, interpretation, and visualisation of information are, in this way, condensed in the map's dot, which is anything but a one-dimensional graphic convention. It is in fact a multi-layered, thick, and dense package of data that can be updated, edited, and removed by anyone authorised to log into the platform. By having access to the system, Eurosur users, whether they are member states' or Frontex officers, play a role of primary importance in the assessment of border events. Through their actions on the platform, they decide which incidents are relevant enough to be displayed on the map and where to focus the attention. At the level of member states, the major or minor commitment of national officers in the processing and uploading of data affects both the perceived knowledge and the actual management of the country's external borders.[226] Shifting the attention to certain border sections influences decision-making processes and the possibility of obtaining financial, human, or technical support in border operations.[227]

As regards Frontex engagement, it is important to note that the European agency is the only body responsible for the final attribution and visualisation of the impact level of each border section. The "impact" defines the potential consequences of migratory events at the border and serves to assess the capacity of states to respond to the "threat".[228] This is possible by merging the information of the situational picture with Frontex's own risk analysis reports. On the basis of the impact assigned by the agency, the necessary operations are designed and resources are distributed. This means that the final decision on how to assemble data and render the border governable rests with Frontex—the body that is mostly connected to the forms of knowing at play and is in charge of the management of the larger set of data.[229]

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225 In this sense, one can say that the icons of the situational picture assume a symbolic value, according to Peirce's interpretation. In "Logic as Semiotic", Peirce distinguishes three possible ways of relating signs to concrete objects (or facts, as in this case); namely, icons, symbols, and indexes. In particular, the symbol defines the object by virtue of law, thus, it depends on the norms established and recognised by an interpreting subject. See: Justus Buchler, ed., *Philosophical Writings of Peirce* (New York: Dover Publications, 1955): 101-102.

226 Ellebrecht, *Mediated Bordering,* 106-107.

227 Ibid., 110; cf. with the general principle of engagement in data sharing for risk analysis purposes: Paul, "Harmonisation by Risk Analysis?", 10; Horii, "The Effect of Frontex's Risk Analysis on the European Border Control", 253.

228 See Paul, "Harmonisation by Risk Analysis?", 11; and Horii, "The Effect of Frontex's Risk Analysis on the European Border Control", 247.

229 Cf.: Rottenburg and Merry, "A world of Indicators", 4.

Therefore, through the situational picture, processes of visualisation and decision-making work in close connection and bring to the fore new power relations. Various users are involved, which reflects the entanglement of organisational rivalries, diplomatic protocols, and political agendas[230] and, even more, introduces a new mode of governing borders. This consists of what Walters defines as the logic of "governing by situation": a mode of governance that manages conditions of possibility, scenarios that are not universal, and temporalities that are carefully constructed through digital operations.[231]

The situational picture is expected to display what is happening at the border in the exact moment when one is looking at it. But, as mentioned earlier, this assumption is disproved by the very technical modality of data collection and processing. The date and time specified in the description of events actually correspond to the moment at which the data is uploaded by the competent officer. In this way, it is immobilised in a temporal frame that does not correspond to the time in which the border incident actually happened. It is always subjected to the delay of gathering, reporting, and updating procedures, which increases the temporal distance between the actual phenomenon and its visualisation. To this time manipulation, one can add the integration of past events. Risk analyses, statistic documentation, and other forms of existing knowledge on migration and borders feed Eurosur and influence the assessment of risk. As Tazzioli conceptualises it, the temporal workings of Eurosur shift between archival functions and future scenarios: the platform collects data from the past, assembles it as potential risk pressure, and projects it onto the future in the form of a governable situation.[232]

While fixing past, future, and present events in a determined time frame, Eurosur displays them on the map's surface and organises them according to their geographic coordinates. Held in time and pinpointed in space, border incidents result in an aggregation of episodes that, otherwise, would never be observable together. While temporal and spatial distances are manipulated through the platform's operations, an image derived from scattered pieces of information emerges progressively clearer. Dots accumulate at the edges of the white background of the Eurosur base map and the external border is rendered visible.

230 Cf.: Martina Tazzioli and William Walters, "The Sight of Migration: Governmentality, Visibility and Europe's Contested Borders," *Global Society* 30 no.3 (2016): 450. https://doi.org/10.1080/13600826.2016.117301 8.

231 Walters, "Live Governance, Borders and the time-space of the Situation," 805-809.

232 Martina Tazzioli, "Spy, Track and Archive: The Temporality of Visibility in Eurosur and Jora", *Security Dialogue* 49, no. 4 (2018): 272–88, https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010618769812.

The flattened white view of the European continent deprives the core of the territory of any relevance. The inner contours of member states disappear in a meaningless blank space where it appears that nothing threatens the countries' safety. Attention, instead, is shifted to the perimeter of the neutral ground where incidents proliferate and a continuous line can be traced. The linear shape that finally appears constitutes the external border of Europe, and its yellow, green, or red shade reveals the assigned level of impact (fig. 3.2).

The border becomes what is visible on the map, which, in turn, corresponds to what "happens" in the arbitrary aggregation of temporal and spatial data. Dots, icons and lines shape a space that does not exist in reality in such a unitary configuration, either in time or in space. The external border of Europe is, in fact, discontinuous, made of overlapping and non-coinciding political and geographical entities. Its spatiality changes and moves and, for this reason, it is not measurable in terms of quantities and distances. What the situational picture manages to achieve is not only a graphic representation, an abstraction, or a simplification of border spatiality. Rather, it functions as an instrument of measure. It traps the border in exact coordinates and distances that can be calculated in terms of actions and necessary resources.

The capacity of visualising and measure the EU external border through the operations of digital infrastructures opens a reflection on the actual extension of this line. The outer limit of Europe appears to be not just a precise geometrical entity with a fixed collocation in the geographical space. Instead, it assumes the characteristics of an ongoing activity, a performative practice.

In these terms, the spatial extension of the border can be said to end in the place and at the moment that the action of control stops. From this perspective, the use of Eurosur to inform on near-to-real time events appears to be secondary.

It does not display an existing or ongoing condition and neither is its map a simple navigational tool. What becomes clearer, instead, is the spatial relevance of this digital pla0tform as an instrument of measure and design. Through the collection of data items, their aggregation, classification, and the elaboration of a situational awareness, Eurosur produces a specific knowledge on borders and migratory events. Then, through the situational picture, it sets the same knowledge into action, giving a concrete spatial form to the border.
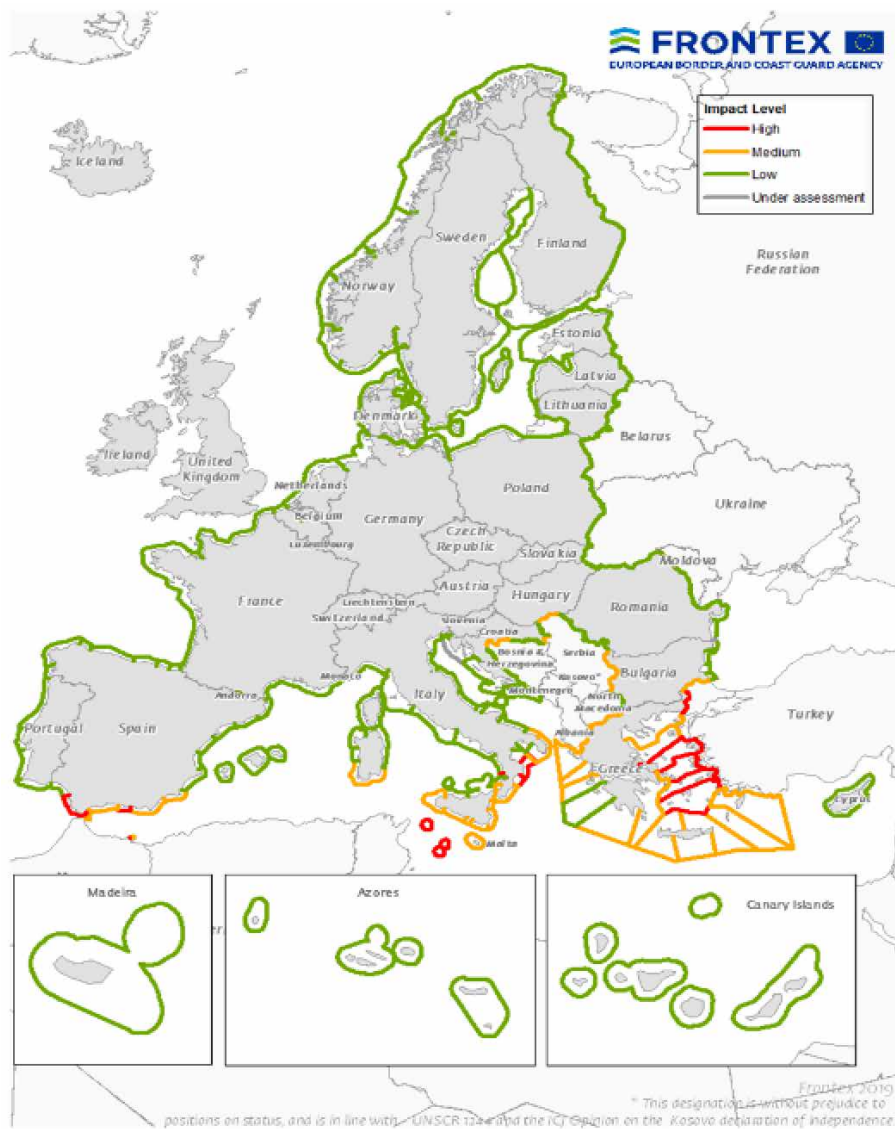
FIG. 3.2 European Borders' level of impact. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/policies/schengen-borders-and-visa/border-crossing/eurosur_en. Accessed on 23-11-2022.

Sight, Distance, Movement: The Enactment of Difference through the Infrastructures of Vision

The functioning of digital infrastructures has highlighted how data and information can be deployed to enable specific actions, which reconfigure the relationship between the digital, the spatial, and the material.[233] The mechanisms of EU databases and platforms affect the way one conceptualises not only risk and threat, but also the very space where risk is supposed to be located: at the border. On the other hand, they influence the norms and legitimacy to act in the face of risk, hence, the mode of acting on space. In the operation of digital infrastructures, the validation and acceptance of interventions, which take place at the spatial-material level, remain linked to a set of complex and hidden procedures that unfold in the digital realm. Although digital quantification and visualisation of border phenomena foster the assumption of an objective reality, the computational processes that bring them to the fore are anything but neutral or evident.

For this reason, it is important to stress the political intentions that underlie digital procedures.[234] Selection, reduction, categorisation, and encoding mechanisms serve to draw boundaries and move from specific incidents and fragmentary documentation to the general governance of events. In spatial terms, this particular capacity has been examined as a manipulation of scales and measures. A certain mode of working with data can render objects and events big enough to stand out on the map or too big to fade in the background. This directly affects the way particular spatial conditions become legible, interpretable and, eventually, governable. Transforming scale and measure, in this sense, can also be interpreted as a first move towards the creation of a particular visibility.

Digital infrastructures, such as Eurosur, manage to frame space and display an arbitrary arrangement of relationships. This visualisation capacity achieves the creation of a *field of visibility*. By speaking of visibility, instead of vision or simply seeing, what is at stake is not the mere sensorial perception, but its implication with relationships of

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233 Cf.: Didier Bigo, and Laurent Bonelli, "Digital Data and the Transnational Intelligence Space", in *Data Politics*, 106.

234 See: Fourcade and Gordon, "Learning Like a State", 81-84.

power, negotiated through the manipulation of what becomes more or less visible.[235] The field of visibility, therefore, refers to the way relationships of power are connected and determine that what is brought into vision is also charged with a particular meaning and a specific relevance for action.[236] The case of Eurosur, in particular, has shown the capacity of digital infrastructures to display specific relationships on space, rendering visibility a tool for action. Some have stressed that the resulting visualisation contains selected items of information, which are in turn derived from other fields of visibility produced by other systems. In the words of Tazzioli and Walters, Eurosur synthesises "a multiplicity of gazes" into a flattened, but dense, visualisation.[237]

The technical apparatus that provides such gazes for the digital systems consists of the infrastructures of vision. This technical apparatus, both in its deployment and in its inner mechanisms, testifies to the co-constitutive essence of knowledge, power, and technology in the management of borders. Possessing features common to both the digital and the physical realm, the infrastructures of vision bridge information and concrete enforcement of control. While their very installation constitutes a material component of border control operations, they also contribute to produce the data used to implement and legitimise the design of the same and new interventions.

This two-fold functioning of the technical apparatus, at the intersection of the digital and the physical, highlights the capacity of not just contributing to the construction of a field of visibility through data collection and sharing. They also intervene in the creation of a visual regime at the border. Unlike the field, which facilitates planning, the regime allows for the performance of actions. The ones who can see, or better, who can see through the technical apparatus, are able to act with a certain advantage of time. In this sense, the regime established by the infrastructures of vision actively manipulates distances of time and space.

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235 Andrea M. Brighenti, "Visibility: A Category for the Social Sciences", *Current Sociology* 55 (2007): 323-342 https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392107076079. In border discourse, the political significance of visibility is often regarded in relation to migrant subjectivities, see: Chiara Brambilla and Holger Pötzsch, "In/visibility", in *Border Aesthetics: Concepts and Intersections,* edited by Johan Schimanski and Stephen F. Wolfe (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2022): 68-89. Different from this approach, the notion of visibility discussed in this chapter calls attention to the political in relation to spatial and material implications, in the form of a differential manipulation of distances and speeds.

236 Cf. with the notion of "processes of enframing" formulated by Derek Gregory in: Derek Gregory, *Geographical Imaginations* (Cambridge and Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1994): 34-36. Enframing processes, which were first implicated in colonising power, render objects visible by the viewing subject and make the world intelligible in the form of a hierarchically established, systematic order.

237 As Tazzioli and Walters argue, in the governmentality of migration one cannot speak of visibility in terms of a sole gaze. Rather, multiple regimes of visibility arrange relationships of "seeable" and "unseeable", which also implicate various powers and actors. See: Tazzioli and Walters, "The Sight of Migration," 450, 458.

The exercise of power, therefore, does not simply reflect an asymmetrical practice of seeing without being seen, but manifests in the very differential regulation of movement.

This means that visual perception, in the analysis of infrastructures of vision, can be understood in two main related ways. On the one hand, in its most basic understanding, it can indicate the capacity of seeing, interacting with the sensorial realm. On the other hand, it accounts for a social-political perception, referring to what is to be seen, by whom, and for which scope. These two understandings are brought together by the technological functioning of the infrastructures themselves, in which perception is inseparable from the tools used to extend the capacity of seeing, and, at the same time, it meets a political goal.

The following analysis of infrastructures of vision is in two parts. First, it discusses the spatial implications of these systems. It observes their operation on the selected case study and examines their interaction with digital infrastructures, considering current deployment and potential implementations. Then, the analysis advances a reflection on visual mechanisms as a manipulation of multiple perceptions, conceptualising the entire border system as an interface.

3.3.1 The Hungarian "Complex Border Protection System"

As mentioned in the opening of this chapter, every border system is unique in its technical apparatus, and, consequently, it activates different performances on space. While digital systems deal with the governance of larger, shifting, transnational, and even global spaces, the infrastructures of vision engage with the management of selected geographical sections. For this reason, the regime of vision enacted at a sea border zone varies greatly from the one established across land borders. The two deploy different tools, technologies, and networks, which in turn affect the border in specific ways, expanding the possibilities for spatial characters to actualise. For the purpose of this analysis, the Hungarian-Serbian border serves as the case study to examine the operations of selected visual infrastructures. These consist mainly of the video surveillance network operated by digital, laser, and thermal cameras, which are deployed in Hungarian border control.

CCTV and digital cameras are among the most standard elements in border control and surveillance technologies, and their application in the Hungarian case does not stand out for particular innovation. Nevertheless, by virtue of their being ordinary, it is possible to extract from the analysis some lines of reflection that can be extended to other contexts. By questioning who and what is brought into vision, and where

and how sight is oriented, these relatively standard tools direct the attention to multiple asymmetries of power. Analysing the working of cameras, in more general terms, serves to untangle political and perceptual relationships, while observing the progressive emergence of the border's spatial form.

The technical components of the Hungarian border system are specified in the National Integrated Border Management (IBM) Strategy 2019-2021.[238] In this document, the implementation of control along the country's external borders is promoted on the basis of a principle of *continuity*.[239] This means that the strategy targets the achievement of a "continuous guarding" of the national border in time and space, through the conjoint deployment of both technical means and human forces. The technological apparatus is composed of 111 fixed thermal cameras operating 24 hours a day, 297 laser motion detection cameras, mobile vehicles and helicopters equipped with thermal cameras, and patrols endowed with hand-held night vision and thermal imagers.[240] These vision technologies are accompanied by an anti-sabotage optical cable, reflectors for night operations, and acoustic signalling system: their ensamble forms the "Complex Border Protection System" which integrates the metal wire fence.[241]

The Complex System functions in conjunction with two control centres for remote monitoring based in the border villages of Bácsbokod and Mórahalom. In these two police stations, the signals of the video surveillance and the anti-sabotage systems converge. Via an electronic interface, alerts are transmitted at the same time to both centres and, once they have been received, a large camera image appears on the computer's monitor (fig. 3.3).[242] The screen shows the border sector where an anomaly has been detected and establishes a connection between the centre and the border, which is both visual and operational.

[238] The official document of the Hungary National Integrated Border Management Strategy 2019-2021(Magyarország Nemzeti Integrált Határigazgatási Stratégiája 2019-2021) is available in Hungarian at the following link: https://bit.ly/kormany. Accessed on 24-11-2022.

[239] Ibid., 13. On the principle of continuity see also: József Balla, and László Kui, "Border Surveillance Measures to Tackle and End the Migration Crisis in Hungary," *Internal Security* 10, no. 2 (2018): 163-176.

[240] Eszter K. Bognar, "The Application of Sensor Networks in Border Security", *Hadmérnök* XII, no. III (2017): 175-187.

[241] Hungary National Integrated Border Management Strategy, 43.

[242] Ferentzi Tünde, "Okoskerítés a Határon (Smart Fence at the Border)" Zsaru Magazin (March 08, 2017), https://www.police.hu/hirek-es-informaciok/legfrissebb-hireink/zsaru-magazin/okoskerites-a-hataron. Accessed on 24-11-2022.

The electronic network of communication allows the signal to travel from one base to the other, but it is only when it reaches the screen that the signal translates into a legible image. At this point, the monitoring officer can interpret the type of alert, assess its gravity, and determine the exact coordinate of the site. Then, s/he can issue a radio alert and notify the commander of the sector concerned, who is in charge of sending border guards to the specific location. In other words, first, the signal enters the field of visibility via the monitor, it is then processed by the police officer, and finally turns into a concrete action.

In the first two stages of the process, the networks of both video surveillance and the anti-sabotage system work similarly to digital infrastructures. The technical devices installed on the fence have different modalities and ranges of sensing and send a diverse set of signals, from visual to thermal and tactile. The reasons and the techniques behind the generation of alerts are manifold; so is the data travelling through the communication system. Nevertheless, they all come together on the screen, through which they acquire a precise meaning and become actionable. In the moment when border guards receive the alert and reach the indicated border section, the relationship linking the police station and the border changes. It is no longer a virtual relation; it manifests as a performative one. At this point, the actions occurring on both

sites become mutually dependent. Thanks to this interconnection and the arrangement of the sensing range of each single device, the visual infrastructure guarantees a spatial and temporal continuity through the concrete performance of actions of control.[243]

The continuity of control and the unity of the monitor's visualisation are obtained from the partitioning of the border into sectors and of each sector into a signal.[244] Through the interaction of the Complex Border System and control centres, the spatial and temporal distances between border sections may shrink or expand, being measured on the capacity of immediate intervention. Distances, therefore, have not so much to do with the geography of the border itself, as with the performance of the technological system and patrols' action.

They vary on the basis of the speed of the signals, the time it takes to sense and send information in the form of an isolated alert, and the speed of officers' response. Such a process of fragmentation activates the strategy of power embedded in the technical apparatus of remote vision. In this strategy, visibility is not so much related to seeing alone, but rather to the capacity of technologically mediated vision to activate a differential regulation of movement. By extending the sensing range of the surveillance devices, thus increasing the spatial distance of detection, the speed of transmission remains unchanged. In this way, the capacity for action of both monitoring officers and border guards benefit a greater advantage. That is to say, their time of action compresses.

In such a regime of remote vision, power manifests in the favouring of one direction of moving and speed of acting, rather than just in a privileged point of view. Seeing remotely from the control centres does not simply serve to allow for planning interventions at a distance, as in the case of Eurosur. Infrastructures of vision achieve the very restructuring of temporal and spatial distances. In this way, the attempts of crossing observed through the screen can be anticipated and, therefore, prevented. Through the control of speed, seeing becomes almost foreseeing and immediate action assumes the character of pre-emption.[245]

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243 Cf. with the concept of tele-topology theorised by Paul Virilio, according to which the emission and reception of the video signal at the monitoring terminal indicates a mutation of distances into power and the establishment of an inextricable link between space and speed. See: Paul Virilio, "Indirect Light extract from Polar Inertia," *Theory, Culture & Society* 16, no.5-6 (1999): 57-70.

244 As Paulo Virilio states "the camera only sees sections", in: Paul Virilio, *The Vision Machine* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994): 13. This specification serves to stress that the principle of continuity promoted by the National Integrated Border Strategy is, in fact, carefully constructed from the assemblage of spatial and temporal fragments of surveillance.

245 See: Virilio, *The Vision Machine*. 61; and Massumi, *Ontopower*, 5-15. In the words of Massumi, pre-emption is an operative logic of power aimed at actualising the potential in a shape to which it is possible to respond. Pre-emption, therefore, can be intended as the capacity to move first, in order to set the threat in motion.

The capacity of infrastructures of vision to work as digital systems manifests in the way signals are collected and are able to travel from the border sector to the control centres. In a similar way, also the digitalised visual information that reaches the monitor of the police could potentially move across other channels and expand the purposes of processing. At present, the Hungarian Border Police shares the information about border alerts via the Frontex Risk Analysis Network (FRAN). This means that reports based on the reception of signals become data for the assessment of risk and for updating the situational picture of Eurosur. The data shared with Frontex consists of retrospective reports of border alerts and not of the signal or visual information itself.

This is to say that there is not a direct, automated connection between the local monitoring system and the larger network of Frontex and European databases. The visual information that reaches the Hungarian police stations does not undergo any additional processing, which may render it shareable with other systems. Nevertheless, a future integration of the current surveillance apparatus with databases of European institutions or other bodies is not to be excluded.[246] For this reason, it is important to consider what the consequences of such an implementation might be.

Being predisposed for digital processing, the visual information of the surveillance network could be combined with other forms of algorithmic analysis. Additional practices of detection, classification, and identification could integrate the function of monitoring. In this way, digital images could be used for countless purposes.[247] The automation of processes of classification, in this case, would do nothing but hide the procedures leading to the attribution of meaning to border events. In addition, when it comes to the detection of crossings, human figures could be distinguished from other objects. They could be characterised, measured, compared, and eventually profiled.[248] A possible combination of such procedures with the application of law, as promoted by Eurodac, VIS or SIS, appears to be particularly controversial. A scenario where the personal information of border-crossers becomes increasingly visible, mobile, and linkable to other events (whether they are criminal acts, terrorist investigations or visa procedures) poses a serious risk of targeting and discrimination.

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[246] Bognar, "The Application of Sensor Networks in Border Security", 185.

[247] For a detailed analysis of the evolution of video surveillance systems and the implementation of video analytics see: Joseph Ferenbok and Andrew Clement, "Hidden Changes: From CCTV to "Smart" Video Surveillance," in *Eyes Everywhere: The Global Growth of Camera Surveillance*, eds. Aaron Doyle, Randy Lippert and David Lyon (London and New York: Routledge, 2012): 218-234.

[248] Ibid., 223.

The rules establishing these links, as well as the entire network of actors, factual or potential, would remain, for the most part, obscure and exempt from accountability. Moreover, the individual captured by the video image would not have any chance to escape the legislative consequences of the digital circuit, in which s/he has been already trapped.

Although the digital potential of visual infrastructures along the Hungarian fence has not been exploited to its fullest capacity, the deployment of cameras still reinforces discriminatory practices. It has been argued above how the remote monitoring activates a differential regulation of movement through the reorganisation of spatial and temporal distances. Yet, this is not the only capacity of infrastructures of vision. These technologies also contribute to enhance stigmatisation and processes of spatial in/exclusion. The installation of cameras on the fence and the very orientation of their gaze frame a precise spatiality. The view is directed towards the "outside", the space beyond the line where the threat is supposed to be found. On the other side of the border, something dangerous may happen, something worth being controlled. Therefore, the presence of cameras reinforces the symbolic role of the border as the guarantor of protection. Its function becomes that of keeping out, ensuring that the "outside" and its "inhabitants"[249] do not trespass the limit. What is to be included in the surveillance gaze must be precluded from entry.

Visually framed, but spatially excluded, the border-crosser becomes a figure that coincides with the symbolic image of crime, terrorism, and illegality. Such a figure hovers in the political and media narratives of migration and is imprinted in the collective imagination of fear. The Hungarian ruling party is well aware of the impact of social-political perception. Therefore, it has paid particular attention not just to the rhetoric of crisis and risk, but especially to the communicative force of symbolic images. The portraying of migrants as a threat became particularly explicit in the notorious billboard campaign of 2015. The image of a walking crowd was posted along the roadsides and at bus stops, as if to recall a marching army ready to occupy the country (fig. 3.4).

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[249] The term "inhabitant", in this case, must not be understood literally as the Serbian citizens or anyone who lives on the Serbian side of the border. Rather, it refers to those who are forced to be outside the national Hungarian territory, namely, the migrants willing to cross the border.

The emphasis on vision as a means of protection is promoted in the Hungarian Complex Border System by different technologies (some examples are shown in fig. 3.5 and fig. 3.6). The video surveillance network is equipped with cameras that possess different sensing capacities (thermal and laser), and it is integrated with optical cables, and reflectors for night lighting. All these technologies engage with various ranges and functionalities of the light spectrum, turning light and vision into principles of safety. The Complex Border System and, in particular, its infrastructures of vision convey the idea of the possibility of uncovering any phenomena happening at the border.
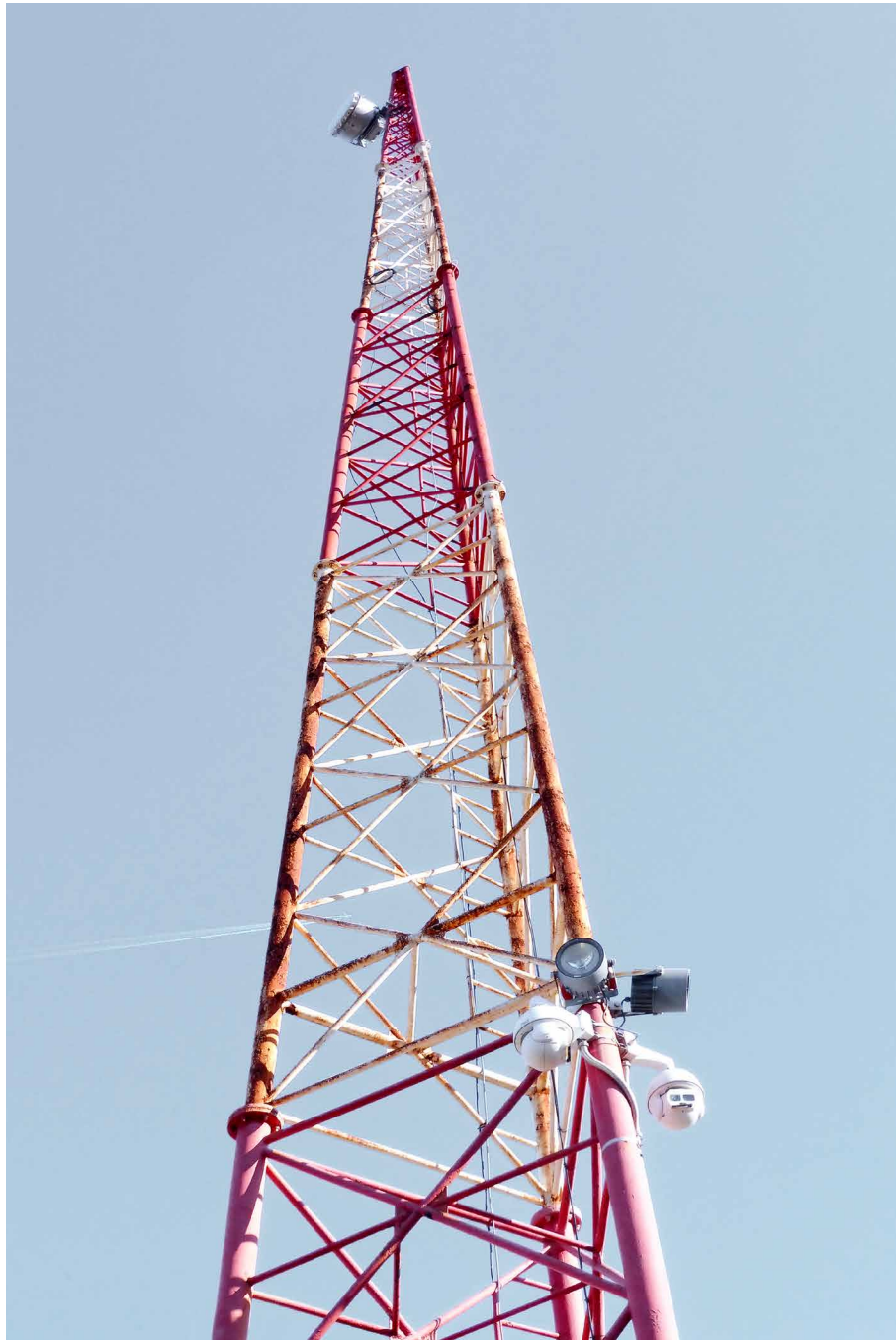
FIG. 3.5 Thermal cameras and reflectors installed at Röszke border crossing station. Röszke (Hungary), January 2022. Source: photo by author.

FIG. 3.6 Surveillance cameras installed in the proximity of the border crossing station. Röszke (Hungary), January 2022. Source: photo by author.

Technologies can go beyond the visual perception of the human eye and render visible what is still hidden, obscure, and, hence, dangerous. Moreover, the implementation of an automated form of vision suggests that what is observed can be considered as self-explanatory, true, and objective.[250] These technologies, however, do not simply allow for the seeing of what is already there; they establish a modality of governing through light. They prescribe the limits within which vision is possible, establishing particular rules and practices of looking.[251] Sensing ranges and light coverage only work on sections. They partition the space and trace the boundary within which to act.

According to the arbitrary direction of sight, movements can be organised and access regulated. While framing the phenomenon to look at and to act upon, the infrastructures of vision cover up the proceedings underlying border operations and establish a differential relationship of in/exteriority. They hide what happens within the country's limit and expose what is beyond the borderline. They can set specific actors in motion and stop others at the same time. In this way, vision functions as an instrument of capture that detects and redirects the disorderly flows coming from the outside.

3.3.2   ## Interface: Visual Remoteness and Bodily Contact

Seeing and sensing mechanisms highlight the capability of materially intervening at a distance. In the infrastructures of vision, the material dimension is not just involved at the level of equipment (cameras, monitors, megaphones, reflectors, cables, scanners, etc.). It also implicates the bodily contact of migrants (visual, thermal, tactile) through the fence. This exact moment of touch triggers action elsewhere and shows clearly which bodies are protected by the remoteness of surveillance technologies and which ones, instead, are even more exposed. When a signal is sent, migrant bodies become physically vulnerable to the intervention of border guards, even before being aware of it. The capture, therefore, is no longer merely visual but turns into a concrete action, characterised by a larger advantage on the bodies of those that cannot respond back.

250 See: David Lyon, Aaron Doyle and Randy Lippert (eds.), *Eyes Everywhere*, 5; and: Lisa Parks, *Cultures in Orbit. Satellite and the Televisual* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005): 14.

251 See: Jonathan Finn, "Seeing Surveillantly: Surveillance as a Social Practice," in *Eyes Everywhere*, edited by Lyon et al., 67-80.

In this sense, the border fence assumes the features of an interface: a mediated site of visual and tactile connection, where multiple systems and environments connect.[252] The infrastructures of vision serve as a medium for the border to physically manipulate movements and spaces from different locations. What is relevant in the interface mechanism is the difficulty, if not the impossibility, to mark a clear separation between the interconnected environments. The space here, at the border crossing, and the one there, at the centres for remote monitoring, merge into one at the performative level.

Actions of bordering take place here along the fence, but also elsewhere at the police station, maybe nowhere if nothing has occurred yet, or anywhere the signal can travel. In other words, the border as an interface is a site of multiple relationships of space and time, where distances become ambiguous. Pointing out the capacity of the border to affect multiple spaces, however, does not mean that its performance has the same intensity everywhere. The concept of interface prescribes a precise site where contact can turn into a very strong bodily experience, even a traumatic one. This is the case of the fence, with which migrants clash daily and violently. In this moment of contact, when the struggle between forces of movement and control takes place, the border loses the full control of the interaction.

While agents of security dominate the planning of actions, at the material level of the interface the possibility of reaction and unexpected outcomes emerges. Although the complex entanglements of remote surveillance remain for most part invisible, the contact established through the fence allows border-crossers to develop a bodily knowledge of certain mechanisms. The experience of physical arrest, which occurs within the visual field of cameras, renders migrants aware of the time and direction of police's intervention. Such knowledge is not based on a quantitative, precise calculation of time and distance. It is instead based on the movement enacted to escape.

Studies of the Department of Border Police have reported some of the modalities through which migrants interact with the technological system. For instance, staging a deceptive crossing attempt may serve to divert the attention of thermal cameras and, consequently, shift the deployment of manpower from one section to another of the fence. Similarly, small groups of people may deliberately come into the field of vision of the surveillance network, as to concentrate the gaze on a precise location, while others effectively attempt a crossing elsewhere.[253]

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252 See the definition of "interface" as a particular site of tactile contact in: Kris Paulsen, *Here/There: Telepresence, Touch and Art in the Interface* (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 2017): 1-16. The relational functioning of the interface is instead emphasized in: Bratton, *The Stack*, 219-221.

253 Joseph Balla, and Laszlo Kui, "The Temporary Technical Barrier at the Border and its Impacts on the Border Surveillance," *Hadtudományi Szemle* X, no. 1 (2017): 227.

Through the movement of their bodies across the fence, those who cross the border learn how to interact with the technical apparatus and manipulate the fragmented spatiality of the border to their advantage. One must note, however, that border-crossers are not the only ones entering into contact with the interface. Wild animals and even strong winds may likewise activate the systems of surveillance and generate alerts. As more entities relate to the interface, the nature and interpretation of signals become increasingly ambiguous. The sole mediation operated by the infrastructures of vision, therefore, is not sufficient. For this reason, human intervention, albeit remote, still plays a crucial role in the attribution of meaning to translate signals into action. This is not only true for the Hungarian Complex Border System, where most of the mechanisms still rely on the work of police officers. It also applies to the more advanced and automated surveillance technologies.

Whether in the design of an algorithm or the issuing of orders via radio, human actors are always accountable for conducting of operations. To understand the complex functioning of border structures, it is of primary importance to trace the connections linking agents, policies, knowledge, and technologies, which underlie operations or control and the perpetration of violence at borders. Accordingly, the working of technical infrastructures (digital, visual, and physical) should also be considered in their mutual interaction and co-dependent and co-constitutive mechanisms. Digital, visual, and physical infrastructures complement one another and possess the potential capacity to function in even closer connection to perform actions of security and control.

The mechanisms of digital and visual infrastructures examined in this chapter have emphasised the passage from diagrammatic functioning, involved with the structuring of virtual relationships, to actualisation. In particular, the attention has been focused on the capacity of the various technical apparatuses to select and extract spatial information from the diagram of policies and enhance actualisation through the manipulation of scale and measure (in the work of the digital infrastructures), and regimes of visibility (in the infrastructures of vision).

Both digital and visual systems do not achieve the completion of actual spatial form, but only initiate its organisation. Through digital mechanisms, boundaries and spatial extensions (coordinates, lengths, volumes) are established and connected to a concrete spatiality. Yet, they are not fixed; they still maintain a dependency from specific processes of knowledge production, which are themselves subjected to changes. The spatial characters that determine the manifestation of extensive quantities, particularly scale and measure in the work of digital systems, show the persistence of a close connection with the virtuality of the diagram. This influences their possible recombination and testifies to a certain degree of instability.

The infrastructures of vision, on the other hand, prove the capacity to actualise space by negotiating distances and relationships of in/exteriority in a differential way. Due to their very ability to act both as digital and as physical systems, they expose a preliminary mode of contact with the actual form of the border. This is not yet a fully formed spatial system but rather present features of an interface.

Understanding the border as an interface is useful in highlighting two related aspects of the process of actualisation. First, the interface manifests as the site where multiple systems and actors interact. The digital, the visual, and the physical systems of control overlap, while border-crossers, police forces, and even natural elements engage with them. These interactions highlight the second aspect, which consists of the emergence of interferences among systems and agents. The capacity of migrants to manipulate the detection capacity of infrastructures of vision, as well as the false signals generated by natural elements, prove that the passage from virtuality to actualisation is not linear nor smooth. Instead, it is always negotiated among many forces and existing conditions. As will be argued more specifically in the following chapter, actualisation of space, or better, the spatial formation of the border, is a multi-linear, multi-layered process, characterised by a non-correspondence with its original diagrammatic form.

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Tompa (Hungary), January 2022. Source: photo by author.

4 Physical Infrastructure

Encountering the Hungarian Border Fence

4.1 Multiple Lines of Actualisation

The process of actualisation drives the evolution of a diagrammatic, virtual form towards the emergence of actual form in space. In the specific case of the border, it selects the material component from the heterogeneous ensemble of border policies and progressively unfolds their spatial potential. Eventually, the process achieves the formation of a concrete system in space. The passage from the diagram's virtuality to actualised form, however, is not automatic or linear. It originates from a plurality of relationships and makes use of various technologies that, in turn, activate a series of different mechanisms. For this reason, it is important to distinguish the infrastructures that intervene in the formation of specific border systems and examine the extent to which they advance differently the actualisation process.

In chapter three, the functioning of digital and visual infrastructures was observed in close connection with the production of expert knowledge. While the creation of a specific knowledge of events shapes the problem to solve at the virtual level, the infrastructures translate the virtuality of selected relationships into actual qualities, also called *spatial characters* in the present study. This is possible through the work of the technological apparatus, which renders the information operative. Nevertheless, it is crucial to note that the actualisation phase that produces such qualities does not correspond to the one that leads to actual form. Digital and visual infrastructures actualise the spatial characters that are necessary to put selected information to work. Scale, measures, and regimes of vision facilitate the design and application of security interventions.

Through the manipulation of spatial characters, it is possible to perform specific tasks that policies and knowledge identify as the solution to the problem. By quantifying, visualising, and monitoring space, the spatial characters of scale, measure, and visibility detail the problem with a quantifiable extension and localise the actions to perform. At this stage, the technological apparatus channels forces of control and concentrates their intensity in a zone of high tension.[254] In this phase of the process, the spatiality of the border is not yet fully actualised. Scale, measure, and visibility may suggest the structure of space, dividing it in sections and counting its events, but this arrangement still contains a certain degree of virtuality. Digital and visual systems assemble events of various kinds that do not necessarily occur together. In other words, they combine potential and actual elements. In this sense, the persistence of a virtual dimension in the actualisation phase, which these infrastructures advance, concerns the fact that their components gain value in relation to one another.[255] This phase is still connected to the framing of a problem, in which conceptual and material features are brought together.

Yet, one must not confuse virtuality with abstraction or fiction. In the previous chapter, several material outcomes of digital and visual mechanisms have proved the capacity to directly affect bodies and environments during the implementation of security interventions. Examples can be found in the collection of fingerprints or in the moment of detection of border-crossers through thermal cameras or other sensors activated by bodily features. What is important to stress is that virtual elements are real but not yet actual objects. As Deleuze clarifies in his book *Difference and Repetition*, virtuality is real and constitutes a component of the material world. The reality of the virtual is to be sought in the structure, in which relationships are arranged, and not in a concrete substance.[256] Accordingly, the mechanisms that produce the actual qualities of scale, measure, and visibility prepare for the genesis of actual form. They lay the ground for the spatial formation of the border—defining boundaries and rules—yet, they do not accomplish the actualisation of an object. The very spatial formation of the border is initiated by the physical infrastructure.

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254 The emergence of differences in intensity, in the work of Deleuze, is what gives rise to forms and their extensive boundaries. The zone of intensity, or tensions, far from equilibrium is where matter becomes an active material. This understanding of formation (or morphogenesis in the words of Deleuze) helps to understand the coming into being of form as a process rather than as imposition from the outside. See: Manuel DeLanda, "Extensive Borderlines and Intensive Borderlines", *Architectural Design* 69, no. 7-8 (1999): 78-79.

255 See Hughes, *Deleuze's Difference and Repetition,* 138.

256 Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (London and New York: Continuum, 1997), 208-209.

The actualisation phase that the physical apparatus carries out exists in relation to the phases operated by digital and visual technologies. It must be stressed, however, that the different phases do not follow a precise order. The digital does not precede the visual, the physical, or vice versa. All phases of actualisation originate from the virtual work of policies and knowledge at the diagrammatic level, but they deal with different sets of relationships. As mentioned in the opening of this chapter, the structure contained in the diagram is characterised by a plurality of relationships and a certain degree of instability, due to their possible recombination.[257] The diagram can be considered as an ensemble of multiplicities meshed together into a *continuum*.[258] From the same continuum, or structure, different lines of actualisation progressively emerge and give rise to extensive characters of space.[259] This allows the various apparatuses, digital, visual and physical, to work autonomously, while still complementing and reinforcing one another. They are not dependent but co-constitutive, and they all advance the formation of the same spatial system.[260]

Acknowledging the possibility of multiple lines of actualisation allows for the study of the emergence of militarised border structures as the complex entanglement of a wide set of technological operations, which function together. The entering into force of policies, the design of tools for remote control, and the physical closure of national borders follow different courses of development. Yet, they come together in the same project of border control. They must, therefore, be regarded in a continuous interaction, which leaves open the possibility for change.

The present chapter is dedicated to the functioning of physical infrastructures in the production of actual form. The process is examined in the specific case of the Hungarian southern border with Serbia, observing the spatial formation activated by the temporary border lock. This part of the investigation focuses on the site where actual form emerges, questioning how border spatiality comes to be in the modulation of forces of control and the endurance of migration. The Hungarian–Serbian border section is analysed as the place where the assemblage of images, patrol bodies, signals, and information converge and materialise. The resulting spatial form, as will be discussed in the final part of the chapter, acquires an autonomy of its own.

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257 Deleuze, *Foucault*, 85.

258 Manuel DeLanda, *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy* (London, New Delhi, New York, Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2002):14.

259 Ibid., 18.

260 As Gilles Deleuze writes: "When a new formation appears, with new rules and series, it never comes all at once, in a single phrase or act of creation, but it emerges like a series of 'building blocks' with gaps, traces and reactivations of former elements that survive under the new rule". Deleuze, *Foucault*, 21-22.

Mediated by the technology of the fence, the process of formation reorganises the border's spatial characters in such a way that actual qualities and actual form no longer resemble one another. Once the spatial form is actualised, it detaches completely from the structure of the diagram and undergoes its own becoming. The capacity of advancing its own transformation, regardless of the initial structure, is the main difference between actual qualities and actual forms, that is to say, between spatial characters and spatial formation. This differentiation happens at the moment of contact with the surrounding environment and passes through the infrastructure of the fence. The technology of the fence interacts, on the one hand, with the natural, geographic, and geological system that constitutes the ground of its installation. Such physical terrain undergoes its own becoming and, due to its movement, impedes the correspondence between the virtual concept of the border and its actual form. The first is conceived on a neutral and fixed ground, where lines can be traced and acquire thickness without affecting any other condition. However, at the actual level, the interference with various systems can no longer be neglected; objects collide, often violently, and the spatial outcomes are contingent.

Along with the terrain of the border zone, other forces render the actualisation of spatial form complicated and conflicting: the movements of humans and non-human bodies that struggle to traverse the obstacle, and, from the opposite direction, the action of military and police forces moving along the border line, influencing the performance of the infrastructure. Due to the dynamic interaction of all these forces and elements, it is not possible to trace a straight line of actualisation that connects diagrammatic virtuality and spatial form. Manifold factors and movements intersect and divert the path of formation, increasing the complexity of the border as a spatial system.

By rethinking the border as a spatial system and a process of spatial formation, one can avoid reducing it to the object of the fence, mere closure functions, and ideas of fixity. From this perspective, physical infrastructures, such as the fence, not only interact with dynamic forces, but they also set a spatial system into motion. Fences, walls, and other border structures do not consolidate a pre-given limit. They establish new relationships of material and geographic nature, connect the scale of the territory with that of the object, and activate new modes of moving.

The emergence of physical infrastructures on the ground marks a rupture in the existing social and spatial environment and produces a radical change. It breaks with the previous condition in a violent and irreversible manner. Such a rupture, however, is not to be understood as an exception, a sudden moment of crisis. Physical infrastructures are placed where growing tensions, specific knowledge, and entangled relations have accumulated and grown over time. In this sense, by building new connections with the surrounding systems, these infrastructures favour the continuity that characterises actualisation.

The performative capacity to provoke a rupture, while guaranteeing continuity, is analysed as actual quality of *plasticity*. Such a quality, activated by the physical infrastructure of the Hungarian fence, refers to the ability of shaping space while, in turn, space itself is being shaped.[261] Interacting with its surroundings and relating with forces of motion in a performative way, plasticity activates an unpredictable, open-ended process of formation.

4.2 Encounters across the Fence

The actual quality of plasticity and the formation enhanced by the physical infrastructure cannot be fully grasped from a mere theoretical perspective. Their implication with materiality and specific locations calls for close observation of the object of inquiry. The following section, therefore, zooms into the concrete details of the case study and the material features that intervene in the spatial formation of the southern Hungarian border. Since the process of actualisation is not a single event and is, in large part, unpredictable, one must acknowledge some limitations in the study of the selected case. The Hungarian border is not presented as a case exemplifying and synthesising all possible lines of actualisation. On the contrary, this case highlights the importance of specificity, when it comes to spatial formation.

By applying certain principles, logic and objectives, different practices of border reinforcement can be compared with one another. However, the actual dimensions of their spatiality prove the impossibility of defining a general functioning that unites them all. Each case is characterised by contingency, historical complexity, and unpredictable future outcomes. In other words, each border, as a spatial formation, undergoes its own becoming—a process that is largely influenced by the various modes of moving that occur along and across it.

Although studying borders as spatial formations requires the acceptance of some uncertainty, the present chapter proposes a possible approach to understand the enforcement of control as a problem of/on space. It distances itself from spatial metaphors and, instead, examines physical structures of separation and their

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261 The concept of plasticity, as will be discussed further in this chapter, is taken from the work of Catherine Malabou. In particular, the performative power of plasticity, namely, the power to receive and give form is explained in: Catherine Malabou, *What Should We Do with our Brain?* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008): 5-6.

performances on the ground. By shifting from the single tangle of razor wire to the militarisation of transnational crossing stations, the material and spatial analysis extends to the actions which originate from more than just human agents. This does not mean neglecting the accountability of specific actors for the securitisation of the border or denying the presence of the inhabitants of the "borderlands". Rather, it means recognising that physical infrastructures, in interaction with their surroundings, have the power to initiate a contingent movement of their own. The border's actual form, characterised by plasticity, moves and causes movement, generates new relationships, and leaves irreversible traces, remarking the impossibility of enforcing the spatial closure established at the virtual level. Such dynamicity orients the research question towards the future—asking what spatiality is coming into existence from the clash of many forms of control and migratory forces, and how it will be built and lived.

The following analysis develops through a series of material encounters with the Hungarian border fence. The observation begins from the "outside", the Serbian side of the border, where the metal fence and the objects that compose the physical infrastructure function as obstacles. They are intended to intercept and hinder movements that come from an "external space" which is perceived as dangerous. On the opposite side, in contrast, the infrastructure performs its function of defence, enclosing within it the "space to protect". However antipodal these two perspectives may appear, the analysis exposes the ambiguous character of separation. The closer one approaches the border's spatial form, the more uncertain its performances and functions become. By reducing the scale to the very objects that constitute the fence, actions of inclusion, capture, and exclusion prove to be mostly intertwined rather than divided. In this way, the border loses its virtual linearity and shows spatial complexity. An analysis of space based on *encounters* on the ground refuses the hierarchical and partial view imposed by maps, remote imaging, and screens. Encountering the fence implies an observation from within, which offers the chance to reorient viewpoints. This approach, however, requires an important clarification.

The encounters described in this chapter refer to an experience that, for the researcher, is merely spatial. It does not concern the direct exercise of control of one's own body or the personal experience of migration. The outer and inner perspectives that are mentioned here relate to the physical, spatial positioning of the observer with respect to the fence, the physical infrastructure. The act itself of being able to move freely along and, possibly, across the border fence testifies to a condition of privilege and safety. This condition, however, makes it impossible to fully understand the material violence exercised by the fence and its concrete implications on the bodies of migrants.

The purpose of the following spatial observations, therefore, is not that of reporting what happens in the act of moving across the fence from the outside to the inside. Rather, it is that of proposing a spatial analysis that considers complexity, by avoiding fragmentation and favouring continuity through experience.

The following analysis was developed in two different phases: the first one was advanced on site, while the second corresponds to the later restitution of descriptions and reflections in the form of textual narrative. The first phase includes the site visits along the border fence that occurred in September 2020, on the Serbian side, and in January 2022 at three selected sections of Hungarian territory. The data collected during each visit comprises photographic documentation and notes of informal conversations with those who guided and facilitated the empirical research: the NGO KlikAktiv[262] and the Colonel Nemeth[263], respectively, in Serbia and Hungary.

The second phase of analysis integrates the data from the site visits with a reflective, situated form of narration that changes the tone of the argumentation. Writing in the first person and reporting observations, thoughts, and feelings, adds another critical lens to the investigation of space. It detaches from the philosophical aspects of actualisation and from the scientific approach of academic writing. Yet, it aims at bringing to the fore those connections that would otherwise remain hidden. These include the events that happened in different temporal frames or elsewhere, the stories reported by others, the material traces that testify to the volatile and invisible presence of people. All these elements could be recorded on site as a thought, a memory, or a mental image, but it is through the proposed narration that they acquire a concrete dimension. The value of the narrative should not be sought in any sort of evidentiary function or objectivity. Its situated character, in fact, renders the narration inevitably partial and, at times, ambiguous. The relevance of this narrative choice emerges at the intersection of the evocative and the critical—in the way ambiguity and uncertainty generate further questions, research, and comparisons with existing knowledge.

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[262] See note 55.

[263] As mentioned in the introduction, Colonel Nemeth facilitated the communication with the Hungarian police for the scope of my visit. This was through the University of Public Service Ludovika, Department of Border Policing. He also accompanied me throughout the entire empirical research on the Hungarian side of the border.

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First Encounter: The Fence from the Outside

The first visit to the Hungarian border fence was an almost casual encounter: an unplanned detour that followed the site survey with Klikaktiv in the village of Majdan.[264] The team of volunteers suggested continuing along the narrow country road that connects Serbia to the Romanian crossing point, a route with little traffic that could have allowed us to approach the fence undisturbed. This location marks the convergence of three nation states: Serbia on the south, Romania on the east, and Hungary on the northwest side. The van stopped along the road and I got out. The heat was so intense that it blurred the view on the horizon. I was surrounded by a calm and silent atmosphere, interrupted only by the sound of cicadas in the fields. The metallic fence stuck up out of a strip of brushwood. It almost disappeared into the background of the sky, marking a thin line between the light blue of the sky and the dark yellow of sun-burned leaves (fig. 4.1).

From the street, bushes and plants impeded me in my attempt to get closer, and, at that distance, the fence seemed transparent and inoffensive. It reminded me of a private enclosure, rather than a military zone. I crossed the road and walked along a dirt path that ran alongside the field. From there, I could finally see it up-close and discern the various layers that composed it. Two megaphones, two cameras, and two lights fixed on a pole, a metal-mesh fence of about four meters high surmounted by a tangle of razor wire. At the point where I was standing, the fence bent at a 90-degree angle (fig. 4.2). It surprised me to see how precisely the perimeter of a country could be fixed on the soil—so geometrical and rigid in its sharp corners. This linearity, however, was contradicted by the second row of fencing that ran approximately ten meters further, inside the Hungarian territory. This inner line repeated exactly the same structure of the exterior one, thickening, or simply shifting, the "real" borderline.

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[264] The visit will be discussed in the following chapter in the logbook of site surveys.
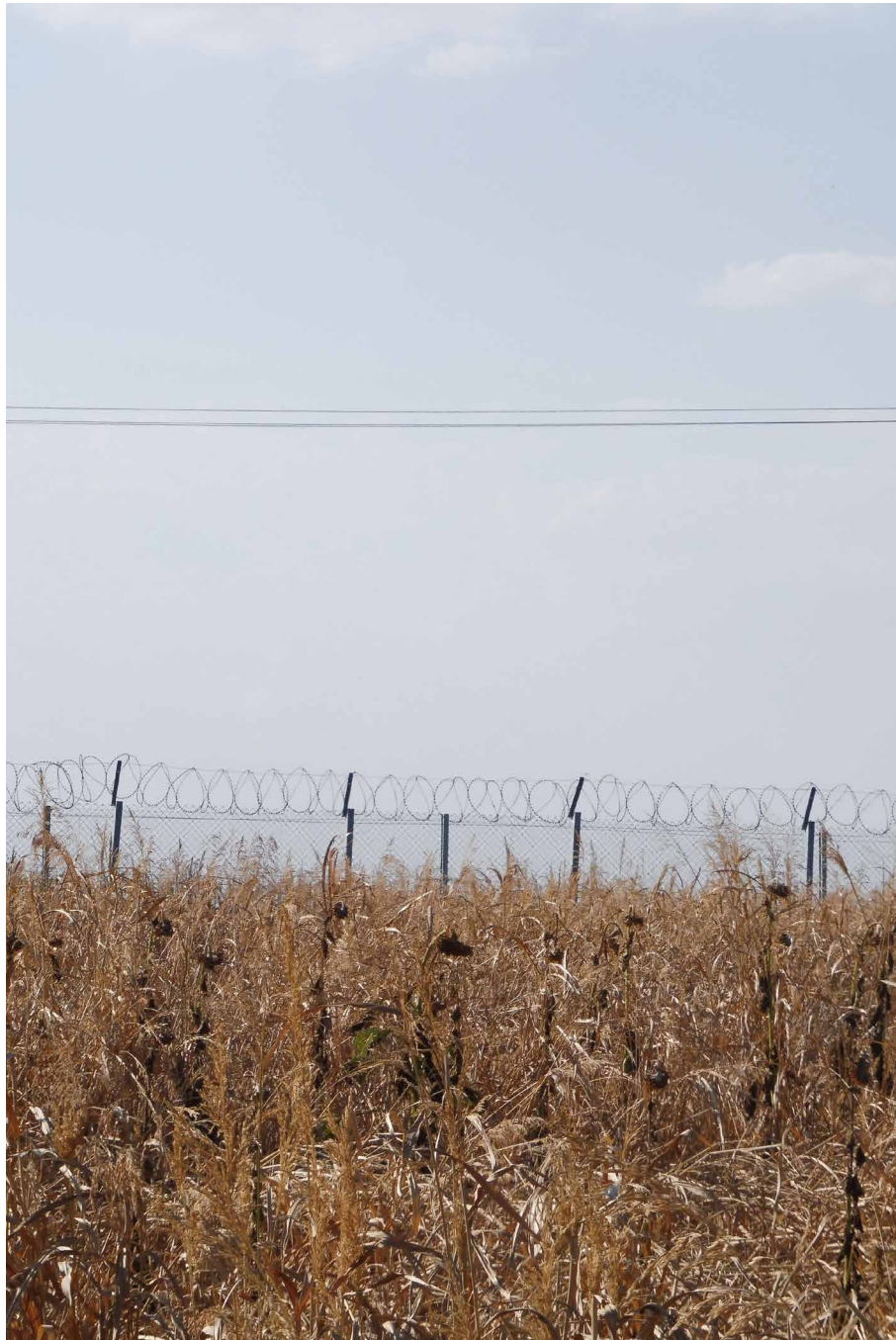
FIG. 4.1 View of the Hungarian fence from the main road of Rabe (Serbia), September 2020. Source: photo by author.

FIG. 4.2 The Hungarian border fence in the proximity of Rabe village (Serbia), September 2020. Source: photo by author.

FIG. 4.3 Closer view of the Hungarian fence, Rabe (Serbia), September 2020. Source: photo by author.

I looked again at the cameras that were pointing somewhere beyond my head. I was tense at the idea that someone was probably already aware of my presence. I walked a bit closer to observe the lower row or razor wire that was lying at the foot of the fence (fig. 4.3). It followed along the entire length of the main metal-mesh fence, building an additional protective layer, perhaps meant to prevent digging or cutting. This technique, I was told, does not work so effectively. The lower belt of razor wire, in fact, is not fixed to the ground along its entire perimeter. Border-crossers can easily lift it with the help of blankets or plastic sheets and pass underneath it without cutting their skin. Inside the two rows of fencing, I could see the cabins that transmit electricity throughout the metal-mesh fence. Somewhere else along the barrier, signs in different languages cautioned that electricity was running and warned not to get closer. Thin metal wires and electricity resembled the rudimentary technologies of farm enclosures. This similarity showcased how simple and unsophisticated, yet cruel, this device could be when activated upon physical contact. I tried looking at the inner fence and I could not see any other cameras or megaphones. In between the "two borderlines", a small control station was arranged: a white plastic chair and a wooden bench sheltered from the sun by a small shed.

It gave an overall impression of abandonment and desolation, in which it seemed possible to imagine an undisturbed crossing.The border fence blended into the horizon and seemed harmless, perhaps powerless in its ambitious claim to defend the borders of Europe from the "unwanted intruders". Less than a kilometre from my location, at the intersection with Romania, this firm separation stops, retreats, and closes in on itself in a corner reinforced by an iron gate.

"Is that it?", was my first reaction at the sight of such a thin barrier. Yet, my thoughts were quickly disproved, when a car of the Hungarian police passed at high speed between the two rows of metal mesh. Suddenly, I was reminded of the cameras, the larger technological apparatus that works in sync with the fence, and the speed with which events can happen at the border. The sound and the view of the police car were sufficient to make me aware again of the place where I was: a military zone monitored remotely, yet, highly policed. The constant presence of a watchful eye can abruptly become material and turn into a transfer to the police station, a physical search, a temporary detention, or a violent push-back. From the mediated view of cameras, the passage to a physical clash is almost immediate. In the time for a full speed drive from the nearest border police station, migrants are brought back to Serbia where the story of the "Game[265]" starts all over again.

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[265] With the term "The Game" migrants indicate the attempt to cross the border along the Balkan Route, trying to avoid being caught or pushed back by the police. The term seems to capture both the tactical character of migrants' movements across the border, as well as the frequency and repetitiveness with which actions of control and escape are performed. Cf. Claudio Minca and Jessica Collins, "The Game: Or, 'the making of migration' along the Balkan Route," *Political Geography* 91 (2021): 1-11. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2021.102490.

Although at a first glance and from a distance not all of the operations of the Hungarian fence are discernible, what immediately stands out is a sense of continuity. Following its length with the eyes along the perimeter of the fields, the sight of the fence almost gets lost. It has no visible beginning or end, only strata that thicken its width and height. It stands straight, intact, with no breaks and no points of access. This visual continuity and the impression of firm closure constitute one of the main (and probably the most effective) functions of physical infrastructures, which is merely symbolic. The government that opts for the sealing of its national boundaries wants to send a clear message, showing an inflexible policy towards migration.[266] The construction of fences, whether meant to be temporary or more permanent, seeks to create a perception of security which will guarantee the support of voters. Regardless of the real capacity of such infrastructures to halt migratory movements, they try to construct the idea of a space without intruders, where danger is kept at distance.[267]

As a symbol, the physical infrastructure establishes a division without necessarily performing it at the material level; it functions by mere signification. In the case of the southern Hungarian border, two elements are integrated into the fence to reinforce its communicative role: the written signals hanging on the metal fence and the loudspeaker system. These impose distance by communicating a specific message which is dictated by the local law. Repeating the message in various languages, these tools warn the illegitimate crosser to stay away, maintain the established gap, and remain within the limits of the "outside space". Through the loudspeaker system, a recorded message directly addresses the border-crosser. The fence assumes an almost uncanny human authority, emphasising the gravity of the infringement and the seriousness of the consequences that may follow the crossing.[268]

The mere symbolic role of these devices can be seen by at least two things. Firstly, border-crossers wishing to reach the EU are hardly discouraged by written or acoustic signs alone; the technologies that are deployed to physically impede movement across the fence are much more effective. As discussed in the previous chapter, through the deployment of various digital and visual technologies, police and border guards are in fact able to locate migrants at the border long before

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266 Annastiina Kallius, "The Speaking Fence," *Anthropology Now* 9, no. 3 (2018): 16-23, https://doi.org/10.1080/19428200.2017.1390909.

267 On the illusory role of border locks and their relation to ideas of security see: Elisabeth Vallet, "Border Walls and the Illusion of Deterrence", in *Open Borders: In Defense of Free Movement*, ed. Reece Jones (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 2019): 163.

268 See: Kallius, "The Speaking Fence".

they reach the fence.[269] And secondly, evidence of the actual ineffectiveness of the loudspeaker system can be seen in the fact that many of the megaphones installed on the fence have been turned off, due to the complaints of local residents.[270]

The effort to establish a distance between the dangerous and the safe space, reinforced by a symbolic language, does not only face outwards. It also extends inwards, through the spatial organisation of security tasks and their representation. Beyond the line of fencing, the rural landscape retreats and makes space for paved roads and patrol vehicles, an inner line of metal fence, patrol posts and stations. The presence of police and military forces restructures the countryside, introduces elements foreign to the rural landscape, and establishes new rhythms marked by checks, trainings, and working shifts. The transformation of the border zone into a militarised space is accentuated by the official depiction provided by the government and other media channels. After the completion of construction works, the dramatic images of "flows" of newcomers were replaced by images of the new Hungarian border zone. The double fence runs undisturbed across the fields in a deserted landscape. Here and there, the figures of officers or patrol cars may appear, but there seems to be no trace of the previous migrant crowds.[271] These images convey the idea that there is no activity to perform at the border other than control. No other ways of inhabiting the area are permitted or even possible. This perception, however, is illusory.

While a militarised space develops on the inside, the opposite side of the fence hosts a growing hidden and insurgent spatial system. From the outside, the Hungarian fence functions as an attractor, generating new hopes of crossing. While it constitutes an obstacle to migratory movements, this physical infrastructure also marks the very point of contact between the EU and non-EU territories. For this reason, makeshift camps continue to appear, move, and cluster along the fence

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269 As Mark Akkerman states: "the real barriers to contemporary migration are not so much the fencing, but the vast array of technology that underpins it, from the radar systems to the drones to the surveillance cameras to the biometric fingerprint systems." In: Mark Akkerman, *The Business of Building Walls* (Amsterdam: Transnational Institute and Stop Wapenhandel, 2019): 1, https://www.tni.org/en/businessbuildingwalls. Accessed on 25-11-2022.

270 See: Eszter K. Bognar, "The Application of Sensor Networks in Border Security", *Hadmérnök* XII, no. III (2017): 175-187. As Eszter Bognar explains the alarm signals can be easily activated by various causes and not only by illegal(ised) crossings: for instance by strong wind or wild animals. The frequent and unnecessary activation of the acoustic signalling system has generated complaints from those living in proximity to the fence and resulted in the deactivation of megaphones in many border sections.

271 See, for instance, the representation of the pre-fencing and post-fencing conditions compared in the video by ATV Magyarország, a Hungarian private television channel: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gA5i4D27VgY. Accessed on 25-11-2022.

in the desperate waiting for an opening. This "insistence on space"[272] can remain silent and hidden for a long time, but it can also explode in episodes of protests and physical clash.

In February 2020, for instance, a group of approximately 200 migrants marched to the crossing station of Kelebija, determined to force their way through the border.[273] Their march proved that the Balkan Route is not sealed, as the official governmental and media discourse has been portraying after 2016. On the contrary, a large number of people are still kept on hold in Serbia, as well as in other countries of the Balkan Peninsula, and are clamouring for their right to seek refuge. This event echoes the so called "March of Hope" from Budapest Keleti station to Austria, which occurred in September 2015.[274] Although the most recent protest did not resolve as the one of 2015 did, when migrants actually managed to proceed north and enter the EU, it testified the same force of autonomy. In both cases, the protesters occupied a space of (denied) transit: a crossing point and a train station, respectively. They exposed their physical presence and turned their claim into an actual movement. Migrants' protests became transformative and performative. The demand of an alternative, the opening of an immediate and direct way to the EU, materialised into a political act through the autonomous movement of migrants.[275]

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[272] The notion of "insisting on space" that is used here refers to the understanding proposed by Judith Butler, according to which the visible and physical presence of bodies in space creates the conditions for political claim and action to emerge. See: Judith Butler, "Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street", in *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, (Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2015): 66-98, https://doi.org/10.4159/9780674495548-003.

[273] Ivana Bzganovic (Associated Press), "Some 200 migrants at Serbia-Hungary border seeking entry," *ABC News* (February 06, 2020), https://bit.ly/kelebija06feb2020. Accessed on 25-11-2022; Laura Burdon-Manley, "Refugees, migrants in Serbia attempt to cross Hungary's border", *Aljazeera* (February 07, 2020), https://bit.ly/Aljazeera07feb2020. Accessed on 25-11-2022

[274] See: Annastiina Kallius, Daniel Monterescu, and Prem Kumar Rajaram, "Immobilizing Mobility: Border Ethnography, Illiberal Democracy, and the Politics of the "Refugee Crisis" in Hungary," *American Ethnologist* 43, no.1 (2016): 25-37. https://doi.org/10.1111/amet.12260.

[275] Ibid. Cf. also with Mezzadra's concept of the "right to escape" in: Sandro Mezzadra, "The Right to Escape," *Ephemera* 4, no. 3 (2004): 267–275, http://handle.uws.edu.au:8081/1959.7/508571.

Second Encounter: The Fence from the Inside

At the time of my second encounter with the Hungarian fence, in January 2022, the border zone had little in common with the dramatic images of 2015, which depict an endless crowd of people marching towards Western Europe. It must have been a very quiet day at Röszke border crossing point (BCP), since the lines of cars and trucks waiting for their check were only a few hundred meters long. The station was silent, neat, and clean with freshly painted walls in green and yellow. A small group of officers walked in the direction of the parking lot and drove off in a car with an Austrian license plate. The Hungarian border police do not operate alone in Röszke. Since the migratory events of 2014-2016, Hungarian forces receive the support of Austrian and Turkish patrols. The latter, specifically, are in charge of checking cargo trucks from Turkey to tackle the risks of smuggling from the country.

Cars and trucks proceeded slowly in two separate lines. The cars are subjected to a document check and a, few meters ahead, a vehicle inspection. Lorries, instead, must follow a dedicated path within an area fenced by razor wire. After a preliminary document check, the vehicle passes through the x-ray scan machine that carefully inspects the cargo. During the peak of crossings that involved the area of Röszke right before and after the construction of the fence, the detection of migrants hidden in trucks was much more frequent. Over time, border-crossers have become well aware of the thorough inspections carried out at the BCP and are now opting for different tactics. Current attempts to overcome the fence occur at more remote sections of the border. They mostly consist of cutting or climbing over the barrier with the aid of ladders or blankets. In some cases, the police have also found traces of tunnels, but it is not yet clear what purpose they were intended to serve.

Moving away from the line of cars, the Colonel introduced me to the officer in charge of guiding our visit. We walked towards the western side of the station and crossed the road along the red line that marks the beginning of Serbian territory (fig. 4.4). At the feet of the blue border sign, a few rusty metal panels recalled the events of the "migration crisis", when they had been used to form a roadblock. To date, these temporary barriers line the road and hint at their readiness for use in the event that another emergency could demand a new closure (fig. 4.5).

FIG. 4.4 National borderline between Hungary and Serbia, Röszke (Hungary), January 2022. Source: photo by author.

FIG. 4.5 Mobile metal border closures that were temporarily used to stop the arrival of migrants in 2015, Röszke (Hungary), January 2022. Source: photo by author.

FIG. 4.6 Containers of the transit zone in Röszke (Hungary), January 2022. Source: photo by author.

On the opposite side of the road, a tangle of metal nets, gates, and razor wire drew the contours of the transit zone. I was not allowed inside but could only move around it and observe the back of blue and white containers (fig. 4.6). Walking along the path that was indicated to me, I could not help but notice the condition of the double enclosure in which the transit zone was built. Its perimeter was delineated by a thick metal net, surmounted by a dense intertwining of razor wire. Surveillance cameras were attached to each corner of this enclosure and on the edges of the containers. They pointed in every direction, watching both inwards and outwards. A dirt road ran around the complex and was, in turn, bounded by the border fence, along whose path appeared an isolated patrol post. In this way, the transit zone was contained not only within its own secured perimeter of razor wire cylinders and cameras, but it was also enclosed in the structure of the double fence, showing a multi-layered structure of containment and control.

After the decision of the European Court of Justice in spring 2020, the two transit zones of Röszke and Tompa are no longer officially in function. At least, they cannot be used for the detention of migrants. Nevertheless, some activities are still taking place inside the complex and police officers are in service 24/7. I was not clearly informed of what tasks are carried out inside the transit zones. What I learned is that they still serve as a channel to "escort" unwanted border-crossers to Serbia and for other activities that fall within the performance of "security checks".

FIG. 4.7 Gate connecting the transit zone to the patrol road within the double fence. Röszke (Hungary), January 2022. Source: photo by author.

FIG. 4.8 Gate connecting the transit zone to the countryside road. Röszke (Hungary), January 2022. Source: photo by author.

FIG. 4.9 Sign indicating the installation of electric cables on the border fence, Röszke (Hungary), January 2022. Source: photo by author.

I moved along the northern border of the transit zone until I reached a wide area in which two gates opened. The one on the southern side connected the complex to the patrol road, which ran between the double fence system (fig. 4.7). The other gate joined the inner line of border fencing to the outer enclosure of the transit zone and opened onto a small country side road (fig. 4.8). Through the mesh of the gate, I could see a small farm house a few meters away. I could clearly distinguish the goats resting in the sun and the equipment to work in the fields. It was the only private property that my gaze could reach near the crossing station. Its closeness created a strong contrast between the highly secured zone and the undisturbed rural life, suggesting a certain ambiguity of inside and outside spaces.

Once the walk around the transit zone was completed, the visit continued in the direction of the village. I was curious to observe the southern limit of Röszke, where the outer margin of the town coincides with the national border. The first stop in the countryside surrounding Röszke was in the middle of a cultivated field. From this location, I could approach the fence and observe more closely the layers of cables and wires that intertwine with the metal mesh, as well with the other technologies installed on it (fig. 4.9).

At this point, the Colonel and I took leave of the officer that was guiding us and drove towards the village. The Colonel, who was responsible for my compliance with the rules of the border zone, was also crucial in helping me understand the territory we visited. While walking through the small streets of Röszke, he pointed out some small cameras which were watching the cultivated lots. He also translated some signs attached to private gates along the street, which announced the presence of private surveillance and alarm systems. These, he explained, were the result of local residents responding to the intrusions of border-crossers. They sought to prevent the trampling of crops and thefts of agricultural products.

A few meters further along the same road, I noticed a wooden cross that faced the fields, with its back to the border fence (fig. 4.10). I was surprised to see a religious symbol in the middle of the farmland. There was no inscription explaining its presence, which seemed out of place. My impression was soon dismissed by the explanation of the Colonel. He told me that the cross was probably a memorial for the massacre of Hungarian ethnics in the region of Vojvodina by Tito's partisans in the aftermaths of World War II.

The countryside surrounding Röszke, despite its quiet, pastoral, and peaceful appearance has been the scene of multiple violent conflicts. The elements dispersed in the fields revealed the scars of a turbulent past. The memorial cross before my eyes and the watchtowers on the horizon were not the only traces of this painful history. Where the internal barrier line stopped and gave way to a small country lane, I could see a few large, concrete blocks scattered a short distance from the fence's gate (fig. 4.11). They are remnants of the ruins of an old barricade that, during the 1990s, gave form to the hostility with the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

For a moment, all these elements distracted my attention from the fence itself and brought to the surface the material remains of past tensions. Multiple lines of struggle have marred these farmlands in less than a century. Many threats have come from the other side of the borderline, which has been repeatedly reinforced, crossed, loosened, and redrawn. The residents of Röszke and its surrounding area have experienced several waves of escape, fear, and isolation. Over time, a history of trauma has been imprinted on the ground of this land and on the memories of people, rendering them prone to accept and adapt to new forms of closure.

FIG. 4.10 Memorial of the massacre of Hungarians in Vojvodina, Röszke (Hungary), January 2022. Source: photo by author.

FIG. 4.11 Ruins of an older border barrier, Röszke (Hungary), January 2022. Source: photo by author.

On the Hungarian side, the site survey started at the crossing station of Röszke. The plan for my visit was to take an ideal "walk" along the border from Röszke to Tompa, including those villages that, before the building of the fence, had experienced the highest migratory pressure. In particular, the small border towns of Mórahalom and Ásotthalom are among those which witnessed the strongest impact. As I learned on site, one of the main reasons for this was logistical, since both villages are easy to reach by transports. In the radius of a few kilometres, they are connected to three official crossing points, the highway of Röszke, and the railway. These routes are straight, recognisable, and easy to follow. On the opposite side of the fence lay a few Serbian villages, in which border-crossers temporarily camped.

Another reason for the strong impact on these villages is the matter of perception. Border villages such as Mórahalom, Ásotthalom, Röszke, and Kelebija have a population of around a few thousand. Therefore, any wave of newcomers, regardless of the actual number, can be experienced as a great increase in the count of local residents and produce changes in the daily life of the village.

The rural towns of southern Hungary are not unfamiliar with the arrival of foreign populations. In the 1990s, a large component of the Hungarian community of Vojvodina moved north and returned to their homeland, in an attempt to escape Serbian military service. At that time, the newcomers were not perceived as immigrants due to their ethnicity, cultural identity, and command of Hungarian language. Some of them still had relatives in Hungary. For this community it was possible to enter the country through legal channels, and many intended to become Hungarian citizens. A few years later, at the end of the Yugoslav War, communities from Kosovo started their journey towards Hungary; at that moment, the first complications related to integration arose.

However, it was only after the Arab Spring and the intensification of arrivals from North Africa that migration began to be perceived as a "problem". Since 2013-2014, groups of around a hundred people reached the border villages of southern Hungary and settled in their outskirts. The influx of people increased progressively in the following year, and migrants started to be visible not only in the countryside but also in the centres of towns and villages. Local residents, especially the farmers, began to express their discontent. Many complained about the theft of fruits and vegetables from their fields. Farmers lamented that the passage of migrants destroyed their greenhouses and cultivations. Border-crossers would walk straight through, following GPS directions, without regard for private property.

Local authorities, with the goal of maintaining order and safety in the villages, responded with the organisation of teams of volunteers to patrol rural and forest areas. The field guards (mezőőrség) were hired by the municipality but worked in close collaboration with the police forces patrolling the closer sections of the border. In practice, the groups of local volunteers had no actual law enforcement tasks. They were in charge of controlling the village centres and countryside to detect the "intrusion" of border-crossers. If they detected something they were to notify the police. Citizens were also required to report to the competent authorities any suspicious activity or movement around the border zone. For this purpose, a specific emergency number was set up and was operative 24/7. In the months that followed the construction of the border fence, the number of detections decreased considerably. Within a few days, it went from hundreds of crossings per day to nearly zero. Residents were enthusiastic about the efficiency of the fence and openly supported the intervention.

Nowadays, several years after the closure of the border, new cases have been reported at an increasing frequency and with an additional problem. Prior to the fence's construction, migrants moved autonomously across the border and in larger groups. In the current condition, instead, they are forced to rely on the mediation of smugglers, taking much riskier paths. Accordingly, the activity of the police and volunteer guards has resumed at an even more rapid pace. After detection by the local patrols, the trajectory of border-crossers undergoes two possible deviations. The ones spotted in the outskirts of the city must be kept in the original place by the patrol guards. These are in charge of calling the police, waiting for their intervention, and giving a precise indication of the site of detection. If border-crossers are found in the city centre, they are brought directly to the nearest border police station. After that, they will be escorted to the transit zone and, eventually, pushed back to Serbia.

From these strategies, it appears that on the inside of the fence other forms of bordering begin; these are much more dynamic and spatially extended. They can take different forms from detection and identification, to capture, redirection, and pushback. What these practices impede is not so much the crossing itself as the achievement of a condition of "safety". This means that the various patrolling actions performed around the border do not simply represent an extra hardening layer of the fence. Rather, they complicate the paths of circulation with new sites of control and obstruction. Channelling and capture functions are performed simultaneously and their entanglement becomes material in precise spaces, such as the transit zone, the patrol car, or the police station.

FIG. 4.12 Entrance of the transit zone in Tompa (Hungary), January 2022. Source: photo by author.

FIG. 4.13 Border guard post outside the transit zone. Tompa (Hungary), January 2022. Source: photo by author.

Transit zones are probably the most concrete example to observe the convergence of those strategies, in which asylum and return, movement and holding are managed in a particularly ambiguous space. The construction of these temporary camps began in 2015, in parallel to the erection of the border fence.[276] They are made of blue and white containers surmounted by a row of coiled wire, and are located in the proximities of the two crossing points of Röszke and Tompa (fig. 4.12 and 4.13). The structures were meant to be the place where selected groups of migrants could present their asylum claims on a daily basis. The transit zones were, therefore, the only legal way to physically enter Hungary, and hence, the EU. However, the number of people allowed access had been progressively reduced from the opening of the structures to their closure in 2020, until reaching the number of one person per day in 2019.[277]

The hardening of entry restrictions along with the long times of waiting for an asylum response had progressively led to a deterioration of living conditions, both on the inside and the outside of the fence. On the Serbian side, migrants determined to proceed northwards set up makeshift camps, where they had to wait in very precarious conditions. Local authorities responded with the establishment of a listing system to select candidates for entry, as to limit the expansion of the encampments.[278] Meanwhile, on the inside, the transit zones had progressively assumed the form of detention centres. Those waiting for asylum were kept for more than a year, without proper access to food, legal support, health and education services. Transit zones, therefore, had turned into spaces devoid of rights and the supply of basic needs, in which violence was manifested in a slow, insidious manner without the prospect of an end. For those detained on the inside of the fence, wait was filled with uncertainty and precariousness, as they sat trapped between the hope for asylum and the fear of return.

The dramatic conditions of the transit zones gained international attention, especially due to the tenacious work of NGOs that pushed EU authorities to take action. Finally, on 14 May 2020, the European Court of Justice ruled that the holding of asylum seekers for more than 28 days would qualify as unlawful detention. The Hungarian government, as a result, was obliged to follow the decision and announced the closure

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[276] See: Hungarian Helsinki Committee, "No Country for Refugees - Information Note" (September 18, 2015). Additional information on the transit zones from the moment of their establishment to the official decision of the European Court of Justice leading to their closure can be found at the following link: https://helsinki.hu/en/akta/transit-zone. Accessed on 25-11-2022.

[277] See: Hungarian Helsinki Committee, "One Year After: How legal changes resulted in blanket rejections, refoulement and systemic starvation in detention" (July 01, 2019), https://helsinki.hu/wp-content/uploads/One-year-after-2019.pdf. Accessed on 25-11-2022.

[278] Marta Stojić Mitrović, Nidžara Ahmetašević, Barbara Beznec, Andrej Kurnik, *The Dark Side of Europeanisation: Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the European Border Regime* (Belgrade and Ljubljana: Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung Southeast Europe, 2020): 33.

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of the structures.[279] Yet, despite the intervention of the European Court of Justice and the official closure, the problem remains unsolved. Border-crossers detected on the Hungarian territory are still transferred to Serbia via the transit zones. Their function of exclusion and expulsion is still operative, with the result that transits are now oriented in one sole direction: from the "inside" to the "outside". While the longest wait takes place on the Serbian side, violence persists across the fence, rendering attempts of crossing, captures, and push-backs part of migrants' everyday life.

4.2.3   Third Encounter: The Fence Elsewhere

"If you are an illegal immigrant and you want to get to Germany…Hungary is a bad choice. Ásotthalom is the worst." With these words, the Major of Ásotthalom closes the viral YouTube video, which sends a message, loud and clear, to migrants intending to cross the southern Hungarian border.[280] Such vocal hostility could not be immediately perceived in the small centre of the village. The Major's office, a school, and a few houses lay along the main road of a quiet place, clean and neat, almost welcoming—an atmosphere that extends to its outskirts. My arrival in Ásotthalom opened with a meeting with an elderly peasant who was intrigued by the view of the Colonel's car. At the sight of the man in uniform, he jokingly raised his hands and asked if we were looking for someone. The Colonel explained the reason for our visit and the man, turning in my direction, greeted me with a bow.

I walked a bit further to observe the countryside. The landscape of the Csongrád area is mostly homogeneous and flat for the whole extension of the province. At a distance, I could see some farms, old *tanyas* with large roofs, stables, and all around them the flat fields. A few houses clustered along the only paved road. Other houses disappeared among the trees in the woods. Two cameras atop a pole at the crossroad of a small dirt path overlooked the occasional passage of cars.

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[279] Edit Inotai, "Hungary to Close Transit Zones after European Court Ruling", *Balkan Insight* (May 21, 2020) https://bit.ly/3tTW20G. Accessed on 25-11-2022. See also: Hungarian Helsinki Committee, "EU Court: Hungary unlawfully detains people in the transit zone and deprives them of a fair asylum procedure" (May 14, 2020), https://bit.ly/3QEIikc. Accessed on 25-11-2022.

[280] The video message of the Major of Ásotthalom can be found at the following link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fgJRjy2XcOc. Accessed on 25-11-2022.

FIG. 4.14 Flyer found in the forest of Ásotthalom (Hungary), January 2022. Source: photo by author.

Our guide for this visit was a field guard. He arrived in an off-road white vehicle, on which the word "PATROL" stood out in blue letters. We got in, and the front passenger seat was offered to me so that I could have a better view of the area. After few-minutes ride, we were in the middle of the woods and I had already lost my sense of orientation. I located our position with the GPS and realised we were heading north, moving parallel to the highway.

The guard stopped the vehicle and showed us the remnants left behind by a group of people on the move some days earlier. A few water bottles, some plastic bags, mismatched shoes and a flyer advertising winter clothes in different languages: "Please tell your friends we have these, thank you" (fig. 4.14). The field guard informed the Colonel that the same morning a smuggler from Poland had been arrested in Ásotthalom. The smuggling of migrants across the border, he explained, has become a very lucrative business, not only for Hungarians and Serbians but also for criminal organisations from the rest of Europe. Their cars are often found dumped in the middle of the woods. Smugglers usually manage to run away, leaving their passengers behind.

FIG. 4.15 Rests of sleeping bags, clothes and other belongings left behind by migrants in the forest of Ásotthalom (Hungary), January 2022. Source: photo by author.

We entered the woods on foot, and not too far from the first stop an eerie sight appeared before my eyes. A few meters away, a large hollow opened at the foot of the trees (fig. 4.15). The centre of the hole was filled with jackets, shoes, sleeping bags, and clothes. A landfill, or perhaps a grave, had been made of the remains abandoned during the escape. The quantity of objects could not be counted nor clearly distinguished. They formed a single agglomeration that offered a vague idea, yet deeply touching, of how restless that forest was.

The ride through the woods started again, this time in the direction of a small building. The abandoned house, I was told, was used as a hiding place for border-crossers, but it had been well known for some time to the local field guards. I crossed the threshold of the dilapidated building, paying attention to where to put my feet. It was difficult to see the floor, given the pile of clothes and other things stacked inside (fig. 4.16). Next to the old mouldy furniture lay more recent remnants left there maybe a few hours or a few weeks earlier. The small space was made even narrower by the mountain of remains that crowded inside and made the air suffocating.

FIG. 4.16 Abandoned house used as stop station in the forest of Ásotthalom (Hungary), January 2022. Source: photo by author.

Once back in the vehicle, the guard received a radio call. A series of quick exchanges with the Colonel followed, but they were not translated. The drive through the woods started again, this time faster, almost frantic. I had the impression that the car was turning in circles around the same place. It was advancing for a few meters, then reversing, and turning back. I could not tell if we were far from the starting point or not. The landscape looked identical to me at every point, flat and thick with trees (fig. 4.17).

A couple of other quick radio calls followed. The guard's voice became more agitated and led to more agitated driving. Now deeply uncomfortable in the situation, I asked the Colonel for an explanation, which was brief. Via radio, a new detection had been reported. Some woodcutters notified of the presence of a group of boys in the same area where we were. The guard pulled the handbrake, got out, and looked around as if searching for something on the ground. He got back in the car and repeated the same action several times.
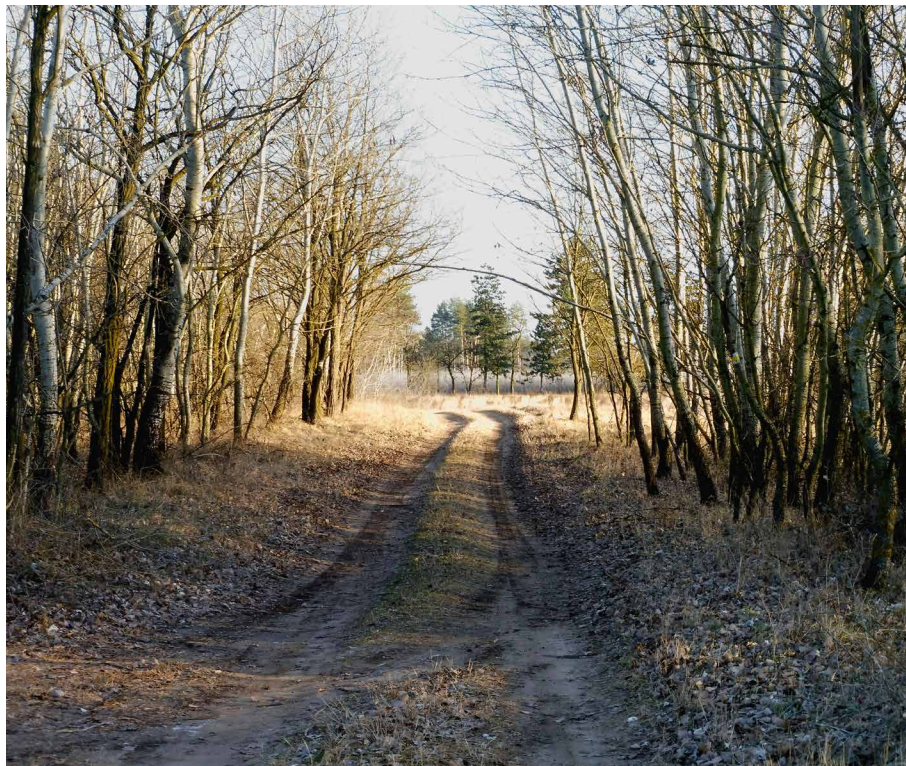
FIG. 4.17 View from inside the forest of Ásotthalom (Hungary), January 2022. Source: photo by author.

A new radio call came. He reversed and we found ourselves again in the woods, in the same spot or elsewhere. It dawned on me how familiar the man was with every single inch of that forest. He seemed able to recognise every slight transformation, almost as if he could distinguish the footprint of someone local from that of a stranger. A sense of helplessness and anguish held me completely still in the middle of a frenzied hunt. Here, a few meters from the border, no trace of the fence was visible. Yet, the forest itself had turned into a labyrinth: a consuming and disturbing trap.

The guard stopped the car at a gate in front of a house. He turned to the farmer, who replied with a shake of his head. I gave a sigh of relief, naively thinking that this might make him desist from the mission. The ride continued for about another hour. It seemed that all traces of the boys had been lost. Yet, despite the poor results, the hunt persisted for a time that seemed interminable. About two hours had passed from the start of the visit in Ásotthalom, when a new radio alert was received. Another quick talk followed. The Colonel informed me that a police patrol had just caught six Syrian boys along the highway. They would soon be transferred to the police station and then brought to the other side of the border.

4.3 # The Design of (Im)Mobility

However hidden or silent, the presence of migrants in the space proves that the border is anything but an empty and static zone. The very design of physical infrastructures testifies to the close interaction of the enforcement of control and the resistance to it. Whether in the shape of walls, fences, or patrolling forces, these systems are structured as much against migration as by migration.[281] In this regard, the U.S.-Mexico wall represents one of the most emblematic examples. The availability of technical and financial resources in this case shows how the design of structures of control and the movement they aim to prevent are closely entangled. In his book Borderwall as Architecture, Ronald Rael examines how the design of different sections of the U.S. border varies and reflects particular strategies of

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281 Cf.: Sebastian Cobarrubias, "Scale in motion? Rethinking Scalar Production and Border Externalization," *Political Geography* 80 (2020): 1-11, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2020.102184. In the aforementioned article by Cobarrubias, particular emphasis is dedicated to the policies of externalisation. These are also "designed" according to the movement of people and the changes of routes, proving the inextricable entanglement of law, migrant bodies and material construction of borders.

crossing, specific geographic features, and relations of proximity to urban and rural conditions. The performance of the border, in this way, can be carefully planned, measured and its material efficiency tested with ad hoc prototypes.[282] On a design level, the Hungarian fence is much simpler. The structure, materials, and components of the physical infrastructure are the same across the entire length of the southern border. A possible explanation could be the relatively short perimeter, along with a general homogeneity of geographical features. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify different phases of construction and a progressive refining of the technologies deployed that, in a similar way, try to respond to shifting migratory practices.

In the first months of 2015, an early attempt to tackle the increasing rate of crossings resulted in arranging razor wire cylinders along selected border sections.[283] These metal tangles were meant to substitute for police forces in the sites subjected to particular pressure. The same technique has been largely used across the Balkan region, creating more or less temporary traps. Although it is not an impassable obstacle, this provisional system is able to cover quite large areas, especially in more remote zones such as woodlands or riverbanks. The official decision of border closure was announced on June 15, 2015 and it became effective with the government decision 1401/2015 (VI.17).[284] The legislative document ordered the preparation of the construction of a temporary border lock of approximately 4 meters high and 175 km long.

In accordance with the government's directive, the first intervention was the building of a sample section in Mórahalom, where four different prototypes were installed.[285] The sample typologies included a metal-mesh fence, with three different types of anchoring and foundation, surmounted by razor wire cylinders. One was fixed on metal poles with a concrete base, a second one saw the mechanical fixing of the poles into the ground and, in the third case, acacia poles substituted the metal columns. The fourth sample, instead, consisted of three cylinders of razor wire arranged one above the other in a pyramidal shape. Eventually, the second solution was chosen as the final one. Before the start of the official construction, the razor wire cylinders remained temporarily arranged on some sections with different anchoring techniques.

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282 Ronald Rael, *Borderwall as Architecture. A Manifesto for the U.S.-Mexico Boundary* (University of California Press, 2017): 27.

283 Cf. Kallius, "The Speaking Fence," 17.

284 Hungarian Government, Decision 1401/2015 (VI.17) on certain measures necessary to deal with extreme immigration pressures, https://njt.hu/jogszabaly/2015-1401-30-22. Accessed on 25-11-2022.

285 József Balla and László Kui, "The Temporary Technical Barrier at the Border and its Impacts on the Border Surveillance." See also: MTI, "Elkészült a mórahalmi mintaszakasz (The sample section of Morahalm has been completed)" *MTI News* (July 18, 2015), https://bit.ly/Elkeszult_a_morahalmi_mintaszakasz. Accessed on 25-11-2022.

The decision of the final design was informed more by the practicality of construction and terrain characteristics than a particular plan to tackle specific modes of crossing.

The building of the fence started with the outer line of metal mesh, extending parallel with the old, white boundary stones.[286] The initial plan of construction for the closure of the Hungarian-Serbian border was completed in September 2015. Soon after this intervention, migrant routes quickly diverted to Croatia, thus leading to an extension of the fence's construction across the entire southern border. In its preliminary design, the physical infrastructure was characterised by one single line of fencing. It was still weak, and a large deployment of polices forces was necessary for the interception of crossings. To (partially) overcome this problem, in the summer of 2016, the government ordered the construction of a second line of fencing, about 10 meters away from and parallel with the first one, on the inside of the Hungarian territory.[287] The second fence follows the exact path of the first one and was realised with the same technique.[288] The progressive linear extension and thickening of the fence testify how the shift of migrant routes has strongly influenced the architecture of the physical infrastructure, despite its simplicity.

In general terms, even though the design principle of the Hungarian border lock remains unchanged along its entire length, some differences are still visible on the ground. These variations are few, and in some cases almost unnoticeable, yet they prove the difficulties of erecting a barrier on a terrain that is anything but void. The clash between the fence's design and existing elements manifests at the intersection of both urban and natural environments. One very visible example can be found in Röszke, few kilometres away from the crossing station. The southern margin of the village coincides with the national boundary. Although Röszke's buildings and infrastructures respect the established distance from the boundary stones, they do not leave enough room for the double border fence.

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[286] According to the Hungarian law, different construction constraints apply with respect to the country's limits. In particular, for the southern border with Croatia and Serbia, as well as for neighbouring EU countries, the building ban imposes a distance of at least 1 meter from the boundary marker. The constraint applies to both the inner and outer direction, covering a total length of 2 meters. This limitation is established on the basis of bilateral agreements with the neighbouring countries, but it changes from border to border. Along the Hungarian-Romanian frontier the ban extends to 2,5 meters from the boundary stones, for a total length of 5 meters, while it doubles along the border with Ukraine. In addition to the building ban, the areas in the proximity of boundary stones must be clear from any visual and physical obstacles, as to make the borderline easily identifiable from both sides.

[287] Hir.ma, "Újabb kerítés épül a déli határszakaszon! (Another fence is being built on the southern border!)," *Hir.ma News* (September 05, 2016), https://bit.ly/3HOog2s. Accessed on 25-11-2022.

[288] See: József Balla and László Kui, "Development of the Temporary Technical Barrier at the Border, or the Second Fence is solve Everything?", *Hadmérnök* XII, no. 1V (2017): 67-75.

Therefore, the physical infrastructure is forced to end in a metal gate and interrupt its inner line of separation. To counter this necessary adaptation, however, an additional gimmick makes the outer side more difficult to approach. An excavation on the Serbian side creates a deep ditch that runs along the metal-mesh fence and the lower row of razor wire. The ditch, in this way, creates a greater difference in height without the deployment of extra materials.

Another collision emerges at the point where the railway line crosses the national border, in the proximity of Kelebia (fig. 4.18). Also in this case, the double fence must stop. Two gates interrupt the patrolling road and bind the line of train tracks on the west and east side. A third gate then closes off the outer fence and is opened by the officers on duty to allow the passage of freight trains. The opening and closing signals that announce the crossing of trains comes from the Kelebia police station. There, the thermal cameras of the border crossing point are managed; their gaze can be manually oriented and offers detailed, zoomed-in views. The node at which the railway and the border fence meet shows very clearly the joint functioning of physical infrastructure, man power, cameras, and remote control (fig. 4.19). At this point of intersection, the operations of the various systems converge and allow the "continuity" of border reinforcement even where its physical extension is necessarily interrupted.

The presence of gates along the path of the double fence usually characterises the locations where particular collisions must be resolved. This, however, is not their only application. The iron doors are also placed at more regular distances, to mark the division of the borderline into sectors, which correspond to different patrol competences. Through the gates, patrol cars access the border zone and begin their ride between the two metal barriers. In both cases they indicate a site where forces and techniques of control concentrate at greater intensity and higher frequency. Other openings, instead, are placed parallel with the borderline. On the inner side of the fence, they serve as secondary entrance points for patrol cars and are connected to minor countryside roads. On the opposite side, they open to Serbian territory and constitute the passage through which illegitimate crossers can be expelled.

FIG. 4.18 The double line of fencing is interrupted to allow the passage of the railway in the proximity of Kelebia (Hungary), January 2022. Source: photo by author.

FIG. 4.19 Section of the border fence in the proximity of Kelebia (Hungary), January 2022. Source: photo by author.

FIG. 4.20 Interruption of the inner line of fencing bordering a nature reserve. Ásotthalom (Hungary), January 2022. Source: photo by author.

Other types of modifications to the physical infrastructure, which were not part of the initial design, testify to the greater or lesser impact of crossings at specific border sections. In most cases, such variations affect the different deployment of razor wire cylinders, especially, on the inner line of fencing. While the outer line maintains the same structure, made of several cylinders of razor wire both at its top and its foot, the inner one usually consists of the sole metal-mesh fence. This is the case, for instance, in the areas surrounding the border crossing points, where movement is highly restricted by the officers' presence and surveillance equipment. In these zones, almost no illegal(ised) crossing occurs, thus the fence appears in its most simple configuration. Other reasons for the removal of the razor wire may be linked to the presence of natural reserves and protected fauna (fig. 4.20). In these particular sites where nature intersects and interrupts the physical infrastructure, border-crossers take the opportunity to overcome the barrier. Accordingly, the response of control manifests in an extension of the height of the fence. In the event of increasing migratory pressure, municipal authorities, local police departments, and even residents may demand more fortification of determined border sections. The request is usually accepted and results in increasing the height of the inner fence by adding new cylinders of razor wire on top of the mesh (fig. 4.21).

FIG. 4.21 Border section reinforced with additional layers of razor wire, Ásotthalom (Hungary), January 2022. Source: photo by author.

While the points of collision with the existing natural or built environment expose the impossibility of completely sealing the southern border, they also show how various techniques of control converge to compensate for the limits of the fence's design. These methods may be more-or-less sophisticated technologies, remote forms of surveillance, or just an increased concentration of the deployment of human forces. The design of the Hungarian border lock, therefore, shows that the close interaction of fencing and moving manifest through a multiplicity of strategies that goes far beyond closure purposes. Regardless of their length or height, walls and fences never achieve a complete obstruction on their own, nor do they totally impede movement. Rather, they discourage potential border-crossers on a symbolical level, and on the material level they render the passage difficult, slow, and harmful by creating specific paths and points of control.[289]

The widespread use of razor wire along the Hungarian border also constitutes a vivid example of the link between a communicative role and a material capacity in the strategic regulation of movement. The characteristic light weight, inexpensiveness, and the possible large-scale deployment have rendered barbed and razor wire one of the most common means in the control of national frontiers. These properties allow for the restricting of motion and organising of space while, at the same time, the inflicting of a physical punishment on bodies.[290]

In the management of external EU borders, the extensive use of razor wire delineates a very wide, although fragmented, geography. The Hungarian fence is actually inscribed in a larger net of cases of border fortification, united not only by similar materials but also by the same manufacturer. As Mark Akkerman reports, the razor wire used along the southern Hungarian border consists of a particular type produced in Spain, also known as concertina wire.[291] The first application that rendered this coiled wire popular in the militarisation of national frontiers was the construction of the Spanish-Moroccan fence in Ceuta and Melilla. The same firm, according to Akkerman, is involved in the provision of concertinas for the building of several other structures including the separation fences between Bulgaria and Turkey, Austria and Slovenia, the temporary barrier between Hungary and Slovenia, protection structures in Calais, and, likely, other border infrastructures.[292]

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289 Cf.: Stephane Rosière and Reece Jones, "Teichopolitics: Reconsidering Globalization through the Role of Walls and Fences," *Geopolitics* 17, no.1 (2012): 217-234, https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2011.57465 3; Polly Pallister-Wilkins, "How Walls do Work: Security Barriers as Devices of Interruption and Data Capture," *Security Dialogue* 47, no.2 (2016): 151-164, https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010615615729.

290 Raviel Netz, *Barbed Wire: An Ecology of Modernity* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2004): xii.

291 Akkerman, *The Business of Building Walls*, 3

292 Ibid.

Although some material features, such as the use of razor wire, may render border structures across the entire globe comparable, European fortified frontiers (especially those which emerged after 2015) share a crucial characteristic. Differently from the physical barriers that mark an existing conflict between two neighbouring countries, the ones at Europe's borders are meant to address various security issues.[293] In particular, they are justified as a means to control the movement of non-European nationals and contain the risks supposedly related to this movement, such as terrorism, criminality, and illegitimate entries. Physical infrastructures of border control, in this case, serve the purpose of "striating space", in the words of Deleuze. This means imposing control over the freedom of movement and the natural space. On a surface devoid of signs of separation or natural obstacles, border barriers forcibly subtract space for movement and organise it rigidly along arbitrary directions and access points.[294]

The capacity of "striating" a wide-open surface is particularly noticeable in the Hungarian case. The rural landscape that extends across northern Serbia and southern Hungary is, for the most part, flat. It does not present any natural features that would significantly obstruct mobility (fig. 4.22). In fact, without the fence, it would be impossible to distinguish where one country ends and where the other begins. For border control to materialise, nature has to be manipulated according to military needs. This means that an arbitrary distance has to be established and constructed, so that a spatial difference can emerge. In the phase that preceded the fence's construction, the use of razor wire rolls arranged across the fields and intertwined in the bushes favoured the creation of such distance. As it is easy to hide, this light and thin material is also difficult to detect, especially at night, when crossings intensify.

The razor wire, therefore, could render movement from the outside slower while giving the necessary time for patrols to intercept border-crossers from the inside. Even if it does not manage to bound space completely, this strategy does serve to create a difference in the way the space is traversed. It allows for the increased capture of intruders before they have time to escape. Hence, distance is established on the time of moving, rather than on a spatial extension.[295]

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293 Vallet, "Border Walls and the Illusion of Deterrence,"157.

294 Cf. Netz, *Barbed Wire,* 9.

295 Olivier Razac names this capacity as the "static and dynamic component" of spatial divisions, which allows enclosures or barriers to function both as signs (through the material presence of the fence) and actions (the capacity to create spatial difference and chase intruders). See: Olivier Razac, *Barbed Wire: A Political History* (New York: The New Press, 2002): 74.

This mechanism is similar to the work of infrastructures of vision described in chapter three. While technologies of surveillance do not stop border-crossers directly, they use vision to manipulate speed in a differential way and, thus, facilitate a prompt police action. The strategic use of vision also comes into play in the physical infrastructures through various means. First, the spaces in the material allow sight to pass through the barrier and turn it in favour of control.[296] From a distance, especially at night, it is hard to see the Hungarian fence. It is by no means majestic or massive. Only by getting closer can a person manage to distinguish each of the components and understand how to overcome them. Yet, at this point, police intervention has already been activated by the other surveillance apparatuses.

Second, the advantage of vision is given by the design of the border site. The Hungarian Integrated Border Management Strategy indicates precise directives regarding the spatial organisation of the border zone.[297] In particular, the area surrounding the national boundary has to be clean and unhampered. This implies clearing trees and bushes that impede visibility and levelling the ground, in order to facilitate the detection of any suspicious activity beyond the boundary (fig. 4.23). In this way, the capacity of patrolling forces to inspect the ground increases, while the possibility for border-crossers to hide is reduced. The profiles of migrants moving beyond the fence stand out from the plane surface, causing them to be visibly and physically exposed, and, thus, more vulnerable.

If the removal of obstacles in the natural landscape serves the purpose of differential vision, a new material discontinuity is arbitrarily imposed to create the difference of space. In other words, the arbitrary differentiation of an "inside" and "outside" that characterises the logic of border control has to actualise. As described above, the preliminary attempt to create a difference consisted of the strategic positioning of razor wire in selected border sections. With the advancement of construction work, this purpose has been progressively realized by the fence, and concertina cylinders were repositioned at both the foot and on top of the metal-mesh fence. This arrangement was meant to prevent people from digging tunnels, climbing over or cutting the fence.

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296 Ibid., 95. Razac dedicates a chapter to the close connection of barbed wire fencing and surveillance tactics. In particular, he states: "Whereas before one could make oneself hidden in order to attack a visible barrier, now it is the barrier itself that is hidden to the person who would attempt to breach it [… I]t favors the light over the imposing, speed over obstruction, transparency over opacity, the potential over the actual".

297 Magyarország Nemzeti Integrált Határigazgatási Stratégiája 2019-2021 (Hungary's National Integrated Border Management Strategy), 24, https://bit.ly/kormany.

FIG. 4.22 Double line of fencing in the area of Ásotthalom (Hungary), January 2022. Source: photo by author.

FIG. 4.23 Flat Serbian landscape viewed through the metal mesh of the border fence. Tompa (Hungary), January 2022. Source: photo by author.

Even in its more solid and continuous configuration, the physical infrastructure was not designed to work alone. However perfected, the architecture of coiled and mesh wires always proves a certain weakness and does not achieve an impenetrable division. It is relatively easy to cut and not impossible to climb over. For this reason, it is integrated into a larger system of control which includes the cameras, sensors, optic fibre, and running electricity on the fence itself. Despite the alleged remoteness and the improved technological sophistication, these systems also increase the violence exercised on bodies at the moment of direct contact during the crossing. The conjoint operation of the metal-mesh fence and remote surveillance devices marks the differentiation of "inside" and "outside" spaces on the very material level. The installation of both systems on the ground determines, in fact, a transformation on the way the two sides of the border are designed, inspected, crossed, and experienced.

In addition to the technological apparatus, the Hungarian government has also introduced several legislative measures to mitigate the material limitations of the fence and accentuate spatial differentiation. In particular, the amendments to Act C of 2012 on the criminal code enunciate three new criminal offences in relation to the border lock.[298] In Section 352 A, any unauthorised entry into the territory protected by the border lock is indicated as a crime punishable by imprisonment up to a maximum of three years. Section 352 B, instead, is dedicated to the damaging of the fence or any other device installed on it. Finally, in section 352 C, the obstruction of construction and maintenance work related to the fence is listed as a felony to be punished by imprisonment up to one year. The amendments to the Hungarian criminal code mentioned above establish a direct physical connection between criminal and asylum law.

Following the diagrammatic logic outlined in the second chapter of this thesis, a line of actualisation attempts to connect the virtuality of the legislative tool to the concrete construction of the border as a militarised space of control. The physical infrastructure is thus the media through which virtuality passes and tries to become effective on space and bodies. Criminal and asylum law are made to coincide in the very moment of contact with the fence. At the closed border, the request of asylum and the attempt of crossing merge in one sole act, which is discursively and materially constructed as a crime. By impeding passage, the physical infrastructure denies the possibility of requesting asylum, and by criminalising its destruction

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298 See: Hungarian Helsinki Committee, "The Hungarian Helsinki Committee's Opinion on the Governments Amendments to Criminal Law Related to the Sealed Border" (September 2015): 3, https://www.refworld.org/docid/55ffb36a4.html; the full text of the Act in Hungarian can be found at: https://njt.hu/jogszabaly/2012-100-00-00. Accessed on 25-11-2022.

alternative chances are also opposed. What the amendments attempt to forbid is the possibility of openness: a cut in the mesh, an insurgent act of creative destruction that would enhance the possibility for novelty to take place. It would produce new forms of contact and exchange, opening the spatiality of the border to a different becoming. The idea of the destruction of the fence, in this sense, does not indicate damage (as the law states). Rather, it could be interpreted as "deconstruction", in the words of Levi Bryant, a restructuring of relations between bodily things: a material performative practice.[299]

On the other hand, the necessity of the aforementioned amendments testifies that the closure of the border is not that solid after all. It proves to be exposed to destructions and crossings. To intervene on those illegalised actions, when they have already taken place, the Hungarian government introduced an additional legislative measure. With the amendment to the Act on the State Border, it established that any person apprehended within a distance of 8 kilometres from the national border and not in possession of the documents required for entry shall be escorted by the police to the external side of the border fence.[300] This amendment legitimates expulsion from the state territory in the form of a legalised push-back practice, which extends on a wider spatial radius.

While this rule has an obvious impact on the obstruction of access to asylum, the focus here is primarily on its emergence as an additional form of violence. The "8 km rule" instituted by the amendment enables a new mode of moving directed from the inner territory towards the outside. Such movement proves that the security function performed by the border fence is not simply a static separation, nor is it only aimed at stopping entries from the outside. Rather, it consists of a dynamic manoeuvre of exclusion and active expulsion, as the "third encounter" has also proved. In this sense, it would not be sufficient to state that the need for new policies exposes a certain ineffectiveness of the physical infrastructure. It also shows how the very presence of the fence becomes determinant in the multiplication of strategies to differentiate space and motion.

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299 Levi Bryant, *Onto-Cartography: An Ontology of Machines and Media* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd, 2014): 267-269.

300 Hungarian Helsinki Committee, "Hungary: Recent Legal Amendments Further Destroy Access to Protection, April-June 2016" (June 15, 2016), https://bit.ly/3xOlHsX, accessed on 25-11-2022. The full text of the Act (Hungarian) is accessible here: https://njt.hu/jogszabaly/2007-89-00-00. It is important to stress that this part of research focuses only on the spatial implications of legislative documents and does not aim at providing a detailed analysis. A more detailed argumentation of the consequences that the amendments related to the state border and the fence have on asylum rights can be found here: Hungarian Helsinki Committee, *No Country for Refugees,* https://www.refworld.org/docid/5608e04b4.html; Hungarian Helsinki Committee, *Building a Legal Fence – Changes to Hungarian Asylum Law jeopardise access to protection in Hungary* (August 07, 2015), https://www.refworld.org/docid/55e99fa64.html. Accessed on 25-11-2022.

The range of action of the barrier thickens, expands, and shifts through the spatial connections established by both policies and technical devices. Accordingly, the physical infrastructure enacts a multitude of practices. It creates new spaces of capture, by forcing arbitrary and violent boundaries on space. It redirects migrant routes by trapping border-crossers in predetermined paths and access points. It draws new differential relations of in/exteriority by distinguishing trusted travellers from unwanted and criminalised migrants. The ensemble of these actions contributes to increase the temporal and spatial distance that separates border-crossers from the space of safety that lies beyond the border fence.

4.4 Plasticity: The Border's Autonomous Becoming

The deployment of a growing set of technological and legislative instruments to integrate the physical infrastructure constitutes one of the main efforts at continuity in border control. As stated in the Hungarian National Integrated Border Management Strategy, the principle of continuity targets the constant guarding of the national border, both in space and in time.[301] The regulation and differentiation of movement through the means described above prove that the extension of border protection is not only achieved linearly across the terrain's surface. It also amplifies in height and width through multiple visual fields and sensorial ranges; it expands temporally through the "clouds" of the digital sphere and on the land's surface by generating a dynamic hindering of motion. Continuity can, therefore, be understood as the capacity of bordering structures and actions to shift across time and space. It does not refer to durability expressed by qualities of fixity and solidity. Rather, continuity manifests as the ability of the border itself to *de-form* and *re-form*, through the interaction with multiple tactics and techniques of both control and escape. In other words, it is the capacity of physical infrastructures to activate the border's *plastic formation*.

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[301] See chapter two, in this thesis.

Plasticity, in the words of Catherine Malabou, is an antonym for rigidity.[302] This may sound contradictory in relation to the sealing of national borders, which are often referred to with terms that stress stiffness, such as "wall" or "barrier". Therefore, it is important to understand that the character of plasticity does not address the physical infrastructure metaphorically. The fence itself, in fact, is not immutable. The metal mesh can be cut, torn, pierced. The razor wire moves and intertwines on the terrain, following the actions it wants to prevent. Plasticity is understood as both a material feature of the physical infrastructure and actual quality of the border's actualisation, which is activated through the technical apparatus of the fence. As actual quality, it is the performative capacity of receiving and giving form in the same performative process.[303]

The material construction of the fence, as physical infrastructure, emerges as a cut that crosses the ground's surface to then acquire a growing spatial complexity. The building of spatial difference through the fence marks a moment of rupture, a striation, a change from the previous open condition. However, it is not an exceptional, isolate event. The physical manifestation of separation arises from an ongoing, mobile phenomenon of struggle. It emerges when the tensions between forces of control and migratory escape come to the extreme and, through their interaction, produce a new spatial form. The latter proves that the space, now scarred, will never return to its original condition. This also means that the border's actualisation does not end with the construction of the physical infrastructure. It continues to move, de-form, and give form to space through those actions that opposes the separation and the denial of motion.

The construction of difference operated through the barrier, therefore, is counterbalanced by a productive form of destruction, which involves a plurality of agencies.[304] These involve border-crossers' tactics and movement along and across the fence, as well as nature's interference with the technological and physical apparatuses of border control.

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[302] Malabou, *What Should We Do with our Brain?,* 5.

[303] Ibid.

[304] In *The Ontology of the Accident*, Catherine Malabou refers to the Greek myth of Phoebus and Daphne to explain transformation as a form of flight. When escape is denied, destruction represents the process of invention and production of a new form, which offers freedom. She writes: "[T]he only possible way out from the impossibility of flight appears to be the formation of a form of flight. […] It is all too true that Daphne can only escape Phoebus by transforming herself. In a sense, flight is impossible for her too. For her too, the moment of transformation is the moment of destruction: the granting and suppression of form are contemporaneous". Catherine Malabou, *The Ontology of the Accident: An Essay on Destructive Plasticity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012): 11. Cf. with the concept of destruction that was mentioned earlier in this chapter, with reference to: Bryant, *Onto-Cartography*, 267-269.

The very actualisation of border spatiality takes place when counteractions in motion oppose the fixity of the fence, create friction, and start a different movement. They reconfigure the pre-established structure, break into it, and demand a new becoming. These actions exploit the quality of plasticity as the opportunity for a genesis of form; they activate difference in the spatiality of the border and render it performative of a new process of formation.

This process is both spatial and political in its autonomy. The plastic formation of the border is political as it refuses predetermined configurations imposed by the virtuality of policy and it does not coincide with the design established by the technical apparatuses of control. The formation of the border does not conform to the spatial rule which imposes a linear separation. Through plasticity, it is open to change and unpredictability. Plasticity enables multiple agents and actions of opposition to take (and give) form. This means that such oppositions do not simply act as a direct reaction to the rule of exclusion (spatial and political) imposed through the fence, but operate in a more performative and creative way. On a spatial level, it activates the border's own becoming; it allows the process of formation to detach from virtuality and become substantial in a way that is unpredictable and open-ended.

The potential for novelty to emerge extends from space to the politics of migration and reception; plasticity invites the imagining of a political movement that proposes new paths for asylum and looks beyond existing policies and border structures. It encourages the thinking of new connections between policy and action to engage with issues of unequal mobility and differentiation. This means to acknowledge the relevance of plasticity through its dual capacity of dealing with both material features and questions of meaning. In other words, its predisposition to change and openness activates a process of formation, which is both material and discursive.

At the level of meaning, plasticity enhances a reflection on established notions of power and resistance. By exposing a multi-directional material struggle, it shows the impossibility of determining a sole, central force of power, which gives a fixed shape to spatial relations. From the perspective of matter, this means that the border, as a spatial process, is not a passive receiver, an empty terrain on which limits can be imposed and remain unchanged. Instead, it has the capacity to initiate its own becoming. The complexity of the process of border formation causes the non-correspondence between the actualised form and the spatial extensions defined by digital and visual infrastructures or policies. The incompatibility originates from the very interaction of forces, the movement of different systems (human and non-human), mediated through the physical infrastructure of the fence.

Counter-movements enacted by migrants and other opposing forces identify points of non-correspondence, open the cracks in the infrastructure, and creatively engage with it. Exploiting the quality of plasticity, these forces emerge as the ability to redirect movement, reorient itself at the material encounter with the limit, thus, refusing to submit to its rule.

Banja Koviljača (Serbia), September 2020. Source: photo by author.

5 Insurgent Becoming

A Logbook of Site Surveys

5.1 Why a Logbook?

The first three chapters of this thesis brought attention to the passage from the diagrammatic structuring of virtual relationships to the start of the process of actualisation. The spatial dimension of the border is progressively manifested in its extensive features, such as measures, distances, and coordinates through the work of digital and visual systems of control. Then, the analysis of the border fence as a physical infrastructure shows a different phase of actualisation in which the technical apparatus mediates the interaction between means of control, forces of movement, and existing material environments. The spatial character of plasticity, which allows for the advancement of actualisation through the fence, opens the path for a completely new becoming: a process in which the spatial form develops independently from the diagrammatic structure, hence, from virtuality. In this way, the complexity of the border as a space in dynamic formation increases and acquires characters of indeterminacy, ambiguity, and unpredictability. These features expose the non-correspondence between the clarity and linearity of the technical visualisation offered by digital systems and infrastructures of vision. By virtue of its complexity, the spatial formation and the activation of the border's own becoming extend border spatiality beyond the fence and make room for new agents in the actualisation of spatial form.

The intention of this chapter is to highlight the rupture and the aforementioned non-correspondence between the planned, the designed, the legislative dimension of the border —in other words, its virtual dimension— and its actual form. The goal is to bring to the fore those interferences, insurgent actions, and movements that shape the spatial form of the border from the ground. To achieve this goal the theoretical argument of actualisation is interrupted so that room can be made for the empirical

investigation of makeshift migrant settlements along the northern Serbian border. The methods of empirical study, the style of narration, and the organisation of the content are intended to accentuate the clash between diagrammatic structure and actualising spatial form. They differ substantially from the previous chapters, preferring descriptions and personal reflections to critical, theoretical argumentation. In this sense, the insertion of the logbook in its entirety is a deliberate choice that seeks to mark a rupture, a disruption from virtuality and the theoretical argumentation. It wants to disorient the reader as to emphasise the non-linearity and non-causality of actualisation, and change the perspective of observation. The logbook offers a zoomed-in view from the ground: an immersion in the actual, substantial form of space that aims at giving a sense of the complexity of the border as a spatial system in becoming. Addressing complexity through the logbook does not mean giving a complete, overarching explanation of it. Rather, this chapter is evocative more than probative. Descriptions stress the contingent and specific nature of the process of formation; spaces, events, stories, and encounters reported in this logbook belong to the very moment of experience of the author, thus, they cannot be extracted, generalised, or reproduced.

Moving from Belgrade to the north of Serbia, including deviations toward Romania and Bosnia, the site visits presented in this logbook are organised as a series of concrete buildings, rooms, and landscapes. In these sites, specific atmospheres are evoked through the description of objects, inhabitants, and conversations. Some of the information included in the narration has the character of factual data (such as the locations, the number of those present, the day and duration of the visits), but, for the most part, developments emerge from conversations reported in the form of a dialogue or a statement, either in a direct or indirect form. As mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, the methods of empirical research do not include interviews, but participant observation and informal conversations were preferred throughout the entire investigation on-site. The choice of not conducting interviews was dictated by my personal sensitivity and judgement on-site. Actually, a large part of those who transit across Serbia to reach Western Europe is quite familiar with interview practices of journalists, researchers, volunteers, and especially authorities. I decided not to reproduce the same hierarchical questioning-answering mode of interaction that, in my opinion, does not add more reliability or truthfulness than simple conversations. However, it is not evidence that this chapter seeks, but a sense of the complexity of events and space.

Inevitably, the voice, as well as the path across the various spaces, is that of the author. Personal reflections are frequent and they are not disguised. In the logbook the transparency of the author's intervention is expressed both graphically, through the choice of a different colour of the text, and stylistically with a narration in

the first person. In these terms, the purpose of the logbook is not that of proving some kind of truth. Rather, it orients the spatial formation towards a multiplicity of atmospheres, stories, spaces, practices, and desires in which the author acknowledges her own limitations. These can be found at the intersection of knowledge and methods of research. Although the focus of knowledge is on the spatial dimension of the border (and not on the experience of migration itself), the author still remains extraneous to it. This does not mean neutral or objective, but rather unable to grasp the nature of conflict, violence, and trauma that characterises the process of border formation. As a consequence, the knowledge produced through the empirical research is partial; it relies on what is made accessible in a protected condition, guided in the daylight and, especially, on what the individuals involved decided to disclose. These limitations also affect the methods of research, as the paragraphs below discuss in more detail. Planning and data collection were informed by the author's personal sensitivity in the place and time of the visits. This certainly does not exclude differing views on methodology and data collection in similar cases or even in my own future research.

5.1.1 Planning

The planning of the site visits in Serbia started in a very delicate time—in the early months of 2020 during the first peak of the Covid-19 pandemic. In this period, any sort of travel for leisure or working was subjected to restrictions, difficulties, and uncertainty. The summer of that year offered a moment of relative calm in which a progressive decrease of casualties and contagions was registered. This moment of relaxation led to a progressive lifting of travel bans, especially among the countries of the European Union. Serbia, for its part, lifted the ban and opened its borders to all European visitors. Its approach, however, was not mutual. From the perspective of EU regulations, Serbia was still considered a risky country, despite a much lower number of contagions compared with many other EU nations.

After considering these conditions, I decided to take advantage of this moment of relative openness and travel to Serbia. The short stay of two weeks, along with the concentrated plan of visits, was necessary due to the possibility of sudden changes in pandemic developments. The short duration of the empirical research, as well as a specific spatial approach, mark the difference of the present study with extensive ethnographic fieldwork. The empirical study is understood as a series of site surveys, in which the attention concentrates on spaces and material features, rather than understanding and explaining the totality of daily dynamics with a focus on individual experiences. The analysis of sites was carried out by means of visual documentation,

photographs and sketches when possible, and reflexive narration. The limitation of time and the facilitation of the visit by a local NGO have strongly conditioned the mode of engaging with space and its analysis, precluding, for instance, the possibility of returning at my discretion. Accordingly, these conditions prevented from establishing a deeper relationship with the people and the building of trust. This aspect, in particular, has compromised a consistent interaction with those I met on site that also results in a fragmented documentation of personal stories.

In practice, the plan of visits included: two Belgrade parks, Bristol Park (colloquially called "Afghani Park") and Luke Ćelovića on September 4 and 5, 2020; the towns of Horgoš and Subotica on September 8, 2020; the village of Majdan on September 10, 2020; the abandoned station of Banja Koviljača on September 16, 2020. The sites above correspond to the places where the NGO Klikaktiv, which acted as facilitator, carries out its regular visits. Among those, Belgrade Parks, Subotica, and Horgoš are the oldest sites of migrants' makeshift encampments, where the NGO has operated since 2014/2015. In contrast, Majdan and Banja Koviljača host more recent, informal settlements. This is due to a later redirection of migratory routes towards Romania and Bosnia. The volunteers had heard about new arrivals in the villages only a couple of weeks before my arrival in Serbia, so they were also relatively new to the area. While Klikaktiv would provide the usual free legal advice, my presence on-site was aimed at the following: monitoring the material condition of informal camps; understanding the proximity with border crossing points; learning about practices of crossing and smuggling; getting information on the struggles (or the lack thereof) with local authorities and police; listening to migrants' memories, stories, and desires related to their journey.

5.1.2   Data Collection[305]

In contrast to the well-defined plan of visits, a proper scheme of data collection was missing. This was due to two main reasons: the specificity of the site and my personal judgement. As regards specificity, occupied places and makeshift camps (which, in this dissertation, are referred to with the general term of "squats") are unstable, undisciplined sites, in which the number of "guests", the objects in place, and the duration of occupation are shuffled on a daily basis. Squats are

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[305] The material collected on site, the methods of processing, and the planned restitution of data for the scope of this dissertation have been subjected to the revision by the Human Research Ethics Committee of TU Delft. The procedure resulted in the final approval by the Committee (letter of approval #1878) on date November 26, 2021.

unpredictable in their exact location, form, number of present people and the daily practices of the inhabitants. When visiting these sites, Klikaktiv volunteers and I were never sure if we would find the place empty or overcrowded, open and accessible or physically sealed. The speed of change and the unpredictable character of the specific sites determined the difficulty and, sometimes, the impossibility of accurately redacting a data-plan or having clear expectations for it. Therefore, I decided to delay the organisation and even part of the data recording to a post-visit phase.

Second, about personal judgement, the items of data that were gathered on site (notes, sketches, and photographs) could not be collected with the same consistency in every situation. Even though I always carried my notebook and camera, in some situations it was impossible to make an immediate record of observations, images, thoughts, and conversations. Sometimes, the reason was to avoid losing the focus on what was going on. In other cases, the reason was to foster a more confidential and relaxed atmosphere during the conversations. Most of the time, I took advantage of moments of rest or rides in the van to write down some quick notes and reflections on the visit. This means that, while participant observation and the collection of photographic material happened concurrently on site, I had to rely on memory for a more extensive writing.

This approach obviously suffers from the retrospective effects of memory, which are as much beneficial as partial. In the first case, a retrospective thinking and writing leaves more room for the connection of facts and personal thoughts regardless of chronological order. I am aware that, from a strictly scientific perspective, such an approach may be especially biased. My attempt to overcome this problem is reflected in the recognition of the contextualisation and the transparency towards personal reflexivity, both graphically and stylistically. However, the later analysis also expanded the following: the considerations on what was possible to do, say, or see; which reasons lay behind limitations; and what those obstacles may produce in terms of research. It is important to stress that the mixing of subjective and objective information recorded in a post-visit narration is not aimed at elaborating a fictional story. Rather, it tests the potential expansion of connections that direct experience might trigger.

The influence of situated judgement is even more evident in the case of personal interactions. First, the basis of all interactions was found in the transparency of my role as a researcher, clarified at the beginning of each visit and distinguished from the role of the volunteers that facilitated it. Second, given the particular condition of vulnerability of the participants involved, measures of protection obviously included the guarantee and maintenance of anonymity, both in conversation and photographs, as well as other precautions aimed at not compromising trust. These might consist,

for instance, in avoiding voice recording that may raise concerns on how this data may circulate in future or who it may reach. Moreover, one must consider the specific conditions which allowed for the carrying out of the empirical research; that is to say, with, and thanks to, Klikaktiv. Special attention was given to not interfere with the NGO's provision of free legal advice. I was aware that any inappropriate behaviour from my side could overturn the fragile trust that is built during the encounter between migrants and volunteers, compromising the NGO's credibility in the migrant community.

Joining the Klikaktiv team in their regular field work was also an important opportunity to learn. I noticed from the very first visit that the NGO's approach was aimed at giving more space to listening than to speaking. The volunteers opened their conversations by asking those present what their problems and needs were, what they wanted the volunteers to know, or what they would like to learn about asylum procedures. On the basis of their response, the volunteers adapted the delivery of legal counselling or other information. In this way, those who were present could conceptualise in their own words what they consider relevant to tell. They could shape their own narrative, calibrating themes and stories of their own experience.

I found this aspect extremely relevant for what concerns my own methods of research. Following the example of Klikaktiv, I decided to avoid the format of structured and systematic interviews, in favour of more spontaneous conversations, sometimes initiated spontaneously by those present. In this way, the role of the researcher is similar to that of a medium able to connect personal stories and missing links, which can consist of events that occurred elsewhere, political decisions, or even theoretical concepts. Both approaches, from a volunteer or a researcher perspective, try to escape a top-down organisation of discourses and interpretations. Stories can thus emerge from the actions and words of the individuals involved, limiting the researcher's role to recording and avoiding the imposition of pre-established structures of academic knowledge.

5.1.3 Photographic Material

As far as visual documentation is concerned, I was able to collect photographic material during most of the site surveys. However, each visit presented different conditions of consent and responses from the inhabitants of the squats. In Horgoš and Banja Koviljača, those present seemed to be enthusiastic about my interest and opposed no resistance to the request of taking some photos. In other cases, such as

Subotica and the Belgrade parks, it was impossible to ask for permission, due to the large number of people. In those cases, the photographic documentation focused on the surrounding environment or on specific objects, deliberately leaving out the more private spaces. The restrictions concerning, among others, the exclusion of human figures or the accurate selection of items to portray offer the opportunity to reflect on presence, absence, and (in)visibility. In the pictures without people, their absence must be seen in the light of emphasising movement and rapid change and not as a way to erase migrants' presence from the border. From this perspective, the interpretation of photographs becomes ambiguous and triggers questions about who or what is missing from the scene. By concealing human figures from the images, only the squat remains visible as the centre of the focus. It emerges in its bare, shelter function resembling an envelope, a shell. On the walls of this envelope, space is left for traces that let human presence and action emerge, without being locked into a motionless depiction.

In this way, presence becomes an intuition coming from material signs and abandoned objects. This aspect, I believe, relates much more closely to the condition of inhabiting borders, especially, in a country of transit like Serbia. This approach takes distance from media and news images of migrants in informal camps, which usually emphasise poor hygienic conditions and suffering bodies. Instead, with the photos collected and integrated into the narrative in the first person, the attention is focused on the fact that squats and informal camps are not only precarious living spaces; they are fore and foremost places of intense movement and change. These sites of transit show the various facets of movement; at times, it is slow and imperceptible and, in other situations, too fast to be seen. Movement is always at the basis of life at the border. The squats I visited in Serbia have to do with occupation and appropriation as much as they have to do with abandonment, with motion as much as with rest. Such an antithetic character can be best expressed by the images that depict absence through signs of presence and integrated with the narration of desired journeys.

The following report of empirical study comprises six surveys and focuses on three main areas of investigation: Belgrade, the northern Serbian border, and the eastern border with Bosnia. Although the order of site surveys reflects the chronology of the empirical research, the reading advice is that of paying attention to the way atmospheres, uses of space, practices, and conversations change, while moving from Belgrade (the node along the route) to different border sections. To accentuate this intention, the narration proceeds through a series of stops along the journey, where specific spatial conditions shift from the background of migratory events to the foreground.

Site Survey #1: Savamala

Belgrade. Friday September 04, 2020. 4:00 p.m.

The Office

On Friday the 4th, I had my first appointment with the Klikaktiv team in Magacin, an art gallery and co-working space, in the old neighbourhood of Savamala. This urban area along the river has historically been a meeting point and a very busy hub for emerging artists in Belgrade. I have been told that before the ambitious urban interventions of the Waterfront Project, the neighbourhood was rich in small art galleries, spaces for performances, and community driven events. However, the current situation is quite different. Savamala is dotted with construction fences and semi-abandoned buildings, but its creative atmosphere still holds on. It is preserved in large colourful murals, lively bars, and eclectic shops that range from sex-shops to vintage and flea markets (fig. 5.1).

FIG. 5.1 View of Savamala from Brancov Bridge. Belgrade (Serbia), September 2020. Source: photo by author.

I entered the building and was welcomed by the team: Milica and Vuk, the main faces of Klikaktiv, and a volunteer of No Name Kitchen (NNK). The young man, like many NNK members, is not Serbian. He came from the U.S. to offer his support to people on the move along the Balkan Route about one year ago. I asked him if the situation of the Balkans was well known overseas and how he decided to move to Serbia. He told me that back in 2015 the news of thousands of migrants walking towards Europe received a lot of attention. Not long afterwards, however, it disappeared from the media discourse. He got in touch with some compatriots already working with NNK and decided to leave for Serbia. In Šid, he met Klikaktiv and decided to reach out to them in Belgrade for a couple of weeks of rest, before leaving for Montenegro.

He showed me a book that had just been given to him from one of the authors: "The Dark Sides of Europeanisation." Milica stood up from her chair and came closer to show me some pictures at the end of the book. The photos were taken before the construction of the Hungarian transit zones. The photos showed the crossing points of Kelebija-Tompa and Horgoš-Röszke arranged with a gate and a pre-transit area, where migrants were sleeping in tents. We talked about the recent closure of the transit zones, dating back to a few months earlier, and I asked what the chances to cross legally were at that moment.

"Barely none," was Milica's answer, "Hungary is not accepting any request of asylum if the migrant comes from a safe country, which means, from Serbia." However illegalised, crossings have not stopped. Controls have intensified along the northern Serbian border, along with the Croatian and Romanian borders, following the emergence of new routes. Yet, the north of Serbia remains one of the busiest crossing areas, Milica explained. Minor, less known routes are also diverting to Albania and Montenegro, small countries that are relatively quick to cross. Authorities are well aware of the fact that migrants will move further, so they let them pass without strong resistance. The major problems, instead, manifest at the doorstep of the EU (along the Croatian and Hungarian borders). It is not likely that the situation will change any time soon.

We stayed in the office for about half an hour, waiting for the interpreter, a young Afghan man who has lived in Belgrade for some years. Arriving in Serbia at the age of 17, the young man had walked the Balkan route himself, without parents or siblings. As a minor, it was relatively easy for him to legally remain in the country, passing from camp to camp, and accessing basic education that made him perfectly fluent in Serbian. When he arrived at the office, he reminded Milica that they had to talk about something very important, concerning the renewal of his residence permit. To date, despite a good integration in the Serbian culture and community, the command of the language, and the commitment shown as an interpreter for various NGOs, the young man still lives a precarious life, filled with deadlines and short-term permits.

"Afghani Park"

Around 4.00 p.m. we left the office and walked towards Bristol Park which lies in the heart of Savamala. The park gained notoriety during the first peak of arrivals in 2014-2015. At that time, many migrants (most of them from Syria and Afghanistan) placed their tents in the urban park, waiting to receive new directions on their journey toward the EU. From that time, Bristol Park became better known as "Afghani Park." In 2016, the ambitious urban intervention of the Waterfront Project swept away some pre-existing barracks along the riverfront. The migrants occupying the park had found shelter in these buildings during the cold winter of 2015-2016, but in spite of the forced eviction, they remained in the area since they had become familiar with its nearby services, such as transportation. Nowadays, the construction fences of the Waterfront Project surround the park on its northwest side and extend along the river until Brankov Bridge (fig. 5.2). In the small interstices left by the fencing, some migrants adjust their temporary shelters, taking advantage of the "privacy" offered by the construction site.

Looking South from Bristol Park, the central bus station appears. It is a crowded area where local residents move around as usual and seem not to notice the presence of migrants sitting on the ground in the parks (fig. 5.3). Bristol Park and Luke Ćelovića Park are a few meters distance. They are a meeting point for the migrant community. Those who sit in the urban parks no longer camp there, nor stay for the night. They gather in daytime to get information, meet smugglers, and get to know what the chances are to play "The Game".

Upon my arrival, the first thing that caught me by surprise was the large concentration of people. I had thought that migrants' visible presence in Bristol Park had ended with the official closure of the Balkan Route in 2015 (corresponding to the construction of the Hungarian fence). On the contrary, there were nearly 100 people in the busiest moment of the visit. Counting those present was difficult, if not impossible, due to the very dynamic situation. "You will see, there are moments in which the guys start to disappear. It is because a smuggler arrives. Then, nobody cares anymore about what we have to say," Milica stated, not without irony. The asylum procedures that she was willing to explain to those sitting in the park were probably not so appealing when compared to an immediate chance to reach the border.

We walked to the centre of the park and the interpreter greeted a small circle of five or six young men grouped around a bench. We went a few steps further and he greeted another two. He started a friendly talk with someone in a language that I could not recognise. Despite the colloquial name of the park, I cannot say with certainty that it was only frequented by Afghani migrants.

FIG. 5.2 A small group of young migrants coming out of the construction fences along the river front. Belgrade (Serbia), September 2020. Source: photo by author.

FIG. 5.3 View of Bristol Park from Zemunski Put. Belgrade (Serbia), September 2020. Source: photo by author.
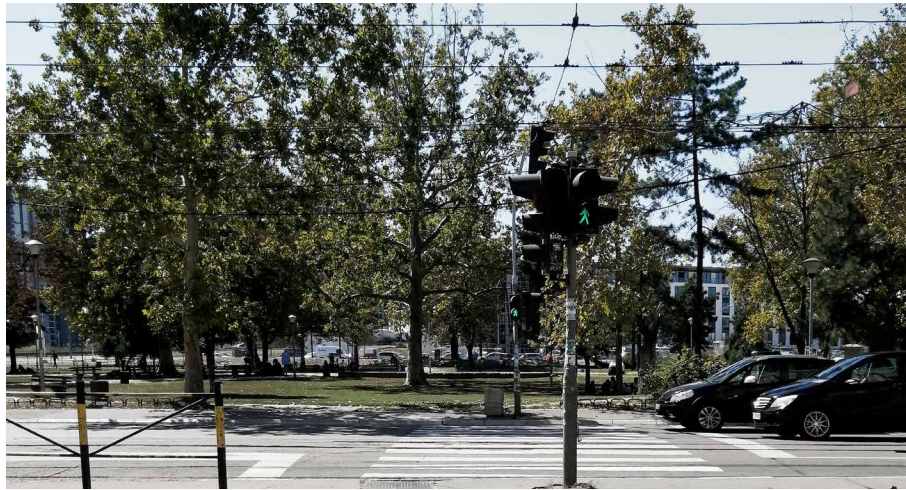
FIG. 5.4 View of Bristol Park from Karađorđeva Street. Belgrade (Serbia), September 2020. Source: photo by author.

There might have been some other nationals among the ones who did not come closer. Yet, for the majority of those who gathered around us, the words of the interpreter seemed to be familiar. In a few minutes, about 15 people were standing around us. The interpreter quickly introduced the Kilikaktiv organisation and the purpose of the visit, explaining that the NGO could provide legal advice on asylum matters. To begin the conversation, he asked some questions to the young men to find out if they were staying in any of the official camps.

The majority of those hanging around Bristol Park were not new in Serbia. Most of them were formally guests of the official reception centres of the country since a few years. Such facilities are usually open, which means that migrants are allowed to leave and return. Some of those present said that they were staying in Obrenovac, the closest camp to Belgrade. At this point, some questions about the situation in this facility followed. The NGO wanted to be informed about the possibility of violent behaviours from the police or other officials, and the young men seemed willing to share their stories.

What emerged from migrants' testimonies was that the attitude of authorities could change easily and with no reason. "One day they behave nicely, the next day the same person beats you up for no reason. You never know what is going to come," someone said in English. Another man mentioned a "24h room" that the police would use as a sort of isolation cell, where he had heard someone had been beaten. The information was not new to Klikaktiv. Nevertheless, it is often difficult for NGOs and activists to understand and, even more, to prove whether the violence is a reality or a rumour.

What is sure is that some of the men in the park did not look to be in good physical condition. Many had visible wounds on their face and their arms. I noticed that a few of them were limping. A man caught my attention, for his large scar around his neck. Also, in these cases, it is impossible to know how or where those injuries had been caused. During my conversation with the Klikaktiv team, I learned that many get injured in the attempt to cross the border. Some try to jump from the fence, breaking their legs or feet. Their skin is often scarred by cuts from the razor wire. Others, instead, may get involved in fights with compatriots or, more likely, with migrants of a different nationality. For this reason, Serbian authorities carefully divide ethnic groups in different camps.

The average age of the people around us was quite young. Many seemed to be minors, only a few looked older. Milica and I were the only two women in the entire park, and this unbalanced situation made me uncomfortable at first. I felt under scrupulous observation, and I wondered if that feeling was mutual. On the contrary, Milica was at perfect ease; she was smiley and friendly, but also very precise in giving information, attentive to migrants' questions and stories. Since it was my first visit, I decided to stay close to the team, listening to the discussion and the stories of the young men, without taking pictures or asking questions myself. I was aware of the fact that the park is mainly a smuggling point and I did not want to attract undesired suspicions.

While the interpreter was handling the conversation in his own language, the other volunteers pointed at two men standing on Karađorđeva Street. They explained that Karađorđeva is the place to find a "lift" to the border (fig. 5.4). Serbian smugglers are also frequent visitors to the park and usually have contacts within the migrant community, some sort of "refugee smugglers". Volunteers recognise these individuals quite easily from the fact that they do not care about either information or humanitarian aid. They wander around, keeping a certain distance, and trying to get the attention of the migrants to offer a service much more appealing than legal counselling.

It was in this moment that I noticed a family with two small children (the only ones in the park at that moment) moving from the bus station in our direction. They stayed away from the rest of the group that surrounded us, looking carefully to what was going on. They did not stop to listen what was being discussed but quickly turned toward Karađorđeva. After only a few seconds, I had already lost sight of them, despite the park offering a rather broad view. The trees were well spaced and did not block the view towards the main road or the bus station. However, the area was very busy and people came and went from many directions. In this general confusion, the figure of a single individual can quickly blur in the crowd or disappear behind a truck crossing the noisy street.

In that moment the level of attention was at its peak. More than 20 men were gathered around us. They continued talking about Obrenovac camp and the shifting attitude of police officers and employees of the Commissariat[306]. They were not able to say who they had to deal with, which type of uniform those people were wearing, if they had a badge or any sort of tag. The young men just referred to "police" whenever they wanted to describe someone enforcing rules or exercising violence in the camp.

At one point, a man stood up from the bench where he was sitting and ordered the younger boy next to him to do the same. He gestured for me to sit down and he jumped into the conversation. He said something in an unfamiliar language, provoking loud laughter from the rest of the group. The interpreter was laughing too and said that the man had made a good joke. The young man was now standing proud and let the interpreter translate to us his story.

He told that in the camp everybody asks many questions; the officers bring everyone, one by one, into the interview room and keep each one there for hours. During an interview session, a friend of his had been asked who of his family had died in Afghanistan. He replied that he had lost everybody: his brothers, his sisters, his mother, and his father. Right after this question, the officer asked him who cried the most for his departure. By answering "my mother!" he fell for the trap and revealed his lie. The joke depicted a situation in which many of those present might have found themselves and it was perhaps this very familiarity that triggered the loud laughter.

I got confirmation from the volunteers that government and police officers do use such strategies intentionally to exhaust the migrants and make them nervous during endless interviews. Whether legend or reality, the short story gave a sense of how communication between migrants and authorities is perceived. It is a particularly delicate, ambiguous, and even risky moment, in which personal experiences merge with the need to provide convincing information. While revealing personal information, one might contradict oneself and risk falling into the trap put in place by authorities to confuse, exhaust, and test truthfulness. As the young man in the park said, shaking his head in resignation, all these questions "make you crazy." They render the moment of communication tricky. Through the right or wrong answer, one might lose the possibility to obtain asylum, get accepted in a camp, or receive any sort of help.

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[306]   The Commissariat for Refugees and Migration of the Republic of Serbia (Kirs) is the main governmental body in charge of tasks of care, return and integration of refugees and the related administrative tasks in accordance with the Serbian Law of Refugees no. 18/92. Source: https://kirs.gov.rs. Accessed on 11-03-2020

What Klikaktiv was doing, instead, was different. First, the team asked the young men if there was something they would like to know or share. The questions were aimed at listening to what needs would emerge in order to do something in turn. With these thoughts in mind, I realised I did not have anything to offer. Research and knowledge, which were the purpose of my presence, do not concern migrants directly and do not help them in any fast way. What counted in the park, instead, was immediacy. The speed with which information could be obtained or with which a problem could be solved. The prospect of asylum in Serbia that Klikaktiv wanted to explain, which could take years, was also not an interesting offer. Rather, the smuggler's car waiting in Karađorđeva, the opportunity to reach the border in only a few hours, was a much more appealing option.

After about one and a half hours, I had the chance to experience what Milica had mentioned at the beginning of our visit. Those around us slowly started to disperse. After a brief peak of giving attention, very few men remained to listen or ask questions. The park seemed almost empty. Among the few who stayed, there was one of the youngest, being probably 13 or 14 years old. A boy next to him, likely just a couple of years older, informed us that they were brothers and asked what they could do to be in the same camp. The youngest, according to their testimony, resided in a reception centre for minors, while the other one was registered in Obrenovac. The older showed a piece of paper that he had received in the camp that apparently allowed him to return there. He also wanted us to notice that his young brother had a bruise under his right eye that he had received in the camp. Unfortunately, the request was out of the volunteers' reach and the unsatisfactory answer made the two boys leave quickly.

We were ready to return to the office, when a middle-aged man approached the interpreter. He said that he had been robbed by compatriots some nights earlier. He had no permits, no passport, and asked whether he could report the theft to the Serbian police without getting into more trouble himself. Nobody could find a satisfying answer or solution also in this case. Without another word, the man walked away silently, disappointed, leaving behind a deep sense of helplessness and frustration.

To date, migrants are very visible in Belgrade. In parks, in the streets of Savamala, along the waterfront, they have become the background of Serbians' everyday routines. This condition of being unknown and having their presence ignored leads to the risk of a precarious life in the city, their exposure to injustice, and, above all, their exclusion. Despite their visible bodily presence, a factual invisibility continues to exist on papers, and it deprives people from rights, dignity, and hope. In the face of an injustice, such as the one reported by the middle-age man, humiliation amplifies. In similar situations, invisibility morphs into a disturbing silence: the silence of passers-by who ignore the presence of migrants, the angry silence of migrants in front of outrages suffered in their own community, the uncomfortable silence of volunteers when nothing can be done.

Site Survey #2: Belgrade Parks

Belgrade. Saturday September 05, 2020. 12:00 p.m.

Crowds and Swarms

On Saturday, the day following my first visit to Bristol Park, I decided to return alone to Savamala and take a walk in Luke Ćelovića Park. I approached it from a different direction, passing through Gavrila Principa Street. From there, I observed the neighbourhood and the connection between the two parks. Luke Ćelovića is enclosed between two large blocks of buildings on the north and south, while its west side, the one facing Karađorđeva Street, is closed off by a parking building. The park opens onto Gavrila Principa with a circular space and a fountain in its middle. Here, a few migrant boys were taking turns drinking water and washing their faces (fig. 5.5).

 I could recognise some of them from my visit to Bristol Park the day before. From there, some of them crossed the street and entered the café on the opposite side of the road. Some others walked to the western corner of the park and sat under the shadow of the parking building.The situation in the park looked calm. Serbian visitors were also sitting on the benches under the shade of the trees. Once again, I had the impression of two parallel lives: the one of the locals and the one of the migrants, two paths that do not meet and do not obstruct one another. I walked around the park and exited onto Karađorđeva Street, continuing south to Bristol Park. Along the street there were a few other migrants sitting and eating in small groups of two or three.

On the contrary, the mode of moving from one area of the neighbourhood to another was as individuals or in pairs. This aspect made it difficult to track directions and destinations of single individuals. Such a swarming, and apparently random, way of moving meant concentrations of people could quickly form and then just as quickly disperse in the small urban space.

As I entered Bristol Park and I noticed that it was much less crowded than the previous day. The atmosphere felt quite static and calm. Some of the people I had just seen a few minutes before in Luke Ćelovića were now sitting here in Bristol Park. I noticed that movement patterns between the two places were quite repetitive and mostly aimless: meeting, eating, and resting under the trees. The young men moved from one side of the street to the other, from park to park, back and forth, at a slow pace. There was no progressive crowding followed by dispersion, as in the previous afternoon.
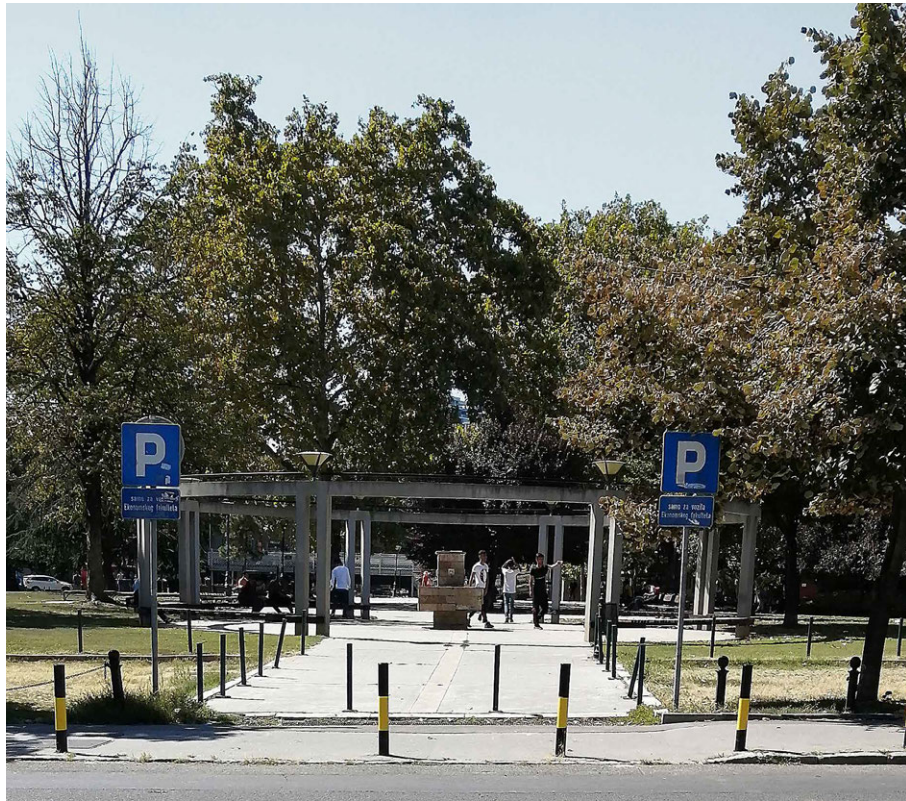
FIG. 5.5 Entrance to Luke Ćelovića Park from Gavrila Principa Street. Belgrade (Serbia), September 2020. Source: photo by author.

The number of people seemed to remain the same. The mode of staying, sitting, and waiting was mostly in groups—quite a number of groups—as I had also noticed in the previous visit.

On the contrary, the mode of moving from one area of the neighbourhood to another was as individuals or in pairs. This aspect made it difficult to track directions and destinations of single individuals. Such a swarming, and apparently random, way of moving meant concentrations of people could quickly form and then just as quickly disperse in the small urban space. On the previous day, the perspective from inside the park did not facilitate this understanding of directions and movements. On this Saturday visit, however, the perspective from the outside allowed me to notice the repetitiveness and circularity of movement which gave an overall impression of stillness.

In a quick sketch (figure 5.6) I merged those reflections, trying to overlap the observations of Friday afternoon and Saturday morning. By avoiding a chronological distinction of what happened on each day, the sketch records the repetitiveness and the seeming randomness of movements. On the first day, I could observe that movements across Bristol Park were mostly directed towards Karađorđeva Street, including some crossings towards Luke Ćelovića Park and then back again. Other movements, in parallel, were headed to the construction site on Hercegovačka Street. I could not see what happened there because sight was obstructed by the fences. The arrival of Klikaktiv volunteers attracted migrants to the centre of the park, resulting in a moment of higher density. This opportunity of conversation probably offered a moment of distraction and novelty that raised migrants' curiosity and interrupted the monotony of that afternoon.

Another moment in which I could notice a sudden crowding and a higher speed of movement was in conjunction with the arrival of smugglers on Karađorđeva Street. After that, everybody dispersed again, some behind the construction fences and others in the direction of the other park. The situation observed in Luke Ćelovića Park on Saturday offered a different set of impressions. It was a much calmer situation in which migrants were mainly sitting and resting in the shade of the trees. Most of the movements were directed towards the closer bars and cafes, or from one park to the other and back again. Not much activity was going on. Most of the men were concentrated at two specific points: the fountain and the car park, where they could benefit from more shade and a quieter rest.
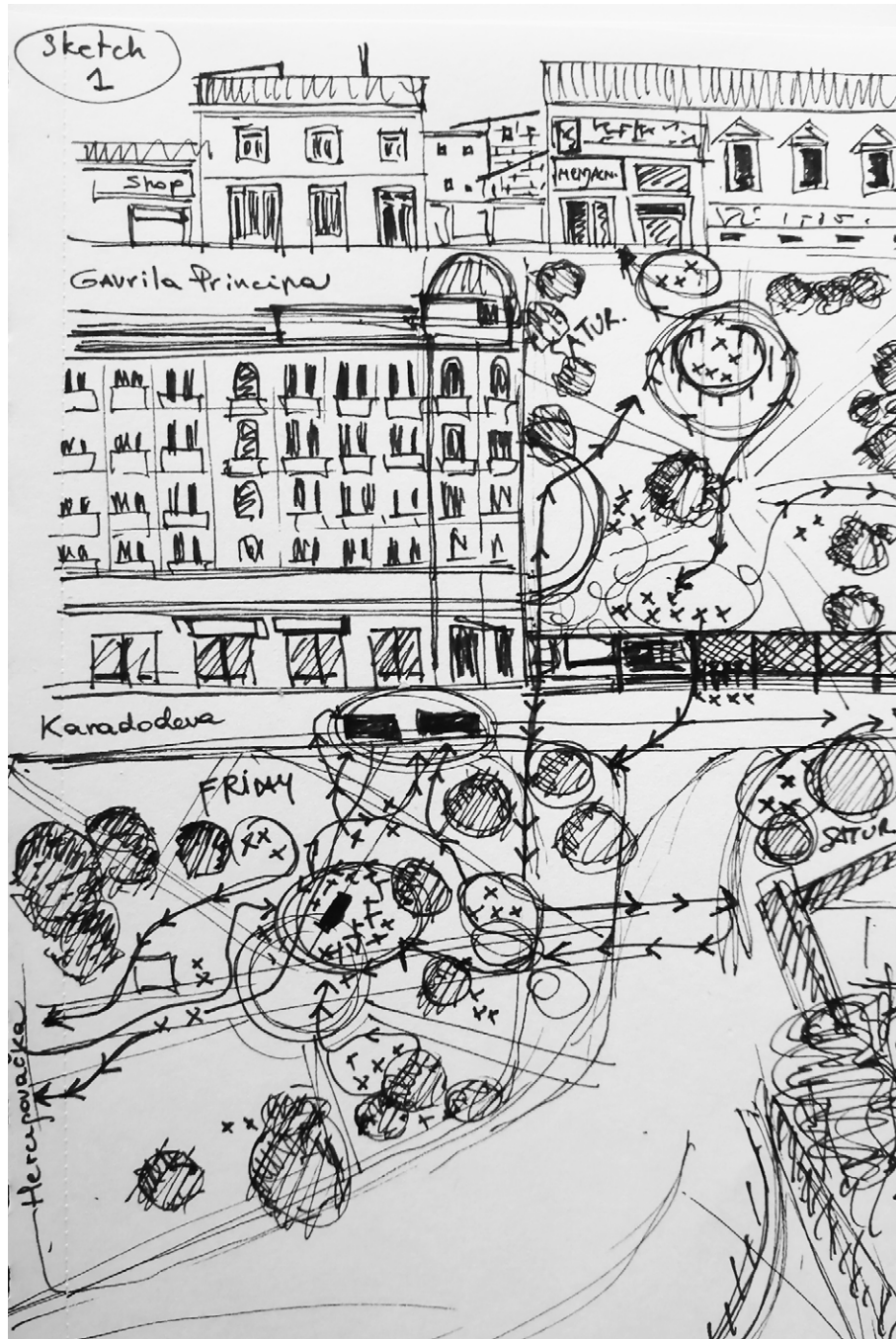
FIG. 5.6 Sketch of migrants' movements in Savamala. Source: image by author

The Waterfront

After having walked around and inside the parks, I proceeded towards the waterfront site from Zemunski Put Street and continued along the Sava promenade. In this area, a completely different scenario unfolded before my eyes. Well-dressed couples and families were drinking coffee in the newly opened cafés and restaurant in front of the riverbank. I had the impression of being in a completely different city. The massive skyscrapers of the Waterfront project emerged in the background, and along the path the fences of the construction site, covered with coloured posters, served as a fun backdrop for the photos of passers-by (fig. 5.7). These elements marked a complete separation from the upper city, orienting the view towards the river and inviting the newly-built area to ignore the dynamics of Savamala. The development of two parallel urban environments within the same district became evident, revealing the general attitude of both residents and authorities. Even if they do not openly oppose migrants' presence in the city, a strategy of neglect and exclusion makes sure the lives of Serbians and migrants remain clearly separated.

I walked straight for about half a kilometre and then went up on Brankov Bridge. From here I could observe Bristol Park, now far away but still very visible. On the one side, the waterfront extends with its clean and tidy lines while, on the other, the old city appears crowded, chaotic, and noisy. The park is located at the exact crossroads between the old—with its struggles, lively protests, poor maintenance, overflowing garbage bins, and traffic—and the new—with its bright colours and ambitious glass buildings (fig. 5.8). The marginal existence of migrants is located at this very intersection. Migrants are stranded in an urban limbo, a strip of grass that is waiting to be obscured by the shadow of new buildings or absorbed by another renovation project. If this is to be the destiny of the park, it is not hard to imagine that its guests will be quickly swept away and forced to move into some other urban residue.
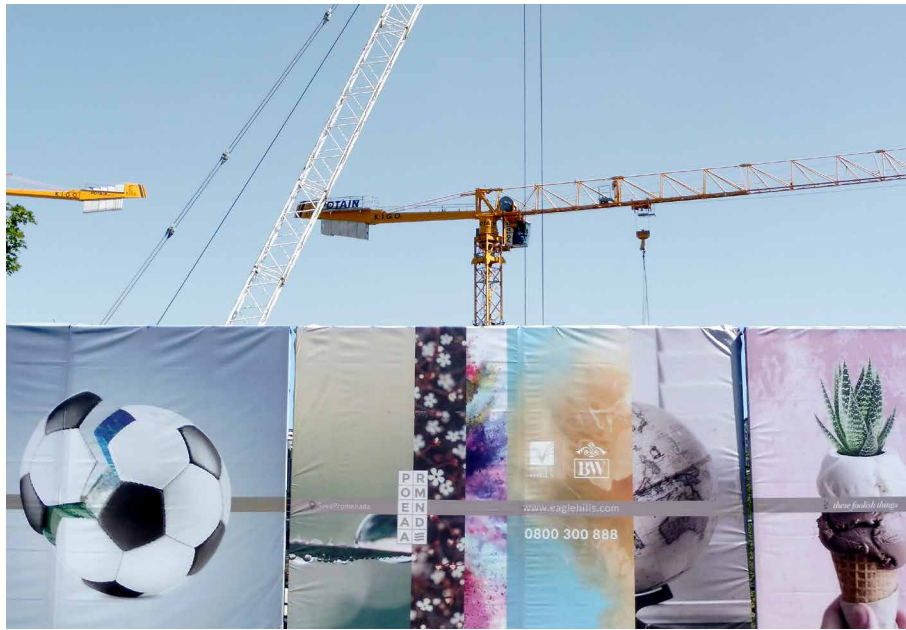
FIG. 5.7 Construction site of the Waterfront Project. Belgrade (Serbia), September 2020. Source: photo by author.

FIG. 5.8 View of the riverbank and the old city from Brankov Bridge. Belgrade (Serbia), September 2020. Source: photo by author.

Site Survey #3: Horgoš Farm

On Tuesday the 8th, the plan was to leave Belgrade and carry out the first field visit along the border. I met the Klikaktiv team in front of the office in Savamala at 11:00 a.m. We boarded a white van, and took the highway in the direction of the border crossing point in Horgoš. The trip from Belgrade to Horgoš took about two and half hours. The town is one of the official crossing points connecting Serbia with Röszke in Hungary. Another crossing station is located about 40 km to the west, connecting the Serbian city of Kelebija with the Hungarian town of Tompa. Since the ending of the construction work of the Hungarian fence, Röszke and Tompa have been at the centre of media and political attention due to the establishment of the two transit zones. Before the closure of the border, migrants used Horgoš as one of the main official ports of entry to reach Hungary and, more generally, to access the EU. Despite the official closure of the transit zone and the interruption of official procedures regulating crossings, the town remained a hub for the informal settlement of migrants. They have not lost hope of entering Europe and continue "The Game" by other means.

From the small window of the van, I could observe the progressive change of landscape. From the metropolitan area of Belgrade the view opened to the flat corn and sunflowers fields of central Serbia. We continued our ride towards the north, where the landscape takes on soft, hilly shapes. We crossed the Danube, close to Novi Sad, and passed through a small wooded area. A few kilometres later, the landscape returned to its homogeneous, flat form, gradually abandoning the green of the woods and returning to a golden colour.

Once we reached the city of Subotica, we left the highway and headed east towards Horgoš. We took a dusty road in the direction of an abandoned farm, a squat that migrants have been occupying for some years now. The occupied building is not completely abandoned. In fact, it is owned by the state. The structure was supposed to be restored and converted for some commercial use, but it has remained in a state of decay for many years. The property, which was originally used as a farm, comprises a stable for animals and an old house. Currently, all buildings of the complex are falling apart. The farm house appeared at the crossroad as we passed in the van. It was the only building visible from the country road. The smaller structure in which migrants spend their days is hidden from the street.

The Farm

Upon our arrival, a small group of boys approached us with a ball and started playing football. The atmosphere immediately appeared friendly and relaxed. I recalled my conversation, some months earlier, with the volunteers of some other NGOs who had been regular visitors of Horgoš. They had described the squat as a peaceful place where migrants seek rest and shelter after many attempts of crossing. In terms of clashes with local police or residents, Horgoš is not a problematic site, in contrast to Šid or the nearby city of Subotica. Police officers, both Serbian and Hungarian, are well aware of where migrants are staying. They also know about the regular attempts of crossing. But, so far, no violent episodes have been recorded. I was able to grasp the sensation described by the volunteers from the very first moments, and I could compare it with my impressions of the parks in Belgrade. In the capital, the highly dynamic life somehow carried with it a sense of strong precariousness, vulnerability, exposure, and risk. On the farm, on the contrary, I could see more serene expressions on the young faces, along with an organisation of the place that was cleaner and more dignified. I perceived a general sense of protection, confidentiality, and privacy.

Horgoš farm is one of the oldest sites where Klikaktiv has been operating in the past few years. Each time the volunteers visit, there are always new people. Some might disappear for few weeks, and, not long after, the same familiar faces may appear again. The Hungarian fence is no more than one kilometre away from the farm. Hence, attempts of crossing take place almost every night. As I learned in my first meeting with Klikaktiv, the modalities of crossing are manifold. The young men sometimes wait for a guard change, a moment in which Hungarian officers might "accidentally forget" to close the gate. More commonly, they try to hide inside or underneath trucks, vans, or buses that wait in line to be scanned at the crossing point. Usually, the scan system manages to detect a hiding person and the police quickly intervene. However, it is not uncommon for someone to have luck on his side and be able to continue further into Europe. Along the Balkan Route, the practice of hiding inside or under a truck is one of the most common tactics, yet, a very dangerous one.

Taking in the relaxed, welcoming, and quiet atmosphere of the farm, we walked towards the smallest building. Next to it, migrants had arranged a small outdoor space (fig. 5.9); three makeshift benches surrounded a small table made from wooden planks. On top of it, a rolling pin and some flour suggested that we were standing around the kitchen table. This cosy zone was shaded by a cloth fixed between the wall of the stable and the benches at the trees. We all gathered under its shade, and the interpreter started the conversation.

FIG. 5.9 View of the occupied farm. Horgoš (Serbia), September 2020. Source: photo by author.

FIG. 5.10 A young man cooking inside the stable. Horgoš (Serbia), September 2020. Source: photo by author.

He introduced each of us and explained the reason for the visit. Around him there were about 20 people, all young males. Those present confirmed that they had come from Afghanistan, but they were from different regions and ethnic groups. Accordingly, the translation had to be done twice, first in Dari and then in Pashtu. While we were standing in circle, a man who looked older than those sitting came out of the stable and greeted the volunteers loudly. "Long time don't see!" he called out, as he came to take a seat in the shade. He was holding some cash and a cell phone in his hands, which rang several times. My impression, later confirmed by the NGO team, was that he was acting as the "leader" of that squat. The man himself clarified his role a few minutes later by saying that he would make sure that only Afghan people would stay in the farm.

One of the volunteers, through the interpreter's translation, asked about any particular needs of the young men, if there had been problems of any sort that Klikaktiv could help with. The main complaint that emerged was the cold and the wind, which spread the trash that the migrants carefully collected in a corner. The volunteer promised to bring a shovel during the next visit and help them dig a hole in the ground, in which they could collect the garbage. In the van, the NGO had ten warm blankets and some toothpaste which were promptly distributed upon our arrival. Perhaps these few items had been requested in a previous visit. The small donation was clearly not enough to satisfy the needs of all the guests of the squat, but everyone seemed very grateful. When asked what to bring from Belgrade next time, those present replied: painkillers, more blankets, and something for the itch of insects.

Despite the problem of garbage that the migrants had reported, the entire squat looked pretty clean both outside and inside of the small stable. The latter was mainly used as a kitchen. Peeking inside, I saw some vegetable boxes, a pot, and a plastic basket used to prepare bread (fig. 5.10). The older man invited me to enter and have a look inside. I walked in and took the opportunity to discretely take a couple of photos. Besides some cooking tools, the stable was pretty empty and I could not tell if anyone else was inside, or which side of the building was used for different purposes.

I went out and joined the rest of the group again. Among those sitting in the shade, a man with visible injuries on both his eyes had caught the attention of the volunteers. The interpreter started asking if anyone had had any bad experience with the local police or residents, probing for possible reports of violence. On the contrary, everybody confirmed that the situation was quiet. One of the young men reported that the police would usually intervene when someone tried to approach the border fence. In most cases, he said, officers would simply tell the person to go back to the squat and had never used violence.

After this brief conversation came the time of Klikaktiv's main service. The interpreter translated the offer of legal advice and the availability of answering anyone's question. The majority of the migrants in Horgoš were interested to know what would happen to them if they would be caught in Europe. They were especially afraid of deportations: "If I reach Austria, will they send me back?" and, "Back to Serbia or back to Afghanistan?" Milica answered their questions, explaining that there is a concrete risk of relocation or return for those who had been fingerprinted in EU countries, such as Greece, Bulgaria, or Romania. "Has anyone been fingerprinted in Greece or one of those other places?" she asked. Only one man raised his hand. Milica explained to him that his fingerprints and his information are now recorded and this would authorise any other EU country to send him back to Greece. So, she concluded, if he wanted to appeal for asylum in any European member state, he would only be allowed to do it in Greece.

At this point, another man in the group asked to share his story in order to get some advice. According to what he reported, his wife and kid had managed to reach Germany where they obtained a one-year permit for humanitarian reasons. He wanted to appeal for family reunification but his asylum request had already been refused in Greece. He was informed that he could make a new request, for instance, in Serbia. Milica clarified that the first refusal from Greece would not be taken into consideration in Serbia, thanks to the family's regular stay. However, she explained, this would not be sufficient to reach his family, since reunification is not possible on the basis of a temporary permit. For the man to enter Germany, an approved refugee status for his wife would be needed.

Milica continued by listing a series of questions that the police might ask in any EU country of arrival: "why did you leave Afghanistan? What would happen to you if you return to Afghanistan? What would happen to your family? Is there someone in danger in your country? Do you have family in Europe?" To date, the only cases that might end up in a positive asylum application are the ones in which it is proved that the individual's life in the country of origin would be at risk. The concept of "risk" is defined by five categories. "Do you remember the categories?" Milica asked the interpreter. He nodded and started listing: religious minorities (Shiite Muslims for Afghanistan), LGBTQ+ persons (a category which generated a few glances and giggles among those present), ethnic minorities, people whose life was threatened by the Taliban, and a general category of members of political opposition. Any other reason, such as economic ones, relatives in Europe, or studying reasons are not taken into consideration and, in fact, could become reason for deportation.

The conversation then turned to the topic of crossings. The team asked if anyone had been caught in the inland of Croatia or Hungary instead of at the border. One young man raised his hand, saying that once he was caught in Budapest. Answering the volunteers' questions, he reported that the police brought him to the station for a few hours. There, nobody took his fingerprints, nobody asked him questions, and he did not fill in any paperwork. What he reported testifies to the non-compliance of Hungarian authorities with the Dublin Regulation. Actually, it is not rare that the police neglect the collection of fingerprints in order to avoid the future relocation of migrants back from other countries of Europe. In this way, personal data will never appear on any national or European database. Such practices are not only facilitated but also legitimised by the safe country rule. Since Serbia is recognised as a safe nation, asylum applications are supposed to be submitted here. This leads to expulsions and the perpetuation of push-backs from neighbouring countries while formal access to asylum becomes way more difficult.

While we were talking, many of the young men around us were busy with their own activities. Some were coming and going from the stable, others in and out of the woods. At some point a taxi entered the dirt road to the farm: "Someone is coming!" said one of the older men. "Or someone is going?" asked Milica. The man was right, someone was coming. A young boy got out of the car. He was wearing a face mask and carrying a heavy black backpack. Perhaps, he was coming back from a failed attempt to reach Hungary the previous night. In the meantime, a small group of people appeared from the street, carrying a watering can and some plastic bottles full of water. Some of those sitting around us were getting tired and losing their focus in the conversation. The older man ordered one of the younger boys to start cooking and I used this pause in the conversation to ask if I could take some more photos of the building. One of those present was not enthusiastic about my request, and he started gesturing and complaining loudly. With the support of the interpreter's translation, I approached him to explain that I was interested in the building and I would not include any of their faces in the pictures. Before I could show him some of my photos, he immediately withdrew his words, and an adolescent shyness appeared on his face. "We don't even know what we are doing in here!" was his reply. Although this misunderstanding was quickly cleared up, I tried to be fast and remain within a visible range, so that everyone could see what I was doing.

FIG. 5.11 Crumbling wall of the occupied farm. Horgoš (Serbia), September 2020. Source: photo by author.

FIG. 5.12 Cooking stove made of building materials. Horgoš (Serbia), September 2020. Source: photo by author.

One of the volunteers pointed out that the wall of the shelter was peeling (fig. 5.11): "This wall is becoming thinner and thinner, there will remain nothing in the end", he said. The wall of the stable was made of bricks and a binder of cement and earth. The cause wasn't simply poor maintenance. In other corners, he explained, migrants were scraping the surface to obtain ashes on which to bake the bread according to the mode of Afghanistan. I could see that many other elements of the structure were also turned into cooking tools. Some bricks and old steel rebar mash had been arranged to create a small fire place (fig. 5.12). Wooden planks, probably taken from the broken roof, were turned into a table, a bench, a seat, or any other tool.

The building, albeit immobile, seemed to be in constant transformation. It remains the same refuge, where many young migrants have met in the last five to seven years, hoping and waiting for an opportune moment to cross the border. However, its casing has increasingly been worn, pierced, and burned as a result of the passage of newcomers. It has become an envelope with multiple functions: that of kitchen, bedroom, and shower place.

The inside and the outside, openings and closings are interchanged according to the needs of the moment and depending on whether it is day or night, winter or summer. Its own bricks, its beams, and plaster can change position, role, and identity. They can be ashes, chairs, tables, or a fireplace. In the course of these transformations, the stable remains where it is and this is what renders it safe. It is a point of reference in view of a new crossing, or the home to return to after a failed attempt. What is constantly on the move are the people who pass through the farm and leave signs of their presence on the building's skin. They are migrants, smugglers, volunteers, activists, journalists, policemen, taxi drivers, reporters, and researchers.

The men in the squat were hungry, fatigued by the heat and tired of the long conversation. So was the entire team of Klikaktiv. We returned to the van and I noticed two men had approached one of the volunteers. "I don't care where to go, as long as it's Europe. Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, everything is fine for me, as long as they take me out of here and give me a permit", the older of the two was saying. The younger, instead, told that he had just returned from a failed crossing, which had occurred the previous night. The police officer who caught him had asked him if he would try to cross again. He smiled and, shaking his head, reported to us his answer: "I said I will. I will try and try every single day. One day, I told him, I will manage".

Site Survey #4: Subotica

Subotica. Tuesday September 08, 2020. 16:00 p.m.

During the lunch break, we stopped by the city centre of Subotica, and Milica and I had a short walk around the main square. Some young men, who did not seem to be locals, were sitting around a fountain while others were wandering around it. Two boys were recording a video with their phone, showing the city to some far away followers and speaking loudly in Arabic. Milica ironically stated: "You would be surprised to know how popular tiktok is among the migrant community!" One of the two young men, with a plaster cast on his leg, realised we were looking in their direction and walked at a slow pace toward us. Holding out his hand, he introduced himself to us. I thought he might have recognised Milica from a previous visit in some squat, but I was wrong. He tried to communicate with us in French, unfortunately, with scarce success.

When we reached the rest of the team, I had been informed that migratory dynamics in Subotica are different from Horgoš and the rest of Serbia. Various groups, mainly from Northern Africa, have been present in the area for decades. They usually reach the city through a well-established network of compatriots. These migrant communities are usually not interested either in asylum or in crossing the border, but rather rely on other activities which gave them the reputation of "trouble makers". This information, coming from the NGO team, should not be misinterpreted as a prejudice. It was informed by a long experience in camps, formal and informal, a close contact with the migrant communities of Serbia, and the knowledge of their differences across the country. Apparently, the peculiar history of migration that characterises Subotica has deeply affected the current treatment of newcomers, the spread of nationalist and racist sentiments in the city, and a more hostile attitude of police officers towards foreigners.

The Railway Station

After the lunch break, we headed to the old railway station a few hundred meters away from the city centre. The team prepared me by saying that the site has always been more problematic than the farm we had visited in the morning. The migrants occupying the old station had had several problems with the local police in the past months. Some weeks earlier, they had been evicted from the nearby abandoned buildings. Serbian police officers intervened with the help of some workers to close doors and windows with bricks and cement (fig. 5.13).

FIG. 5.13 Abandoned house in the proximity of the old train station of Subotica. The closure of windows and entrance with bricks by the local authorities was meant to impede migrants' access. Subotica (Serbia), September 2020. Source: photo by author.

FIG. 5.14 Squatted site of the old train station. Subotica (Serbia), September 2020. Source: photo by author.

This episode of eviction is not the first one in Subotica. From the station, it is possible to glimpse the chimney of an old brick factory that, until some years earlier, was one of the most crowded squats of Serbia. That was also the first place from which migrants had been swept away soon after the closure of the Hungarian border. One of the main reasons behind the tensions in Subotica may be related to a more noticeable presence of migrants in the city centre. Different from the case of the farm, such exposure often generates complaints from residents and tourists.

As soon as we parked the van near the station, a young man walked in our direction. He greeted the interpreter with a gesture of his head. He noticed that we were looking at the building that the police had obstructed and asked if we could do something about it. He said it was getting too cold at night to stay out and the small house was very useful. He also informed us that the police had returned some days earlier and barred the entrance to another building that he called the "pink house". One of the volunteers explained that since it was a police decision, unfortunately, Klikaktiv could not interfere and migrants, in turn, should do the same to avoid bigger problems.

The man guided us through the old tracks of the railway and at first sight it seemed like no one was around. Yet, I could hear voices coming from the rusty wagons of an old train. We walked further until we reached a group of people gathered on the old train tracks in between a gas tank and the train wagons (fig. 5.14). A man with long dark hair and a beard was sitting with a solemn face in a half-broken armchair. Staring at us, he said something in an unknown language with a high-sounding tone. He introduced himself as "Ali Baba". He was holding two cell phones in between his legs, which rang several times during the visit. From his attitude, it was not difficult to understand he was "managing" the squat. The other men sitting around him were slightly older than the ones in Horgoš, except for one child of about seven or eight years old.

In total, there were about 17 people sitting in a circle and a few more walking around the old wagons. Some got closer and gathered around us, others were coming and going; two or three remained seated under a wagon, where I could glimpse a power strip charging several phones. Next to it, I noticed two tea boilers; this image recalled the farm in Horgoš, where some boys were drinking tea around their makeshift table. It also reminded me of a recurrent complaint from the interpreter, who lamented the lack of "proper green tea" in Serbia. Blankets were visible from the open doors of the wagons, which seemed to be divided into small private rooms. Behind the armchair of Ali Baba, a carpet and some backpacks were set down carefully in a line. Despite the general precarious conditions, the site looked pretty clear and tidy, organised according to its own logic. The old station was occupied by a homogeneous group of Afghan nationals and here, like in Horgoš, we were reminded that other ethnics would not be welcomed.

After the usual introduction which includes the question about any problems with the authorities, the "leader" started raising his voice. He said that if police would return to bother them again, they were ready to fight back. One of the volunteers promptly interrupted the tone of the discussion and explained firmly that such an approach had to be avoided. He insisted that if the group had experienced any physical violence from the local police they should report it to some other NGOs, or to him in person, but they must not fight back. "*Problemi, problemi!*" he was stressing in Serbian, meaning that bigger problems would occur. Some of the men sitting in the circle started reporting their experiences of police abuse. A couple of officers had come in the night, woke everybody up, and took a couple of men with the excuse that they would bring them to the police station. But, in fact, the police officers just drove for some kilometres to the middle of nowhere and abandoned the men there. Someone else reported that a few days earlier two officers came in the night, took the child with them to the police station for few hours, and then brought him back without giving any explanation to his father.

Milica took me aside and explained that Subotica is the place where Klikaktiv has been recording the most reports of police abuse. A probable reason might be the fact that migrants are increasingly visible in the city centre, in supermarkets, and in the streets. This somehow annoys the local population, who turns to the police. I thought of Belgrade's parks, where migrants were definitely much more numerous and surely more visible than in Subotica's city centre. However, in the capital, police and migrants did not seem to have many problems. Yet, despite the daily struggles with the police and the locals, Subotica is a well-established node in the net of informal migrant squats. Reasons are manifold—from the availability of services, transports, and contacts with other migrants to the vicinity of a reception facility. In this case, different from in Belgrade, most of those sleeping in the train station are not registered in the camp due to a lack of available places, but they are allowed to access the structure to take showers and get food when they need to.

The Pink House

Most of the conversation at Subotica's station was carried out by the interpreter in his mother tongue. He knows by heart all of the information to provide, and he forgot to translate the discussion to the rest of the team. Milica and I decided to take a walk along the old tracks and see the "pink house" that had been mentioned upon our arrival (fig. 5.15). After the various evictions, first from the brick factory and then from the old station building, the pink house became the only shelter left in the area. Since the last police intervention, however, the windows and doors of this small structure have also been sealed with bricks and concrete.

FIG. 5.15 The "pink house" in the proximity of the old train station. Subotica (Serbia), September 2020. Source: photo by author.

Observing the house, it was clear that the very buildings where migrants try to seek shelter can easily turn into an instrument of oppression and struggle. The message that the police give through such interventions is that migrants are not welcome in the city and should just go away. No alternative has been offered after the eviction, even though the only reception facility in the area has no available places. As the young man stated at the start of the visit, all they are looking for is a place to rest and shelter from the cold at night.

Even though the bricking up of abandoned buildings sends a very clear message to the migrant community, it has also proved to be an ineffective method. It does not prevent migrants from staying, but it pushes them to hide further, find new interstices, open new holes, and seep in somewhere else. Hiding and breaking into abandoned spaces are practices that require the ability to move, both in groups and individually. As in the case of the Savamala Parks, a sort of swarming method of moving renders migrants able to quickly get around a circumscribed site and give alerts to others, when necessary. They have learnt to become quickly invisible when the police are getting closer. Just a moment later, they can reunite and be compact again to gather goods, pray together, eat, and tell stories.

Milica and I turned to head back to the rest of the group, when a Serbian man, that I did not see coming, approached us. He warned us that it was not safe for two ladies to walk around the old station: "It is full of immigrants around here" he said in Serbian. Milica reassured him, saying that we were aware of that and, actually, it was the reason for our presence. "We are from an organisation in Belgrade. Are there any problems with the migrants here?" she asked. "*Uvek!* (Always!)" replied the man. The man's attitude is quite common among many of the locals, Milica explained. The rhetoric of migrants creating problems to the local community spread quickly, especially through the political debate, even when no newspaper had ever reported a crime committed by the migrants who camp in the railway station. "Believe me" she said, "no one would lose the occasion to speculate on an event like that". This, however, does not mean that crimes or abuses do not occur among the migrant community. On the contrary, she pointed out, this kind of offence is rarely reported, either by the media or by the migrants themselves.

We returned to the old tracks and found everybody sitting in a circle talking about asylum procedures and passports. "Ali Baba" looked at Milica, swaggering, and asked how much it might take to get a permit by marrying a Serbian woman. "Eight years" she answered firmly, ignoring the subtle provocation. Unsatisfied with this answer, he asked what he had to do to get a permit that would allow travelling around Europe. The interpreter continued in his language, probably repeating the various options to claim asylum. We sat down on the tracks and one of the men, sitting right in front of me, ordered the child to bring a pillow. The gesture, in this situation, made me feel uncomfortable. I tried to show him that there was enough space for two, but the little boy ran away.

This small movement suddenly attracted attention in my direction. "Ali Baba", pointing at us, asked us to repeat our exact provenance. We had already introduced ourselves, but this time my non-Serbian origin generated more curiosity. The man asked if I could give him a passport and bring him with me to Italy. Without a doubt, the man was well aware of the unfeasibility of his request. Nevertheless, my impression was that, while joking and showing off, he also wanted to emphasise the complexity and lengthy time of the procedures: problems that may have the effect of easily discouraging the rest of the group from following the legal Serbian paths.

It was about 7.00 p.m. The sun was going down and I could feel the temperature lowering fast. One of the young men turned up the volume on his cell phone and gestured to the interpreter. We sat in silence, while what seemed to be a prayer was playing from the phone. This moment of silence lasted for a couple of minutes; everybody, none excluded, was very concentrated. After this short break, the noise of conversation started again and continued for a little while. The interpreter was

asked to tell the story of his own "Game" by someone of the group. I could see how everybody was very interested to know what he had done to be in, what seemed to them, a safe condition.

The most relevant advice and the most interesting stories that migrants were excited to listen to were personal experiences. Where did he cross, where was it safe to stay, where did he spend the night, where were there more police, what happened to someone else…? This is the kind of information that migrants trust the most, even if sometimes it is difficult to distinguish the truth from rumours. What matters is feeding the desire to proceed, to break free from the immobility in which Serbia is forcing them. On the contrary, formal asylum procedures, with their endless waiting times and uncertain outcomes, sound daunting, frustrating, and discouraging.

While the conversation among the young men grew more animated and excited, it was getting darker and it was time for us to return to Belgrade. We distributed some toothpaste tubes that were quickly piled up in one place. We said goodbye to everyone and returned to the van.

Site Survey #5: Romanian Route

On Thursday morning we left at 10:30 from the office in Savamala. This time, the team was more numerous; along with Klikaktiv volunteers, a Serbian scholar of anthropology joined the visit. We were also accompanied by another interpreter, a man from Syria that I had never met before. This was due to the fact that, in the area where we were directed, migrant groups are in large part Arabic-speaking. During the three-hour ride, Milica informed the anthropologist of our previous visits to Subotica and Horgoš. They were sharing previous experiences of field work, discussing the way squats and areas of transit have quickly changed over the course of years, months, and weeks.

Milica was saying that after the closure of the Balkan corridor through Serbia in 2016, everybody expected Bosnia to become "*The Route*", as she emphasised. But, in fact, except for a few critical areas, such as that of Velika Kladuša, Bosnia never took the role of Serbia as a major country of transit. She explained that Italian authorities were also expecting to receive a larger number of migrants from the Adriatic Sea. At some point, in fact, a strong smuggling network had developed between South Macedonia and Montenegro, directed to Albania. But, besides a few episodes, the Adriatic Sea route never gained much popularity.

I was interested in Horgoš and Subotica, whose role seemed to have remained crucial in the period of recent migration. Milica confirmed my impression, explaining that Subotica has always had a prominent position. Around the same area, a few kilometres away, there used to be some other places, in which migrants informally camped while waiting for the opportunity to cross. Those were Kikinda and Kanjiža. Over time, migrants progressively moved out of the two towns and began heading east, closer to the Romanian border, where we were directed.

According to what the volunteers had heard during their field visits, Serbian police had been spreading false information among the migrant communities, encouraging them to apply for asylum in Romania. Some of them were transported to the northeast Serbian border with buses, but, once there, the Romanian police were ready to push everybody back to Serbia. When hearing about these facts, the NGO started investigating the presence of squats in the proximity of the Romanian border, and they learned about Majdan. Their field activity in the village had started only a few weeks before my arrival.

The Village

This very small town is located at the intersection of the three borders: Serbian, Romanian and Hungarian. All that the village has to offer is a supermarket owned by a Hungarian lady, a very quiet and reserved community of residents, and plenty of abandoned countryside houses. The Klikaktiv team had been visiting Majdan for about a month, and had managed to meet some of the locals only once. Milica told us about her first encounter with two ladies on the street. She asked them if they had heard anything about migrants or seen anyone new in town. The ladies did not know much, but they confirmed that they had seen some unfamiliar faces around. They expected the organisation to open a camp nearby, so that migrants would not wander around the village without a place to stay. Milica tried to explain to the ladies that if this was a real need, the municipality should take the initiative to contact the Commissariat and make a formal request for opening a reception facility. Unfortunately, she did not succeed in her explanation, and the ladies continued to insist that she should do something about it.

I saw the sign of Majdan village from the van. The name was written on a yellow metal board in both Cyrillic and Latin characters, indicating the border condition of this place. Less than a kilometre from here, the Hungarian border fence ends in a corner where Romania begins. This is the reason why some groups of migrants moved here. From Majdan, it is possible to move parallel to the border fence, continue a few kilometres inside the Romanian territory, then, divert back to Hungary in an attempt to bypass border controls.

We parked the van on a dusty road and were immediately immersed in the surreal atmosphere of the village. It looked completely deserted. We could hear no sound but only inhale the strong smell of farm animals and feel the extreme heat of the sun. The street of Majdan, probably the main one, was dusty and only four meters wide. Along both sides of the road there were big farm houses, all very similar except for the colour of the walls and their maintenance conditions. A few of the houses appeared newly renovated, with metal gates, well-kept gardens, flowers, benches, and even some playgrounds. Others were surrounded by walls of concrete or brick that did not allow seeing through. These were mostly one–storey houses with broken windows and crumbling roofs (fig. 5.16).

Milica decided to approach one of the crumbling houses that she remembered as the one they had visited some weeks before. Whether it was the same house of her previous visit or not, it was clear that someone was using it as a squat. There were neither doors nor a gate. We entered and called loudly, to see if someone was around. Nobody replied. We walked past a corridor of rubble. A carpet and a mattress were laying on the floor of one of the rooms, next to them, an ashtray full of cigarettes and a hanger on the wall (fig. 5.17 and 5.18).

FIG. 5.16 View of the village houses from the main road. Majdan (Serbia), September 2020. Source: photo by author.

FIG. 5.17 Sleeping station arranged inside of an abandoned/occupied house. Majdan (Serbia), September 2020. Source: photo by author.

FIG. 5.18 Interior of an abandoned/occupied house. Majdan (Serbia), September 2020. Source: photo by author.

When we returned to the main road, the rest of the team informed us that they had glimpsed a group of people from the van and indicated to us the direction. We started walking and, along the way, we entered another house. The situation in front of our eyes was similar to the previous one. The building was slightly bigger; it had a space arranged as a kitchen on the outside, with a fireplace made from a metal bin filled with ashes and wood (fig. 5.19).

The interpreter showed me a room, where I could see a plastic basin, some plastic bottles cut in half, and a large metal container. "They shower in here, you see?" he said. I nodded, although I couldn't really picture how to shower in that completely dark room. On the ground around the house, there were signs made by walking. They directed toward a space between trees, where a couple of mattresses and a blanket were laying on the ground (fig. 5.20). Also in this case, there was no guest in the squat.

We were back on the main road and walking, when we ran into two men. One of the two quickly disappeared behind a metal gate. The other, instead, remained still and looked at us without showing too much enthusiasm. At the interpreter's greeting, the man seemed to be slightly more at ease. The interpreter introduced us and started explaining the reason for our visit. He asked the man a few questions: where was he from and was that house behind his back the place where he was staying. He said that he was from Morocco, while the man with him came from Algeria. The house in front of which we were standing, he explained, was only the place where they could get water. Pushed by one of the volunteers, the interpreter tried to get information on other migrants in the village, but the answers of the other man were vague, and he seemed uncomfortable with so much curiosity. He replied that he had seen some Syrians, in the past days, but he had no clue if they were still around.

Given the hesitation of both interpreter and his interlocutor, one of the volunteers decided to intervene in the conversation. He asked the man to show us where he was staying, so that we could bring him some blankets and talk more privately. The Moroccan man looked reluctant and, despite the insistence of the volunteer to translate other information, the interpreter seemed uncomfortable as well. Eventually, the man agreed to take the blankets and guided us towards his squat. After walking for a few meters, we passed through a rusty metal door and entered the yard of an abandoned house. Four other young men were there, approximately in their 20s, all Algerians according to the Moroccan man, who was probably twice as old.

FIG. 5.19 Cooking and eating place arranged outside an abandoned/occupied house. Majdan (Serbia), September 2020. Source: photo by author.

FIG. 5.20 Sleeping station arranged outdoor. Majdan (Serbia), September 2020. Source: photo by author.

Once we all gathered in the yard, the volunteers offered to explain something about asylum procedures, but the older man responded quickly: "We are not in Europe, yet!". With a few words, he made it very clear that none of those present intended to stay in Serbia. The volunteers then asked if there were any other questions they would like to be informed about. "When will the shop be open?" was the only question of the older man, which remained unanswered. As an alternative, Milica proposed to share some information on what would happen at their arrival in Europe, what the police would ask, and how they should respond. As soon as the proposal was translated, this offer seemed to them more appealing.

Milica emphasised the possibility of police officers searching pockets, bags, and phones, to check GPS records and prove histories of travel. This procedure allows the police to verify migrants' answers and match it with the digital records. She then listed three main questions that are asked for the asylum procedure: "Which country do you come from? Why did you leave your homeland? What would happen if you will return there?" The only answers that might open the possibility of an asylum case, she explained, are those in which the life of the migrant is threatened. Poverty, family reunification, or any other reasons are not accepted for asylum, especially for nationals of countries that are considered safe, as in the case of Morocco and Algeria. The listing of five categories of possible asylum eligibility followed.

The atmosphere now seemed to be more relaxed and I noticed that the detailed information and expertise of Milica granted her attention and, probably, more trust. In this moment, the discussion opened to more personal matters. The young man who carried the water to the squat expressed his intention to return to Algeria. He said that he had already given his documents to the Algerian embassy to obtain a "*laisser passer*", but did not know what would happen next. Klikaktiv responded by offering support on the following legal procedures and the man shared with them his contact information. This brief exchange of information attracted the attention of the others. Yet, nobody else raised any questions. The only thing we learned from the older man was that, some days earlier, he had heard about three people who had drowned in a river in the attempt to pass to the other side of the border.

Taking advantage of the slow opening, the volunteers inquired again about the presence of other migrants in the area, asking if someone could accompany us to them so that we could share the same information. This time, the older man agreed to bring us to a place where, he said, we might find other people. I wondered what the initial distrust and the general lack of interest in our presence was due to. Perhaps, I thought, it was connected to the relatively recent arrival of migrants in Majdan. They may not be used to volunteers' activity, unlike Horgoš or Subotica, but may have learnt to be at ease with the silence and indifference of the village's residents. Or, such an attitude might be

related to the geography of Majdan itself. The vicinity of the border may give migrants the impression that they are closer to Europe than to Serbia. Therefore, there is no need to learn about local asylum procedures or to find out what NGOs have to offer.

The Crossroads

Following the guidance of the Moroccan man, we reached the intersection of two roads, where a group of around ten people was resting under the shade of a tree. On the opposite side, the roof of a house rose above the trees' branches. While the volunteers greeted the group and explained the reason for the visit, a taxi reached the crossroads and three young men got out of the car. Hugging and kissing, they greeted our guide who had remained distant from us and left soon after. They came in our direction, shouting loudly, shaking hands, and hugging some of those present.

The interpreter, in the meantime, was talking with a small group of older men from Syria. His attention, in particular, was focused on a middle-aged man with a big infected wound on his shin. He was injured while trying to cross the border, and his condition had worsened over the past few days, explained the man. The wound slowly became infected, and he supposed there might have been poison in the high weeds near the border fence. The volunteers suggested that he go to Subotica and get treated in the camp or try to contact another NGO based in the city. The suggestion did not convince the man, who said that Subotica was too far and that it would be better for him to get treated in Europe.

I noticed that the interpreter was having some difficulties in translating; many people were jumping into the conversation, while others were laughing and talking loudly about their own affairs. One of those who had just arrived with the taxi came towards us and with a playful attitude said in English: "We just want to cross the border! Are you the police? Let us cross the border!" In all that noise, the atmosphere was friendly and joyful, in deep contrast with the silence of the village. Some of those present could speak English, so we started talking. From the short conversations, I learned that the migrants were living a pretty undisturbed life in Majdan.[307] The village is very close to the Hungarian border and this offers the chance to cross on a daily basis, either from the Romanian side or from the Serbian side, sometimes in daytime, sometimes in the night. The migrants reported that one person had already succeeded. Someone else, instead, had been sent back.

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[307] This situation corresponds to the time of the visit (September 2020). More recent updates from Klikaktiv report an increasing use of violence by the Romanian police in this area during push-back practices. See: Klikaktiv, "I too am a human, not a dog" (July 1st, 2022), https://klikaktiv.org/journal/gwiywievof5jxqf7t68f1gror652fu. Accessed on 29-11-2022.

I began talking with a couple of the young men who were quite fluent in English. They shared information on their country of origin and ambitions for future destinations. The loudest one, from Morocco, told me he would love to move to the Netherlands and confidently stated, "We will meet there soon!" The other young man said he was from Algeria. He told me he was 26 years old and held a degree from the faculty of Biology. He had worked in a pharmacy for some time in his country, until it became very difficult to find a job. He would try to go to Europe—hopefully Switzerland or Sweden. The Syrian men around the interpreter were having similar conversations, sharing their desired destinations and asking questions about what to do to reach Sweden, Norway, or Finland. The interpreter laughed, and, shaking his head, he ironically said: "I want to go to Canada, then!"

It was clear that Majdan, despite its desolation and abandonment, was a place where migrants find hope. They could see the fence at walking distance, and it was part of their daily attempt at crossing. The border fence seemed almost a familiar element that did not inspire much fear. The closer they get to it, the more motivated they become. The gate to the EU is so close that the desired lands of destination are perceived to be not so far away. Migrants in Majdan grow their desires of freedom and empowerment. Yet, the reality of crossing is quite different from their aspirations. In Romania as well as in Hungary, practices of push-back are constant and increasingly violent. At the doorstep of both Hungary and Romania, the migrants we talked to had never been asked if they wanted to apply for asylum and (in the best-case scenario) they had been immediately escorted back to Serbia.

While Milica and the interpreter were trying to provide information on asylum, one of the other volunteers asked a young Syrian boy if he could show us the inside of the house. Hesitating, he explained that the squat was not "his house". Nevertheless, he finally agreed to introduce us, but he would remain outside. In the front yard, a group of five people was sitting at the shade of a cloth fixed on the branches of the trees in the style of Horgoš. They greeted us and invited us to go inside. The conditions of the small building were similar to the empty houses we had entered earlier. In the darkness of one of the rooms, I glimpsed some mattresses and blankets lying on the floor. Differently from the Afghan squats, I did not see any boiler or tea cups but just many empty bottles of beer. Loud voices were coming from another room and we walked in that direction. In the meantime, the boy had changed his mind and was following us.

I looked out through the door. I met a girl's gaze, and we exchanged a smile and a wave of greeting. About six men and two young women were sitting in a circle, smoking cigarettes and talking loudly. With a surprised expression, they greeted us. We invited them to come outside and listen to some information about asylum.

They laughed loudly and nobody seemed to be interested in applications and procedures. At some point one of the two girls, showing a kind of playful authority, stood up and brought the rest of the group outside. She proposed herself as a translator, since the Klikaktiv interpreter was still busy with the Syrian men.

All of those who had just came out from the house were from Morocco. From what I could see, Syrian and Moroccan migrants gathered around the same area, yet, they did not interact much or share the same squats. Milica moved in our direction, introduced herself to the young woman, and began with the usual introduction and explanation of Klikaktiv services. The lady listened to her, while exchanging amused glances with the others. But, contrary to what was promised, she was not translating the information.

A tall, skinny man interrupted Milica. "I will marry a Serbian!", he stated, causing loud laughter among those present. The young woman jumped into the conversation and asked: "If we get asylum in Serbia, do we get money? Migrants in Germany, I know, they get money." Without entering into details, one of the volunteers quickly said they would not or, at least, not soon. Hearing laughs and noise, a tall, stout man came out of the house and walked straight towards the group. He turned to us and said in English: "I need money and new shoes". Ignoring the provocation, one of the volunteers responded jokingly: "We are the same, then! I also need money and I also need new shoes." The man insisted playfully, but provocatively: "Then, will you give me money?" The information of Klikaktiv did not sound very exciting for the group, and, having found neither shoes nor money, everybody quickly returned inside the house.

We said goodbye to the rest of those present and slowly walked back to the van. Along the way back, we entered another house, empty as the others. A cloth was arranged on the branches of the trees, some shoes were left outside. In front of the entrance, two small piles of bricks were disposed, one in front of the other. The ashes in the middle suggested it was a small fireplace. In the houses of Majdan, similar to the situation observed in Horgoš, whatever is demolished quickly assumes another function. The building components become furniture, the carpet turns into a door. Inside and outside spaces can take over each other's role. The houses of the village, behind their old yard walls, appear abandoned to their own solitary decay. But, on the contrary, they are thoroughly lived-in, opened, reorganised, and consumed by the people who leave, those who arrive, and those who will return. At times, they are empty and silent but, just a moment later, they are filled with loud laughter, cigarette smoke, shoes, greetings, and stories of the border. Life in this tiny village at the intersection of three nations revealed itself much more eventful than one might expect.

"So, there are no migrants in here, right?" Milica smiled, turning to the interpreter. Along the way to Majdan, he had expressed his doubts that anyone could actually live in the village. I asked him what his impression of the place and people was. He said it was quite bad and he was seriously worried about the man with the infected wound. However, he said without much irony, if he would not get the status of refugee from Serbia, he might return to Majdan and try "The Game" again from there.

The story of the interpreter is similar to the ones I had heard in the previous visits. He walked the Balkan route by foot, crossing Turkey first, then Greece, and North Macedonia. When he finally reached Serbia, he was accommodated in Krnjača camp, not far from Belgrade. This facility was originally built as a complex of barracks in the 90s to host refugees from Bosnia. In 2015, when a large number of migrants arrived in Belgrade, Serbian authorities decided to move the Bosnian refugees somewhere else and make room for the newcomers.

Milica and the interpreter started talking about how easy it was to get in touch with smugglers inside the camp itself. Some names came out and the interpreter remembered these interactions very well. "Weird people", he said. "I lost my occasion back in 2015! I could become a smuggler and now I would be rich. I was offered, you know?" Krnjača camp was not a good place, according to him. For this reason, he decided to leave and place a tent in Bristol Park. "There were not many people back in 2015", he said, "Just me and a couple of other guys. Police saw us every day, but nobody ever asked anything. They were ignoring us." In the park, he managed to get in touch with different NGOs and get informed on how to apply for asylum in Serbia. He applied in 2015. Five years later, at the time when we met, he was still waiting for a response.

Site Survey #6: Bosnian Border

Banja Koviljača. Thursday September 16, 2020. 11:00 a.m.

On my last day of visiting, the plan changed from the usual northern direction and turned west towards the Bosnian border. Here, in a small village called Banja Koviljača, migrants gather to cross the Serbian-Bosnian border, intending to proceed to Croatia. Only a river separates the two countries with the borderline running along it; the eastern shore of Drina falls within Serbian territory and the western one belongs to Bosnia. The landscape of this area was quite different from the one I had gotten used to during our rides to the north. The mountains of western Serbia host rich, green vegetation, dotted here and there with small villages and broken roads. Milica informed me that not far from the migrant squat in Banja Koviljača, the first Serbian refugee camp was opened in 2002. At that time, there was no proper law on asylum or regulation of reception. Thus, UNHCR took over the management of the facility until 2008. In that year, the Law on Asylum entered into force, and the structure turned into a camp. The facility is still functioning and hosts a considerable number of the migrants who arrived in 2015.

Banja Koviljača Station

The makeshift camp we were heading to was at the site of the abandoned train station of Banja Koviljača: a fascinating concrete building with a modernist design and geometric proportions (fig. 5.21). The van stopped somewhere in the high grass, and I could not see much at our arrival. We stepped out of the vehicle, and I noticed through the broken glass of the windows the profile of a group of people inside the main entrance. The Afghan interpreter, who accompanied us for this visit, waved his hand, and a few boys responded from the inside.

We walked further, and, behind the corner of the building, I glimpsed some men lying down on the concrete floor. They were barefoot and just a thin blanket was underneath their bodies. Most of them were sleeping and did not bother to open their eyes to check who was around. Others were lying down in the shade of a gazebo a few meters away. We were not the only visitors at the squat—a trio composed of two men and a young lady in a blue jacket sponsored by UNICEF and HCIT[308] was asking questions to the guests of the squat.

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[308] HCIT is the acronym for the Humanitarian Center for Integration and Tolerance (Humanitarni Centar za Integraciju i Toleranciju) is a non-profit and non-governmental Serbian organization, partner of UNHCR and UNICEF. Source: https://hcit.rs/. Accessed on 30-11-2022.

FIG. 5.21 Concrete structure of the old station building. Banja Koviljača (Serbia), September 2020. Source: photo by author.

This time our group was more numerous. Two Spanish volunteers from the Catalan Commission for Refugees joined Klikaktiv during the visit. They were interested in getting some information on push-backs and travel histories of the migrants stranded in Serbia. As soon as we got out of the van, they prepared their notebooks and started approaching some of those present. We learned that the squat was occupied by different groups; Kurdish ethnics from Iran, Afghan nationals, and Pakistanis. Similar to most of my previous experiences, the station was occupied by young males only. Quite a number of young Afghan men gathered around the Klikaktiv team. I could count approximately 30 people in the open space around the station, but there was probably an equal number inside. Two weeks earlier, Klikaktiv had visited the squat for the first time and counted more than a 100 people.

This aspect testifies to the mobile character of life in informal camps, where it is very difficult to predict how many people will arrive and how many will leave. Makeshift camps and squats can progressively empty, be abandoned, and then appear again some kilometres away. These changes depend on a variety of factors, including the relations with authorities and local residents, the possibility of finding food or aid, the proximity of transport and, especially, the emergence of new routes.

It is interesting to note that informal and official camps are often at a close distance and they exist in relation to one another. The young men we met in the Belgrade parks were, in large part, registered in Obrenovac camp. Those in Subotica were coming and going from the closest centre, in which they could shower and get food. Probably, similar dynamics were also occurring in Banja Koviljača. Reception facilities, one-stop centres, and transit camps are strategically located at the margins of the country and they seem to encourage the redirection of migrants outside of Serbia. This reminded me of the discussion I had some days earlier with the Syrian interpreter. He mentioned the possibility of establishing connections and finding smuggling channels inside the camps. This allows people to get information about new crossing points and pushes them to consider the option of moving out to the nearest squat.

The conversation in Klikaktiv's corner was getting intense. A man was raising his voice, speaking and gesturing animatedly to the interpreter. He stood up and left to answer his phone. I recognised the "leader-attitude" that was later confirmed by the man in person, with a certain pride. I moved closer in order to understand what was going on. Sadly, I found out that the reason for such fervour was the death of two migrants, drowned in the river Drina the night before. The man was not mad at the interpreter, contrary to what I had first thought. Rather, he was reporting the story. According to what the interpreter translated, in the previous night four men had tried to cross the Drina River to reach the Bosnian shore. Bosnian police were patrolling on the other side and forced them to swim back. The water was cold and the current fast. Two of the men managed to reach the Serbian shore but the others died in front of the eyes of the Bosnian officers, who watched the scene impassively. The conversation was continuing in a language that I could not understand but, from the mimicry, I could guess it was about other episodes of police push-back. One young man was showing his broken tooth, another one some bruises on his legs and arms. "Bosnia", "Albania", "Croatia" were the only words I could catch.

I was standing next to the Spanish volunteers when the man, who was shouting before, came in our direction and asked in English: "Who is from Spain?" He wanted to talk to the volunteers and encouraged them to take notes. He started sharing his story, saying that he had lived ten years in France and seven in Belgium, working without papers in the construction industry. One of the volunteers asked if he ever tried to cross the border and how many times. "Crossing? 20 times, 30, 50 times. Million times!" was his answer. But lately, the man said, he had decided to stop crossing, although he had been in Serbia for more than a year. In the recent period, he said, he was helping his compatriots to go to Bosnia. He had also arranged a small "*bateau* (boat)" to cross the river.

When he used to play "The Game", the police had pushed him back several times and hit him. As evidence of his story, he rolled up his trousers to the knee and showed a big scar on his leg. "Can I take a picture of it?" asked the volunteer, "No, no photos! Never in my life, not even in the school!" was the man's reaction. He quickly changed the topic of discussion and continued by telling us about part of his family staying in Greece "I will bring them here. I know the way very well now" he said.

While the man was talking, a teenager came closer and waved at us, asking: "How are you?" I turned to him and his arms immediately caught my attention. They were covered with small scars that could be seen from the sleeves of his t-shirt to the middle of the forearm. The Spanish volunteers asked if he felt like answering some questions. Shaking his head, he said his English was not good enough. "*Nederlands?*" he proposed, taking me by great surprise. Probably, the word had spread quickly in the squat that one of the visitors came from the Netherlands. I used my little knowledge of Dutch to translate the brief information he wanted to share. According to his story, he had reached the Netherlands four years earlier and lived there for the past four years.

The Spanish volunteers were interested in knowing if the police had ever hit him, probably concerned by the visible scars. But the reply was negative. After this short interruption, the young man continued with his story. He had reached the Netherlands at the age of 14. He was able to pass through Hungary, Austria, and Germany. Eventually, he reached a small town, Almelo, where he remained for the following years. He went to high school and got his diploma. But, as soon as he turned 18, his permit expired and he was sent back to Pakistan. Just three months before our visit, he had started the journey all over again, passing through Iran, Turkey, Greece, North Macedonia and, finally, Serbia. Pakistan was not safe; his father had been murdered, he explained, gesturing a gun with his fingers. That same night, he would try to cross the river for the first time. This brief conversation left many questions unanswered, but the boy seemed not willing to talk further and was impatient to leave. We wished him the best of luck for his first crossing, and, with a smile, he returned inside the building.

The older man was still standing next to us. He had listened to the boy's story carefully, nodding from time to time. I decided to ask him if he could show me the squat to take some pictures of the building. His reaction was very enthusiastic. He gestured me to follow him and, stopping from time to time, he suggested the best angles to shoot. The building was in a slightly better condition than some of the other countryside squats we had seen in the previous days. Yet, I could see very little of the inside. The old station was a solid concrete and steel construction, characterised by a strange mix of styles, both modernist and vernacular. The front

was geometric, linear, and painted in white. The opposite façade, facing the old railway, was of a more rural construction with wooden doors and small squared holes in the thick, light-green walls (fig. 5.22).

I could see some camping tents through the broken glass of the windows, in a sort of double envelop of shelters that helped hold heat against the cold of the night. Behind the front façade, some mattresses and carpets were lying in the interior rooms (fig. 5.23 and 5.24). This side was facing the main road and was probably the most repaired and warmest corner of the building in the later hours of the day. However, from what I was told, the night is not the time to sleep, but rather the most active moment of the day, when "The Game" begins. I asked our guide if anyone might get annoyed by our curiosity, but he shook his head. He specified that everybody would be fine as long as he was allowing it. The man was not hiding his role in the squat. He was presenting himself as a benefactor of the migrant community and an expert on the local routes, suggesting a certain pride. After the tour of the station, he offered to show us the river where migrants used to cross. Apparently, that was not the preferred route anymore, but he insisted on guiding us there in order to give us an idea of how "The Game" works.

FIG. 5.22 Back side of the old station building. Banja Koviljača (Serbia), September 2020. Source: photo by author.

FIG. 5.23 Sleeping station arranged inside the old station building. Banja Koviljača (Serbia), September 2020. Source: photo by author.

FIG. 5.24 View of the station's interior. Banja Koviljača (Serbia), September 2020. Source: photo by author.

The Drina River

The man walked in front of us, proudly sharing his knowledge on crossing tactics and routes. All the volunteers and I were following in line and, behind us, another young man was walking at a short distance. We went straight along the old railway tracks and we continued along a short path flanked by tall weeds (fig. 5.25). We crossed an asphalt road, on which cars and trucks were passing at high speed. On the other side of the road, I could see a small opening in the high weeds. The man pointed at it, saying that was the direction to follow.

After crossing the main road, the way to the river looked like a well beaten path, not only by people on foot but also by cars. That made me suppose there might be another way to reach it, perhaps, a way used by local residents every day. On the right side of the road, there were some houses with well cultivated gardens in front. On the left side, instead, the vegetation was high and wild. We could feel the humidity of the water without seeing it. We stopped in front of a small wooden gate in a weak fence made of three rows of rusty barbed wire. We entered the yard and finally reached the water. Our guide was going straight to the shore of the river, and I was standing a bit distant, not sure what we were supposed to do. He noticed my perplexity and asked: "What? You cannot swim?" I smiled and assured him I am a very good swimmer. Yet, the question made me feel even more uncertain about what he wanted to do. It did not take long to realise the man intended to show us "his territory", as he previously did in the squat. Somehow, his attitude testified to the desire of telling a personal story of travel: a knowledge that no one else could master or understand. His version of the story did not contain signs of weakness, like the wound that he had refused to immortalise with a photo. His insistence was, rather, on achievements, expertise, and movement. He wanted to stress the urgency of moving and his capacity to find new strategic routes. The crossing, he made it clear, would happen regardless of what it might take. Maybe even "million" attempts, as he told us before. The emphasis in his gestures and words was on action, supported by refreshed memories and new hopes.

The landscape along the river was very quiet and pleasant. Green mountains appeared on the opposite shore, and the water was flowing clear (fig. 5.26). The man took off his shoes and he showed to us the signs left by leeches. He said that the water was full of those small animals and, moreover, the river bed was very slippery: "If you don't know how to do it, you will ski, and you will break your legs." To give us a demonstration, he took off his shoes, rolled up his pants to his knees, and entered in the water. We lost sight of him for a while. The man appeared few minutes later on a small strip of land in the middle of the river. He was holding his phone, waving it in the air with his arm outstretched.

FIG. 5.25 Dirt path connecting the old station to the Drina River. Banja Koviljača (Serbia), September 2020. Source: photo by author.

The border between Bosnia and Serbia runs on an invisible line located on that small island. It was somewhere under the man's feet. Without being aware of it, he might have already reached Bosnia. Our guide beckoned us to join him on the island, but we declined his invitation. He returned to our shore and said that he would have shown us where they were crossing before, if it was not so dangerous. He explained that the Bosnian police might shoot from there and we all agreed it was a wise decision to return to the squat. Apparently, the corner he had brought us to was not the current crossing point. The man just wanted to show us where the river was and, probably, how smoothly and confident he could move around. That side of the river was neither hidden nor isolated. A man was fishing a few meters away from us, and some other people were doing the same on Bosnian waters. The life of the fishing men seemed to precede undisturbed, silent, and relaxed in this corner of the Drina. Along the same shore, the lives of migrants were unfolding quickly, in the dark, limping barefoot, with open wounds and burned skin. That same water could be a place of rest and quietness for some, deadly for others.

FIG. 5.26 View of the Drina River from the Serbian shore. Banja Koviljača (Serbia), September 2020.
Source: photo by author

TOC

The stories and photos collected and delivered through the logbook of site surveys brings attention to particular spatial interstices and material residues. These exist, become visible, and acquire significance as a function of someone who is moving, hiding, or going elsewhere. The material and spatial traces of insurgent movements develop as survival tactics, become visible as scratches on the concrete surface of new habitats, and testify to the growing complexity of border spatiality. Their fragile, yet concrete, attachment to walls, dusty grounds, and broken windows offer the freedom to tell stories which would otherwise be censored, without taking the authority of speaking for someone else. In this sense, residues and traces do not constrain the relevance of the empirical research to evidence, to something precise, tangible, or measurable. Rather, they reorient knowledge from the objective to the subjective, in the direction of experience, as something that is not fully comprehensible or explainable.[309]

The following chapter resumes the theoretical argumentation on spatial formation, starting from the very traces that are disclosed in this logbook, and integrates them in the becoming of the border. The objects and material signs that here are simply uncovered through descriptions and images turn into indices in the following chapter, to discuss the possibility of different modes of being at the border. Occupying and inhabiting the border is understood as a stance against immobilisation, a physical and political movement, which manifests in various forms of space and life.

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[309] Cf. with Didi-Huberman's notion of "non-knowledge" described as "a dream, a desire, an image" (in this case, a trace) that is "concealed in objective reality but has not yet become empirically intelligible". Georges Didi-Huberman, *Survival of the Fireflies* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2018): 73-75.

Horgoš (Serbia), September 2020. Source: photo by author.

6 Squatting the Border

Modes of Being and Spatial Forms

6.1 From Plasticity to Multiplicity

In rethinking the space of the border as a spatial formation characterised by plasticity, two fundamental aspects can be highlighted. On the one hand, the concept of plasticity guarantees continuity in the process of formation, providing the actual ground for different forms of agency to interact —from the agency of space itself opposing fixity through its becoming, to the agency of border-crossers, natural and non-human elements. On the other hand, emerging through the physical infrastructure, plasticity brings attention to the contingent moment of rupture in which a separation materialises. This does not mean that the construction of the fence ends the process of actualisation with a neat differentiation of inside and outside spaces. On the contrary, the spatial character of plasticity offers the possibility to engage with space and favours the start of a new becoming.

The endurance of crossings testifies the very manipulation of plasticity to oppose the fixity of separation and reconfigure the way of being at the border. When speaking of crossings, it is important to clarify that migrants are not the only active agents in the process. Humans and non-humans, bodies and objects come into contact and form new relationships of both an affective and a spatial-material nature. These include, among others, the bodies of border crossers, the objects that they procure and carry during the journey, transport infrastructures and smuggling networks, systems of control and humanitarian aid, conversations and desires for escape, and natural and urban features of the site. In this sense, humans and things gain agency by exploiting the border's plasticity to make connections, form networks of relations and expose

the mobile, unstable nature of the border's formation.[310] Plasticity, therefore, provides for the performative emergence of difference through interplays, struggles, and exchanges that unfold on space, activating the genesis of spatial form. This means that the border, as a formation, is an open-ended spatial system. The material outcomes of its becoming, emerging from ongoing and future interactions, are not predictable, nor fully comprehensible.

The logbook of site surveys selects and illustrates the particular spaces where some of these interactions become concrete and visible. In the city centre of Belgrade, for instance, the parks emerge as meeting points where migrants receive humanitarian support, come into contact with smugglers, or get information from other border crossers. The actions of migrants in the parks, however marginal, are not isolated from the dynamics of the city itself. Their exposure in public areas also reflects a certain vulnerability to practices of policing and exclusion. A similar condition was observed at the train station in Subotica, where the relationship between migrants and authorities often resulted in violent clashes and several episodes of eviction.

Moving closer to the border, the use and the atmosphere of squatted sites change. In Horgoš, the space around the farm conveys a sense of well-cared-for, yet precarious, domesticity. This site presents very different advantages than inner city squats. The immediate vicinity of the border allows for more frequent attempts at crossing, and, thus, the farm is used as a station for temporary shelter. As the distance from the border decreases, the relationship between precariousness and domesticity shifts. The sense of abandonment and absence becomes more evident in Majdan. There, the present condition of immobility merges with future imaginations of life in Europe, rendering the connection with the actual location more labile.

Lastly, the case of Banja Koviljača gives insight on the development of tactical knowledge. The old station building occupied by migrants has features of both inner city and peripheral squats, while presenting a different relationship with the surroundings. The location along an emerging route exposes the necessity to explore new paths, test different modes of crossing, and, thus, develop an embodied knowledge.

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310 Objects, organic and inorganic elements, acquire an active part in the process of formation; their operation is possible in conjunction with other things and beings without any particular hierarchy, cf. Jane Bennett, "The Force of Things: Steps towards an Ecology of Matter," *Political Theroy* 32, no. 3 (2004): 347–372, https://doi.org/10.1177/0090591703260853.

The urban park, the train station, the farm, and the occupied houses presented in the logbook offer the opportunity to trace multiple lines of analysis to understand the complexity of the border's formation. These spaces are not just a consequence of the fence's construction. They are exemplary of specific conditions of movement, relations of proximity with the border, availability of goods and information, and interaction with the existing social, political, and natural environment. The analysis of such spaces, in their material and relational nature, has the potential to engage with the border's complexity as a multi-layered system and process, while providing additional insights on the concrete effects of moving and bordering. From these spaces, a different line of actualisation originates. This is certainly connected to the one operated through the border's infrastructures, yet, it is not a direct result of it. The proliferation of occupied spaces is a manifestation of what has been named as the border's "own becoming", or, "insurgent becoming" in chapter five. In this phase of actualisation, border spatiality shows the actual quality of multiplicity, which advances the border's autonomous formation.

The study of multiplicity is at the core of this chapter. How to observe, conceptualise, and understand it through space is the main question of the analysis. The investigation includes the search for a conceptual and material account of multiplicity that considers relationships of meaning and matter, as well as interactions between human and non-human agents. To answer these questions the chapter proceeds in two main directions. On the one hand, it addresses the proliferation of occupied spaces on the Serbian side of the border. The informal encampments presented in the previous chapter serve here as concrete examples to examine the intersections of architecture and migration and test a relational-grounded mode of investigation.[311] This entails examining everyday social interactions and material practices as components of a generative, performative process that brings to light difference through the very way of being at the border. The latter emphasises inhabitation as a spatial form and a form of being, in which plural identities and spaces are entangled. In this way, the border is not only the space where strategies of control and tactics of resistance unfold, in simple reaction to one another. It acquires increasing complexity as relationships of a different nature intersect and expand. Examining multiplicity through inhabitation involves the becoming of individuals at the border and intertwines with the becoming of space—how the two processes affect one another, transform both bodies and environments and leave tangible traces.

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[311] Michele Lancione, "The Assemblage of Life at the Margins," in *Rethinking Life at the Margins: The Assemblage of Context, Subjects, and Politics*, ed. Michele Lancione (London and New York: Routledge, 2016): 4.

After discussing the relationship between modes of being and spatial form, the analysis moves to the material dimension, zooming into the small scale of objects that populate occupied spaces. As mentioned earlier, not only individuals but also things circulate, change, and acquire an active role in the process of border formation. They assume different practical functions and symbolic values and convey a meaning according to whom and what they relate to. Multiplicity in the study of things is regarded as the account for ambiguity, doubt, and diverse interpretations. For this reason, an indexical approach is proposed with the aim of engaging with perception without claiming to confer clarity, truth, or definitions. Understanding material traces and objects as indices of experience allows tracing multiple lines of interaction and acknowledging openness in the materiality of formation.

Through the concept of multiplicity, this part of the research aims to be in dialogue with the recent scholarship on home making in migratory experience and dwelling practices in displacement. In particular, the argument shares with this literature an understanding of migrant identity as multiple, which reflects in a complex sense of place. From this common ground, it seeks to expand the relationship of identity and space. The focus is on how multiplicity, as part of the migratory experience, can be understood as a concrete, material character of border spatiality. This helps to highlight migrants' role in the active construction of the built environment in entanglement with the non-human and looks at the potential opening of new forms of knowledge.

6.2 In-between Architecture and Migration

Critical migration studies, sociology, and feminist theory have offered various intriguing insights into the interplay of identity, movement, and place. However, intersections with architecture remain largely unexplored. The discipline of architecture is often associated with ideas of fixity and rooting, especially connected to processes of construction. Accordingly, its connection to migration is commonly seen as a response to the necessity of managing human inflows through the provision of a housing stock. Scarce consideration, therefore, is paid to the productive capacity of migration in the active transformation of spaces.

As Herscher points out in his genealogy of architecture and refuge, refugees as a political community have hardly been registered in architectural history.[312] In his book three spatial settings exemplify the way states have taken the lead in distributing refugees on national territory according to their alleged role in the society. The author emphasises how the exclusion of refugees from the political scene has resulted in a lack of knowledge on the space they inhabit, what sort of economic and power relations intervene on its production, and how refugees themselves have had an active role in shaping it.

From a different angle, Stephen Cairns wisely suggests that we make room for migration in the history of architecture by revisiting the relationship between movement and space.[313] In the edited volume *Drifting: Architecture and Migrancy*, the proposed approach to migration breaks the linearity that connects points of departure and arrival.[314] The authors bring attention to a complex network of fragmented spaces that shape migratory experiences, while transforming national territories and boundaries. In this proliferation of spatial systems, social and architectural realms do not neatly coincide. On the contrary, they prove the capacity to shift and open questions on notions of rooting and stability. According to this view, the lines that traditionally bound architectural spaces assume the shape of a track: a material, corporeal device capable of grasping movement in scattered traces of presence and absence.[315]

More recent academic investigations direct attention to migrants' agency in spatial production through the study of practices of home making.[316] The authors interested in the architectural dimension of migration draw from a sociological and philosophical tradition that re-elaborates the concept of home.[317]

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[312] Andrew Herscher, Nikolaus Hirsch, and Markus Miessen, *Displacements: Architecture and Refugee* (Stenberg Press Critical Spatial Practice, 2017): 3.

[313] Stephen Cairns, ed., *Drifting: Architecture and Migrancy* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003).

[314] Ibid., 6.

[315] Paul Carter, "Mythforms: Techniques of Migrant Place-making," in *Drifting*, edited by Stephen Cairns, 91.

[316] See for instance the edited volume: Luce Beeckmans, Ashika Singh, and Alessandra Gola, "Rethinking the Intersection of Home and Displacement from a Spatial Perspective," in *Making Home(s) in Displacement: Critical Reflections on a Spatial Practice*, eds. Luce Beeckmans, Alessandra Gola, Ashika Singh, and Hilde Heyn (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2022) https://doi.org/10.1353/book.98785.

[317] See, for instance: Sara Ahmed, "Home and Away: Narratives of Migration and Estrangement," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 2, no.3 (1999): 329–347, https://doi.org/10.1177/136787799900200303; Sara Ahmed, Claudia Castañeda, Anne-Marie Fortier, Mimi Sheller , eds., *Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003); Paolo Boccagni, *Migration and the Search for Home: Mapping Domestic Space in Migrants' Everyday Lives* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017); Homi K. Bhabha, "Halfway House," *Artforum* 35, no. 9 (1997): 11-12.

Understood as a process in the making, "home" is distanced from the reduction to "house" and "dwelling". It establishes, instead, a dynamic and interpersonal relationship with the place, in which movement is implicated.[318] As the migratory experience, home becomes multi-scalar—connecting the realms of the national and the domestic and taking into account the many locations of the journey.[319] In this way, home itself becomes a movable concept, unfinished, and in continuous becoming.

These characteristics, however, bring along a certain ambivalence that resides in both the concept of home and the individuals who inhabit it. Ambiguities and doubt concern: the various places that one can call home, the non-correspondence with the dwelling location, and the imaginative dimension of a destination not reached yet.[320] Ambivalence also involves temporality. Motives, desires, stories, and decisions of moving may be prior to the actual start of the journey, thus, they add complexity to the personal experiences of migration.[321]

The spatial-temporal complexity and the ambiguity that belong to the lives of migrants extend to a deeper sense of estrangement in the individual: a feeling of discomfort that reflects the condition of inhabiting more than one place.[322] Spaces of migration and migrant bodies, in other words, affect one another in a process of becoming that relates not only to the reinvention of home but also reorganises the individual's way of being in the world. Mariana Ortega examines in depth the sense of not-being-at-ease and explains it as a mode of "being in-between worlds".[323] The experience of "in-betweenness", according to Ortega, concerns those individuals who do not belong to a precise location, or rather, belong to multiple places at once. Due to this condition of being in-between worlds, they find themselves needing to constantly negotiate politics of location, as well as the assumption of fixity related to their identity. They become, therefore, "multiplicitous".[324]

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318 Boccagni, *Migration and the Search for Home*, 2.

319 See: Cathrine Brun, and Anita Fabos, "Making Homes in Limbo? A Conceptual Framework," *Refuge* 31 (2015): 5-17, https://doi.org/10.25071/1920-7336.40138 .

320 Cf.: Ahmed, "Home and Away."

321 See for instance: Mirjana Lozanovska, "Emigration/Immigration: Maps, Myths and Origins," in *Drifting*, edited by Stephen Cairns, 184-202.

322 The concept of inhabiting more than one place is also discussed in the aforementioned works of Sara Ahmed and Homi Bhabha, see: Ahmed, "Home and Away", and Bhabha, "Halfway House."

323 Mariana Ortega, *In-between: Latina Feminist Phenomenology, Multiplicity and the Self* (Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 2016).

324 Ibid, 196.

While this process of negotiation expresses qualities of creativity in the dynamic reorientation of one's own position, it can also be distressing, violent, and in some cases even deadly.[325]

The stories of border crossers presented in the logbook are testimonies of the numerous negotiations and compromises that migrants accept for the sake of movement. These include, for instance, the way of relating to authorities and humanitarians with the scope of providing convincing information and fitting into the figure of the "good refugee".[326] Such negotiations can feed the hope of speeding up asylum procedures, guarantee access to camp facilities and services, or facilitate the procurement of basic goods. Outside official systems of reception, the "bad refugee" can get in contact with smugglers and become part of the community of squatters. In this sense, the framing of one's identity as belonging to a certain category of ethnicity, religion, politics or sexual orientation may open possibilities for protection or increase the opportunities of informal crossing through the right network of contacts. Yet, it could also determine exclusion from the official procedures of asylum, as well as from the migrant community itself. A concrete example of the attempt to frame one single identity can be found in the ethnic composition of migrant squats, generally homogeneous based on geographical provenance and language.

When there is limited space for recognising plurality and difference in an individual's identity, "belonging" can be used as a powerful instrument to silence certain features of the individual.[327] This applies to both migrant and local communities and results, to the same extent, in the establishment of hierarchies, boundaries, and marginalisation. Exclusion in the border crossers' experience assumes the form of non-recognition in the political and social life. It also entails a spatial and physical dimension that manifests as inhabiting the "outside": the outside of overcrowded transit and reception centres, the outside of urban environments, the open ground of forests and abandoned peripheries. Leaving someone outside involves precariousness and risk, a condition in which in-betweenness assumes very physical and bodily features.

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325 Ibid., 133. Cf. with the condition of anxiety discussed by Sam Grabowska in: Sam Grabowska, "Anxious Architecture: Sleep, Identity, and Death in the US–Mexico Borderlands," *Footprint* 10, no. 2 (2016): 115–135. In Grabowska's understanding, the state of anxiety is not only a psychological condition, but it extends from the individual to the spaces s/he inhabits at the border.

326 Chapter five of this thesis provides examples of the problem of communication, questioning, and interviewing between migrants and authorities, particularly, in the Site Survey #1.

327 Ortega, *In-between,* 201.

As a mode of being, in-betweenness introduces multiplicity in migrant identity. It also implies a complex engagement of the individual with the physical environment. Being in between worlds, therefore, is both a conceptual and material practice: a mode of interaction with a social and physical realm that is unwelcoming.[328] The migrant who lives in-between worlds must develop attentiveness to the place and its material features in order to survive. S/he has to learn to move across an inhospitable terrain, sharpening the senses and acquiring practical knowledge. This is what Gloria Anzaldúa calls "*la facultad*": an instant sensing, an acute awareness, a survival capacity grounded in space.[329]

In the experience of border crossers along the Hungarian-Serbian border being in-between is a very concrete condition, which translates to being stuck outside of the EU, yet, inside Europe. The capacity of navigating this condition of in-betweenness manifests in the continuous effort at perfecting attempts of crossing. The use of new tools to climb or cut the razor wire, the discovery of new routes and informal crossing points, the strategies to escape the view of cameras and to hide from patrol cars shape migrants' "*facultad*" and produce a different knowledge. Such knowledge, grounded in space and embodied in the migrant, permeates "The Game" stories, which circulate from individual to individual and become charged with the longing for a chance of success. It improves the ability to move across the border and opens the possibility to render it inhabitable.

This implies a performative mode of being in-between that can be better understood as being-at-the-border. Such a mode of being generates bodily adaptations and spatial transformations; while the body at the border hones its habits and capabilities, space bends and folds according to the needs of movement and survival. In a nutshell, bodies and spaces affect one another and enhance the border's formation. Their contact and the resulting material transformations offer an opening: to understand experiences of in-betweenness as being trapped between worlds, and to study the enactment of tactical movements and the development of a habitual domesticity. The following analysis of migrant squats as "habitats" adds another layer to the relational field that links architecture and migration, in which becoming and multiplicity extend from the concept of home to the border, widening spaces and possibilities of inhabitation.

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[328] Ibid., 127

[329] Gloria E. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1987): 38.

Inhabiting the Border: Bodies, Spaces, and Politics

At the encounter with migratory movement, the space of the border complicates into a manifold of scattered, fragmented, inhabited spaces. These spaces attest to a highly dynamic situation with various kinds of interactions.[330] The migrant squats described in the previous chapter are recalled here to advance a critical reflection on the entanglement of displacement and placement. Unfolding with a tactical, insurgent way of moving, the inhabitation of squats emerges as a mode of being that is both conceptual and material. Multiplicity, described above as a mode of being, extends to the spatial dimension and becomes the main quality of the border's actualised spatial form.

From a relational perspective, multiplicity can be understood as the entanglement of a large set of connections (geographic, social, economic, and political) grounded in a specific context, which set the conditions for difference to emerge. Considering the proposed case study, the proliferation of squats along the Balkan route and, particularly, along the Hungarian-Serbian border highlights the relations that render Serbia an exemplary site to observe the specificity of the border's formation. First, the establishment of "open" reception facilities to assist the continuation of migrants' journey constitutes a determinant factor for both the development of informal settlements and their specific locations.[331] These centres offer border crossers certain services, such as access to showers and food. More importantly, they offer the freedom to leave and return. In this way, migrants can connect with compatriots and smugglers who are settled outside the camps, find temporary accommodation in places that are less controlled and closer to the border, and, above all, attempt frequent crossings. It is no coincidence, therefore, that most of the informal encampments visited during the site surveys were located near official reception facilities.

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[330] The understanding of space as dynamically and relationally produced is drawn from the work of Henri Lefebvre and Doreen Massey, as argued in the introduction to this thesis. However, the relationships and interactions that are discussed in this analysis extend beyond the social realm to include a deeper understanding of matter and non-human agency.

[331] See: Diana Martin, Claudio Minca, and Irit Katz. "Rethinking the Camp: On Spatial Technologies of Power and Resistance." *Progress in Human Geography* 44, no. 4 (2020): 743–68. https://doi. org/10.1177/0309132519856702.

The establishment of open centres also shows the intersection between local policies and migrants' determination to proceed toward the EU. On the side of Serbian reception strategies, it demonstrates that the passage of migrants and their temporary stay is the preferred option by authorities. This is also reflected in the poor promotion of and information on the legal procedures that could regularise people's stay in the country. Accordingly, the decision of migrants to settle informally is dues to both a lack of knowledge on available legal options and a lack of interest in remaining in Serbia.[332]

Second, one must consider the topography of the country, for the most part flat, and its geographical position at the intersection of three EU borders (Croatia, Hungary, and Romania). Over time, these spatial features have given the country a prominent position in the network of informal routes. This position was maintained even after the interruption of the dedicated transport systems for migrants and the construction of the Hungarian fence. Considering that most informal crossings happen on foot, the topography of northern Serbia makes the passage through the fence remains preferable to secondary routes, such as those through Albania or Montenegro. These are not only further away from EU borders, but also present more tortuous paths, with limited access to essential services and humanitarian aid, which are available in cities such as Subotica or Belgrade.

Third, the international media attention paid to this area since 2014-2016 has attracted volunteers and activists from all over the world, who are determined to help migrants along the route.[333] The network of humanitarians and independent volunteers, who are not connected to the official system of reception, is engaged in the provision of various goods, from basic necessities that sustain daily survival to those tools that facilitate the continuation of transit. Although this type of aid is not sufficient to maintain an acceptable quality of life in squats, it certainly plays a role in the development of life outside camps.

The reasons mentioned above are just a part of what sustain migrants' deliberate choice to inhabit the border. Other more practical (but no less relevant) motives make this decision rather obligatory. These include, for example, the limited capacity of reception facilities to host a growing number of newcomers. An obvious, more structural impediment is the lack of legal channels to enter the European Union from a country that is considered safe, as in the case of Serbia. This, in particular, leaves no option but that of attempting to cross the fence.

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332 Barbara Beznec, Marc Speer, and Marta Stojic-Mitrovic, "Governing the Balkan Route: Macedonia, Serbia, and the European Border Regime," *Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung Southeast Europe Research Paper Series* 5 (2016): 37. Doi: 10.13140/RG.2.2.29918.23363.

333 See: Margaret Feischmidt, Ludger Pries, and Celine Cantat, eds., R*efugee Protection and Civil Society in Europe* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-92741-1.

National and supranational policies, migrants' action, geographic conditions, and humanitarian networks display a set of relationships which are material, political, affective or simply practical. The entanglement of such relationships links transit to the proliferation of informal encampments and determines the contingency and specificity of the spatial formation in the context of the Hungarian-Serbian border. These connections set the premises to understand inhabitation as specific to and situated in the context while emphasising its concrete link with the ongoing process of border formation.

In the proposed understanding, inhabitation is distinguished from simple dwelling. The latter, as a social and spatial practice, could actually be observed in other places that compose the border's assemblage, such as reception and asylum centres. Many scholars have already analysed the development of domestic practices inside refugee camps, showing how migrants' autonomy can persist in the organisation of space, the search for privacy or the stabilisation of routines.[334] While some have focused on the possibility for political solidarity and alliances to emerge,[335] others have stressed the constant presence of control in connection with practices of care.[336] Camps in these studies emerge as complex spaces of interaction where, despite an apparent immobility and physical containment, active forms of waiting[337] and different ways of moving may still persist.[338] Similar studies constitute a fundamental basis to understand and substantiate the analysis of migrant squats. Many of the social and spatial interactions mentioned above are observable both in camps and in occupied spaces, but what renders the latter unique is the closer implication with the border's formation.

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[334] See for instance: Sandra Dudley, "Feeling at Home: Producing and Consuming Things in Karenni Refugee Camps on the Thai–Burma Border," *Population, Space and Place* 17 (2011): 742–55. https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.639.

[335] See the articles of the themed section "Migration and Activism" in the 14th volume of ACME; Deirdre Conlon, and Nick Gill, "Guest Editorial: Interventions in Migration and Activism," *ACME*, 14, no. 2 (2015): 442-451. http://hdl.handle.net/10871/18371.

[336] Examples can be found in: Michel Agier, *Managing the Undesirables: Refugee Camps and Humanitarian Government* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011); Polly Pallister-Wilkins, "Im/mobility and humanitarian triage," in *Handbook on Critical Geographies of Migration* (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2019): 372–383, https://doi.org/10.4337/9781786436030.00041; Martina Tazzioli, and Glenda Garelli, "Containment beyond Detention: The Hotspot System and Disrupted Migration Movements across Europe," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 38, no.6 (2020): 1009–1027. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263775818759335.

[337] Cathrine Brun, "Active Waiting and Changing Hopes: Toward a Time Perspective on Protracted Displacement," *Social Analysis* 59, no.1 (2017): 19–37, https://doi.org/10.3167/sa.2015.590102.

[338] Nick Gill, Deirdre Conlon, Dominique Moran, and Andrew Burridge, "Carceral Circuitry: New Directions in Carceral Geography," *Progress in Human Geography* 42, no. 2 (2018): 183–204. https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132516671823.

Differently from the camps, where pre-defined location, design, and program restrict the dynamicity of space, in migrants squats the becoming of individuals affects and is affected by the ongoing actualisation of the border's spatial form.[339]

Squats emerge outside of any predefined enclosure. They are not bound to a precise location, perimeter, or norms of circulation. Rather, they rise from a movement that escapes and opposes control. This insurgent movement discovers the openings left in the process of striation that, through boundaries and check points, attempts to define the border as the space of mere control. Migrants' obstinate movement infiltrates these cracks and inhabits them. Squats, in this sense, resemble those spaces that Maria Lugones calls "hangouts": a form of moving and living at the street level that performs disruptions.[340] The hangout, like the squat, is an occupation of the outside space that does not seek to reproduce new boundaries. On the contrary, it transgresses territorial enclosures and social sameness. It fosters openness of social and spatial systems, intensity of relationships, and sensorial attentiveness.[341] In the same way, the spatiality of the border is shaped by bodies in motion and characterised by many deviations and redirections. The spaces occupied and appropriated for living are mobile, unsettled, in continuous negotiation. They are open to multiple voices, experiences, senses, stories, and different rhythms of life. The interactions, compromises, and struggles that take place along and across the border activate a new becoming and give form to the border as inhabited space.

The endurance of transit movements generates a rupture with the norms of control and introduces the possibility of enacting difference as a mode of being at the border, namely, inhabiting it. This is to say that, while performing insurgent movements, migrants experience other ways of engaging with the border and its complex spatiality. In the moment when individuals interact with space, they disturb and alter it and also modify their own way of being.[342] Movement provokes a rupture within the migrant's experience through the body. For this reason, inhabiting the border can be understood as an insurgent practice that opposes control and restructures conventional ways of living. It disrupts the norm, or rather, the "habitus"

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339 For the same reason (that is to say, to accentuate the close connection of spatial and individual's becoming) this analysis does not consider the local (Hungarian and Serbian) residents of the borderland. Actually, their way of being at the border is not affected by the border regime of control and the physical separation of the fence as the migrant "inhabitants" are.

340 Maria Lugones, *Pilgrimages / Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition against Multiple Oppressions* (Lanham, Boulder, New York, Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2003): 209.

341 Ibid., 220.

342 Cf. with Grabowska anxious architecture and adaptive spatial tactics arising from the trauma of border crossing, in: Grabowska, "Anxious Architecture," 116.

of home.[343] Understanding inhabitation as a spatial rupture and a radical change of habit means to trace a close connection between migrants' squatted spaces and embodied experiences, or better, between spatial forms and modes of being.

At this point, it would be useful to clarify what is meant by "habit" in the context of inhabitation as a space-body entanglement. For this purpose, special attention should be paid to habit's dual capacity of accommodating the duration of being and the change of becoming. The interpretation of habit that this analysis refers to is drawn from the recent elaborations proposed by the readers of Ravaisson, Bergson, and Deleuze.[344] This tradition of study contests the common understanding derived from Descartes, Kant, and Bourdieu (among others), which stresses aspects of repetitiveness, constraint, and unconsciousness in habitual practices.[345] It proposes, instead, a deeper study of the material complexity of habit, in which minds, bodies, and environments interact.[346]

From this perspective, habit does not have to be sought in the mind and its training to habituation. Nor does it reside exclusively in nature. Rather, it emerges from bodily and environmental interplays, which determine the possibility to incorporate change in action. It is a productive capacity that may drive enduring forms of transformation through the engagement of bodies with and within environments.[347] The possibility of habit, therefore, has to be sought in muscles, skin, and nerves in contact with the material features of their surroundings.[348] In the words of Grosz, habit is a "mode of encountering materiality and life".[349] According to this view, the concept of habit can be understood as an affective practice; it has to do with the way the environment impacts the forms of life it accommodates, while these lives themselves transform it in turn.[350]

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343 Michele Lancione, "Radical Housing: on the Politics of Dwelling as Difference," *International Journal of Housing Policy* 20, no.2 (2019): 273-289, https://doi.org/10.1080/19491247.2019.1611121.

344 See, for instance, Elizabeth Grosz, "Habit Today: Ravaisson, Bergson, Deleuze, and Us," *Body and Society*, 19 no. 2–3 (2013): 217–239, https://doi.org/10.1177/1357034X12472544; Clare Carlisle, *On Habit* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014); Chris Shilling, *Changing Bodies. Habit, Crisis, and Creativity* (London: Sage, 2008); Tony Bennett, Francis Dodsworth, Greg Noble, Mary Poovey, and Megan Watkins, "Habit and Habituation: Governance and the Social," *Body & Society* 19, no. 2–3 (2013): 3–29. https://doi.org/10.1177/1357034X13485881; Carolyn Pedwell, "Transforming Habit: Revolution, Routine and Social Change," *Cultural Studies* 31, no.1 (2017): 93-120, https://doi.org/10.1080/09502386.2016.1206134.

345 Catherine Malabou, "Addiction and Grace: Preface to Felix Ravaisson's f Habit," in Felix Ravaisson, *Of Habit*, translated by Clare Carlisle and Mark Sinclair (London: Continuum, 2008): vii-xx.

346 Cf.: Bennett et al., "Habit and Habituation," 12.

347 Cf.: Pedwell, "Transforming Habit," 19.

348 See: Rebecca Coleman, "Habit, Temporality and the Body as Movement: '5:2 your life'," *Somatechnics* 4, no.1 (2014): 76–94, https://doi.org/10.3366/soma.2014.0113.

349 Grosz, "Habit Today," 217.

350 Ibid., 219.

What emerges in this interpretation is the close connection of habit and change being situated in a context of dynamicity and transformation. Thus, one can say that habit manifests at the intersection of being in the physical world and becoming with(in) it. This can be seen in the inhabitation of migrant squats: the practicing of a mode of being at the border and an active engagement with its spatial formation.

The interaction of bodies and space calls attention to intentionality in the practice of inhabitation. This manifests as the capacity of orientation and re-orientation, searching for a certain degree of stability in a condition of movement and in the becoming of space.[351] It is important to underline, however, that stability through practices of inhabitation, occupation, and appropriation does not imply the establishment of fixity. On the contrary, it maintains the orientation toward future movements, a tendency to action. Stability involves the repetition of daily activities, the durable capacity to sustain a precarious life and perform actions with a bearable effort. It is the search for familiarity in a hostile environment, found at the intersection of knowledge handed down over years and newly acquired abilities.[352]

In the migrant squats of Serbia, the endurance of life at the border turns into a material organisation of the spaces inhabited. It involves making room for old habits by laying carpets on the ground to pray together and scratching the building's surface to derive ashes for cooking. Familiarity is found in the way bodies move in space and sit in a circle, recreating a community of people who identify with each other, share food and stories, and find ease in speaking a recognisable language. On the other hand, inhabiting the border also requires inventiveness and strain to adapt unusual tools and outdoor spaces for domestic and private functions.[353] Makeshift showers appear in the rusty wagons of abandoned train stations (fig. 6.1). Tents and sleeping bags arranged side by side make up the rooms of a building, in which the size of the shelter and that of the body almost coincide (fig. 6.2).

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[351] The capacity of orientation has to be understood, in the terms of Sara Ahmed, as something that has to do with movement as much as with the way one resides in space. "Orientation" questions how to inhabit spaces, considering who and what one inhabits with, see: Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects and Others* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006): 3.

[352] In this sense, the actions performed by migrants to recover a certain degree of familiarity and ease resemble what Mariana Ortega calls "hometactics". In the work of Ortega, hometactics manage to recreate a sense of belonging and offer a way to navigate the multiple identities of the self, see: Ortega, *In-between*, 193. In the context of migrants' squats, instead, those actions are related to a more impellent necessity. They are crucial for guaranteeing survival and are performed through the mutual adaptation of body and environment.

[353] Cf. Grabowska, "Anxious Architecture," 123. Border crossers' architecture adapts through modifications, re-appropriations, re-inhabitations. Its origins, functions and identity, in this way, are altered too.

FIG. 6.1 Water collection station in the occupied station of Banja Koviljača (Serbia), September 2020. Source: photo by author.

FIG. 6.2 Sleeping room in the occupied station of Banja Koviljača (Serbia), September 2020. Source: photo by author.

The newly developed habits that open the possibility of being at the border and living otherwise serve as the technology of the body. Habits, in this sense, are the main infrastructure that migrants have at their disposal to initiate the actualisation of the spatial form of inhabitation. Through habits, the process of spatial formation closely relates to human bodies, their movement and capacity for change. Accordingly, it acquires characters of openness and unpredictability. Inhabited spaces are forming where bodies pass and where they pause; such spaces are mobile, unsettled, and scattered, and so are their inhabitants. The relentless movement of border crossers renders these spaces, at times, overcrowded and then suddenly empty: occupied and abandoned. Migrant squats are not defined by exact perimeters, and their locations are unfixed. The distances that separate one from the other are covered by foot, undergo deviations in the continuous redefinition of one's own position and direction. At the same time, these spaces are inscribed in the same relational field that connects geographic, political, social, material, and environmental conditions. While the openness and unpredictability of the spatial formation seem to render squats un-measurable, ungraspable according to traditional geometric conventions, the relational dimension allows reflecting on alternative spatial understandings. In particular, the recognition of interactions and movement in the formation of space leads towards a revision of the traditional interpretation of scale and measure.

In the dynamic, relational field in which migrant squats emerge, it is possible to note the convergence of many spatial scales. These include supranational decision-making processes that establish the access or closure of boundaries, as well as the intervention of human actors and institutions. The distribution and capacity of reception facilities, on the other hand, relate the scale of the nation to that of the local municipalities. Inside migrant squats, all these political and spatial scales solidify through ongoing daily struggles and material adaptations of the site.[354] Multi-scalar interactions direct attention to the limitations imposed by scale as a fixed, nested, and hierarchical convention. According to the common geometric understanding, scale consents to observe selected portions of space, zooming in and out, and leaving distances unchanged. In their geometric understanding, scales and measures facilitate control strategies in the attempt to actualise a fix set of relationships, which are established in the field of virtuality. But, as space acquires an actual dimension, these prove to fail to contain the complexity of the border's formation.

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[354] See: Paolo Novak, "The Flexible Territoriality of Borders," *Geopolitics* 16, no.4 (2011): 741-767, https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2010.494190.

But, if space is in formation, scale must also be considered mobile, active, and transformable.[355] It should be able to shift not only across spaces and the geographic realm but also from spaces to bodies. It should move from the surface of the terrain to that of the skin, as to include the bodies, the objects, and the environments that partake in the process of formation. For this reason, scale has to be understood as heterogeneous and unpredictable too, neither totally quantifiable nor universally recognised.[356] The study of space and the tools to approach it, such as scale and measure, must accommodate temporal and sensorial experiences, changes, and reorientations. They should take into account the inevitable possibility that something may get lost.

This does not mean that it is impossible to measure the spatial dimension of the border, but rather that a multi-dimensional, multi-scalar, and open approach is needed. In this regard, rethinking the border as a formation—meaning a concrete spatial system and an ongoing process— allows for a mobile, transformative understanding of its spatial properties oriented towards the border's material becoming. The spatial characters that this thesis presents as pertaining tot he actual dimension of the border's formation, plasticity and multiplicity, force to reconsider conventional tools and parametres for the analysis of space.

Multiplicity, as ontological feature of border spatiality, replaces scale, measures and distances with multi-scalarity and multi-dimensionality. Rethinking scale and measure in plural terms means to engage with openness of the process of formation, its temporality and transformability. Multi-scalarity and multi-dimensionality, in this sense, make room for intensive rather than extensive features of space, and allow therefore difference to overturn established spatial forms.

In emphasising relationships, movement, and becoming of the border, however, one must not lose sight of the fact that the interactions in which bodies and spaces are implicated are also traumatic. Living at the border is a practice which is always under threat of criminalisation, incarceration, forced return, and even death. It requires the aptitude and readiness to move somewhere else where the possibility of life manifests again. The inhabitation of the border, in this sense, shows the capacity to account for movement and change and also to incorporate long times of suffering. Habit consolidates the pain of everyday struggles, the endurance of hunger and

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[355] As Cobarrubias claims in: Sebastian Cobarrubias, "Scale in motion? Rethinking Scalar Production and Border Externalization," *Political Geography* 80 (2020): 1-11, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2020.102184.

[356] Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, "On Nonscalability: The Living World is not Amenable to Precision-nested Scales," *Common Knowledge* 18, no.3 (2012): 505-524, https://doi.org/10.1215/0961754X-1630424.

thirst, heat and cold, insect bites and stinging brushwood.[357] The mode of being at the border, therefore, is a mode of being in pain. In the same way, the spatial form of inhabitation is one fundamentally hostile, or "uninhabitable".[358]

The problem of in/un-habitation at the border has to do with both a material and a political condition of impossibility of life. Inhabiting the border consists of being in a prohibited place. To this extent, it is an insurgent act that affirms one's own presence in the material and the political space.[359]

This political affirmation is not based on the norm, on the status of rights imposed by law. Rather, it is possible through the body claiming a right to survival.[360] The way migrants engage with space and render it inhabitable diverges from the notion of citizenship and disrupts the norms of hospitality in which hosts and guests are differentiated.[361] They enact the right to move,[362] to be, and to reside directly in space. Actions of movement and inhabitation depict a different image of the migrant: no longer a victim, weak and in need of help. On the contrary, they accentuate migrants' decisional capacity, inventiveness, and autonomous initiative, linking physical mobility to political mobilization.[363]

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[357] The everyday suffering by inhabiting the border can relate to what other scholars address as a condition of slow violence. See, for instance: Estela Schindel, "Death by 'Nature': The European Border Regime and the Spatial Production of Slow Violence," *Politics and Space C* 40, no. 2 (2022): 428–46. https://doi.org/10.1177/2399654419884948.

[358] For the concept of the uninhabitable as a spatial and political condition see: AbdouMaliq Simone, "The Uninhabitable? In between Collapsed yet still Rigid Distinctions," *Cultural Politics* 12, no.2 (2016): 135-154, https://doi.org/10.1215/17432197-3592052; see also: Camillo Boano and Giovanna Astolfo, "Inhabitation as more-than-dwelling. Notes for a Renewed Grammar," *International Journal of Housing Policy* 20, no.4 (2020): 555-577, https://doi.org/10.1080/19491247.2020.1759486; and: Lancione, "Radical Housing."

[359] Cf.: Nicolas De Genova, "Conflicts of Mobility and the Mobility of Conflict: Rightlessness, Presence, Subjectivity, Freedom," *Subjectivity* 29 (2009): 445–466, https://doi.org/10.1057/sub.2009.22.

[360] See: Ilana Feldman, "The Humanitarian Condition: Palestinian Refugees and the Politics of Living," *Humanity* 3 (2012): 155–72, doi:10.1353/hum.2012.0017.

[361] Deanna Dadusc, Margherita Grazioli, and Miguel A. Martínez, "Introduction: Citizenship as Inhabitance? Migrant Housing Squats versus Institutional Accommodation," *Citizenship Studie* 23, no.6 (2019): 521-539, doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/13621025.2019.1634311.

[362] In this sense, not only is the movement of migrants a political expression of autonomy, as argued in the works of Mezzadra and Papadopoulous et al. - Sandro Mezzadra, "The Right to Escape," and: Dimitris Papadopoulous, Niamh Stephenson, and Vassilis Tsianos, *Escape Routes: Control and Subversion in the 21*st *Century* (London: Pluto Press, 2008) - but also inhabitation at the border is understood as a political act.

[363] Sandro Mezzadra, "The Gaze of Autonomy: Capitalism, Migration and Social Struggles," in *The Contested Politics of Migration: Borderzones and Irregularity*, ed. Vicki Squire (New York: Routledge, 2011): 121–142.

Migrants' decision to inhabit the border can be seen in the view of a transformation of the notions of citizenship, status, and rights in which they are no longer based on a concession from above, but rather enacted, practiced and, especially, negotiated across different grounds. By recognising the plurality of practices and compromises of migration, it becomes increasingly difficult to trace neat dichotomies between host and guest, threat and security, victims and oppressors, power and resistance. That is to say that one must acknowledge a certain degree of ambiguity in border struggles, originated by the mutual and multiple interactions of powers and oppositions.[364] This serves to foster an understanding of migrants' agency and resistance not as a direct reaction to the fence, but as a complex series of practices situated on a wider relational field in which the becoming of space is also entangled.[365] In a nutshell, the political dimension of inhabitation expresses an additional feature of multiplicity, as the recognition of difference in the way of acting politically.

6.4 Leaving behind and Moving Forward: Indices of Presence, Violence, and Flight

The previous section has offered the conceptual basis to understand inhabitation as both a mode of being at the border and a spatial form. The concept of habit has helped to address multiplicity from both a relational and material perspective. In relational terms, multiplicity extends from the individual moving across borders who escapes fixed categories of identity, to a complex sense of space in which relations of a different nature entangle. The bodies in motion engage with space, bring to the surface particular relational entanglements (geographic, social, political) and produce concrete transformations. Multiplicity, at this point, manifests concretely through the impossibility of framing space into fixed scales and measures. Therefore, it is necessary to reinterpret these parametres in plural terms of multi-scalarity and multi-dimensionality as to account for the intensive capacity of space. That is to say the capacity of difference to unhinge the imposition of a predetermined, arbitrary spatial form.

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[364] See: Vicki Squire, "Acts of Desertion: Abandonment and Renouncement at the Sonoran Borderzone," *Antipode* 47, no.2 (2014): 500-516, https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12118.

[365] As Lugones clarifies through the concept of "hangouts", mentioned earlier, acts of resistance are not just a direct opposition to a single form of oppression. Resistance should be understood as a multiple set of critical interventions that challenge complex structures of domination. See: Lugones, *Pilgrimages / Peregrinajes,* 215, 221-223.

How, then, can a study of spatial formation be fostered which is able to account for the material dimension of its multiplicity? And, to what extent can zthe intensive capacity of space be grasped rather than measured?

Recalling the specific conditions that guarantee the continuation of transit, crossing, and inhabitation across Serbia, one can notice that not only spatial and human interactions are implicated, but tools, objects, and concrete infrastructures also acquire an active role in conjunction with them.[366] Accordingly, the matter of objects and the concrete component of their relations deserve special attention. The papers proving the registration in reception centres, the trains, buses, and taxis that transfer migrants across the country, the camps, the goods (shoes, blankets, backpacks, sleeping bags, tents, food) provided by humanitarian workers, the personal belongings of migrants (cell phones, SIM cards, power banks and money) are all incorporated, both in migratory experience and in the process of shaping inhabitable spaces.

In the ever-expanding field of critical migration studies, a growing number of scholars are investigating the role of objects in migratory phenomena. The philosophy of Bruno Latour and Arjun Appadurai's work represent two of the most decisive influences in this trend. They discuss the possible arrangements in which things can be organised, expanding the possibilities of action,[367] and open the study of things to questions of value, exchange, and mobility.[368] The interest in the connections of non-human and human mobility has proliferated in a manifold of methods and case studies.[369] A large scholarship has tested the potential of objects themselves as a heuristic lens. Biographical approaches, for instance, allow shifting the attention from the individual to the apparently insignificant, mundane things, bringing to the fore hidden aspects of everyday life.[370] Material elements and migrants' belongings can offer an alternative narrative of trauma and dramatic experiences, mediating sensitive conversations and opening an embodied perspective to the audience through the engagement with things.[371]

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[366] Cf. Bennett, "The Force of Things," 353-354.

[367] Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An introduction to actor-network-theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[368] Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in cultural perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

[369] For a more complete overview, see: Friedemann Yi-Neumann, Andrea Lauser, Antonie Fuhse, and Peter J. Bräunlein, eds., *Material Culture and (Forced) Migration* (London: UCL Press, 2022).

[370] See, for instance: Dudley, "Feeling at Home."

[371] Tuulikki Kurki, "Materialized Trauma Narratives of Border Crossings," *Folkloree* 83 (2021): 81-104, https://doi.org/10.7592/FEJF2021.83.kurki

Other interesting, recent explorations investigate the intersection between material culture and migration, bridging the methods of various disciplines and moving across the fields of anthropology and archaeology,[372] art,[373] curatorial projects,[374] and forensic approaches.[375] Research and art projects experiment with new modes of accumulation, assemblage, cataloguing, and reinterpretation of artefacts and their remains, seeking to shed light on complex entanglements of bodies and things. The focus in these cases is not only on the possessions of humans. It expands to the landscapes surrounding migratory phenomena, enmeshing the non-human in the intricate net of social, economic, geographic, and political relations. Such projects call readers and spectators to question the role things may assume in episodes of struggle and survival, how they can become vehicles of hidden stories or evidence of rights violations. By shifting the attention to things in their damaged, worn, or dirty condition, the authors avoid any form of metaphor, mediated representation, or romanticised narration. They stress, instead, the raw and embodied trauma of border violence, which characterises not an exceptional situation, but rather the everyday migrant life.

Archaeological methods, in particular, offer very relevant insights to record and document the material and spatial dimension of the border. The field observations from an archaeological perspective result in detailed narrations of material stories.[376] They interrogate the objects encountered on site to accentuate the specificity of

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[372] See the work of Yannis Hamilakis: Yannis Hamilakis, "Archaeologies of Forced and Undocumented Migration," *Journal of Contemporary Archaeology* 3, no.2 (2016): 121–39, https://doi.org/10.1558/jca.32409; Yannis Hamilakis, ed., *The New Nomadic Age: Archaeologies of Forced and Undocumented Migration* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2018); Jason De León, "Victor, Archaeology of the Contemporary, and the Politics of Researching Unauthorized Border Crossing: A Brief and Personal History of the Undocumented Migration Project," *Forum Kritische Archäologie* 1 (2012): 141-148, https://doi.org/10.6105/journal.fka.2012.1.19 . See also: Sarah Mallet and Louise Fowler, "The Dzhangal Archaeology Project and 'Lande': Two Archaeological Approaches to the Study of Forced Migration," in *Material Culture and (Forced) Migration*, Yi-Neumann et al. eds. (London: UCL Press, 2022): 125-146.

[373] See the artwork of Ai Weiwei "Safe Passage": Leah Asmelash, "The Entrance to a Minneapolis Museum Has Been Covered with 2,400 Life Jackets that Refugees Once Wore." *CNN* (February 21, 2020), https://cnn.it/395Wx0i. See the exhibition "State of Exception/Estado de Excepción" created by artist/photographer Richard Barnes and artist/curator Amanda Krugliak in collaboration with Jason De León (more information are available at: https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/105034/state-of-exception-estado-de-excepcin/). See also the art project "Border Cantos" by photographer Richard Misrach and composer/artist Guillermo Galindo, and the installation "La Mer Morte" by artist Kader Attia.

[374] Ayşe Şanlı, "Undocumented Migration and the Multiplicity of Object Lives," in *Material Culture and (Forced) Migration*, Yi-Neumann et al. eds. (London: UCL Press, 2022): 147-156, and: Sandra Dudley, *Displaced Things in Museums and Beyond: Loss, Liminality and Hopeful Encounters* (New York: Routledge, 2020).

[375] See for instance the project "Forensic Oceanography" by Charles Heller and Lorenzo Pezzani, started within the framework of Forensic Architecture. More information about the project can be found at the following link: https://forensic-architecture.org/category/forensic-oceanography.

[376] See: Yannis Hamilakis, "Drawing the Future in the Ashes: The Ruins of Moria and the Materiality of Migration," *American Anthropologist Online* (2022), https://www.americananthropologist.org/moria/hamilakis.

topographic, cultural, and economic features and their concrete impact on the shaping of movement.[377] But, especially, they call attention to the fact that material traces do remain inscribed in the spaces where migrant communities pass through and live. Stories of migration, in this way, become part of history and collective memory.

The following analysis draws from the ongoing investigations of material culture and critical migration studies and aims to relate the materiality of the border's spatial formation to questions of meaning. Meaning, here, relates to the significance of things in terms of their productive and generative capacities within the migratory experience. In other words, the entanglement of matter and meaning is observed as a "doing", as concrete elements and actions.[378] This serves to recognise the active role of objects in the process of becoming of the border and challenge assumptions of neutrality commonly related to the non-human. Things, as material-discursive aggregates, are part of the larger diagram of discourses, legislations, and political speeches that is at the basis of the process of actualisation (as discussed in the second chapter of this thesis). This recalls how the spatial formation in its virtual dimension does not exclusively involve the supranational level of law and politics. It also comprises a larger set of discursive-material practices in the making, which implicate the smallest scale of things and bodies. In this sense, the analysis of things and material traces left in the process of border formation expands the connections of matter and discourse, human and non-human, nature and culture, and stresses their mutual articulation and concrete, physical form.

If material elements are part of the formation of space, in a process of becoming, their relationship with meaning is also unsettled and in continuous redefinition. The analysis of things and their significance, accordingly, should be understood as a practice that captures developments in the making and, at the same time, remains open to modifications. This approach entails that knowing, as a practice that engages with the material world and its becoming, should move in the direction of

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[377] See: Jason De León, J. "Undocumented Migration, Use Wear, and the Materiality of Habitual Suffering in the Sonoran Desert," *Journal of Material Culture* 18, no.4 (2013): 321-345, https://doi.org/10.1177/1359183513496489.

[378] The understanding of relationships as a "doing" can also be synthesised through the concept of "intra-actions", referring to the terminology of Karen Barad. Intra-actions stress the inseparable character of material-discursive configurations, which constitute the world as open-ended and in becoming. In addition, Barad's concept of intra-actions highlights the concrete, material dimension of relationships and defines a different way of engaging with their study, namely, through an ontoepistemological approach, as will be discussed later. See: Karen M. Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity" *Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28, no.3 (2003): 801-831, https://doi.org/10.1086/345321; and: Karen M. Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007).

onto-epistemology.[379] This approach favours the mapping of connections between concepts and objects without seeking to fix definitions and meanings. Rather, onto-epistemology wants to make room for expansion and change. In this sense, the study of objects and material traces is different from forensic approaches, which search for evidence to provide a clear explanation of facts. The analysis proposes, instead, an indexical approach to materiality that multiplies the possibilities of meaning and interpretation. In this sense, an indexical reading involves matter in the intensive capacity of space, which is oriented towards transformability, hence, multiplicity.

The understanding of index, in this context, is derived from Charles Sanders Peirce's *Logic as Semiotic*. In his theory of signs, Peirce distinguishes three possible interpretations that relate signs to their objects: icons, symbols, and indices. The first denotes the object by virtue of its own characters, manifesting its qualities regardless of the actual existence of the object. Differently, the symbol defines the object by virtue of law, thus, it depends on the norms established and recognised by an interpreting subject. Finally, the index marks an existential relation between sign and object. The index is affected by the object and is actually modified by a concrete interaction with it.[380] Following this last interpretation, the analysis of things as indices of presence, violence, and flight aims to shed light on events and experiences through signs of physical contact as a practice of sensorial attentiveness.

From this perspective, objects at the border do constitute evidence of facts, yet, they do not testify to an incontrovertible truth. Actually, indices mark a disconnection in time, a lack of synchrony between the moment of material contact and the manifestation of its traces.[381] Therefore, the event that left a concrete trace cannot be recovered in its entirety. Taking distance from the logic of identity, resemblance, or proof,[382] the indexical approach entails relation, interpretation, and decision.[383] Here, the open, unsettled, and doubtful character of the index emerges; the identification of a relationship requires questioning and the formulation of a hypothesis of meaning. This is sought at the intersection of context —the spatial, material, and relational environment, in which contact has occurred— and narration.

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379 Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 89-94; 185.

380 Justus Buchler, ed., *Philosophical Writings of Peirce* (New York: Dover Publications, 1955):101-102.

381 See: Kirs Paulsen, *Here/There. Telepresence, Touch and Art in the Interface* (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 2017): 19.

382 Or logics of "figuration", in the words of Georges Didi-Huberman, see: Georges Didi-Huberman, and Thomas Repensek, "The Index of the Absent Wound (Monograph on a Stain)," *October* 29 (1984): 63–81. https://doi.org/10.2307/778307.

383 Paulsen, *Here/There*, 29.

Context and narration bring in characters of contingency and partiality, as well as the possibility of change through the redefinition of interpretations. These two characters highlight both a potential and a limitation of the analysis. The first consists of the possibility of finding multiplicity within materiality through different aggregations, in which matter and meaning can be assembled. The limitation resides in the impossibility of the researcher/observer to grasp the totality of the event and to acquire a fully embodied knowledge. This is due to the inevitable external position of the observer, a privilege of not inhabiting the border. Exposing the difficulty of understanding and the ambiguity of material traces, the index does not make claims of truth. Instead, it calls for attention.[384] It points straight to the struggle of survival and prevents the observer from looking away. The observer cannot be passive or indifferent in an encounter with the index. S/he is affected and moved, reoriented from the past of the event to the present of the encounter. The index actively engages with the observer and becomes productive through the stimulation of deeper exploration and reflection.

6.4.1 Indices of Presence

To a certain extent, all the material things and traces that have been observed on site testify to the passage and the presence of migrants. However, the objects of this first analysis address the problem of attention at a wider, geographic scale. The purpose is that of highlighting the proliferation of migrant squats in Serbia and engaging with the study of a more durable form of presence and endurance of transit. In this regard, indices bring attention back to a territory that has progressively fallen to the background in the media and political focus.

During the peak of 2014-2016, Serbia had been at the centre of debates and news on migratory events, attracting a large number of international volunteers, journalists, NGOs, and researchers. Later, the emergence of new routes towards Bosnia and Croatia determined not only the movement of migrants, but also a redirection of humanitarian aid (involving especially the non-local organisations) and a shift of the attention of journalists and researchers.[385] Although the number of informally-settled people, along with violence and tensions, is incessantly rising

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384 Ibid., 27.

385 See: Claudio Minca and Dragan Umek, "The New Front of the Refugee Crisis in the Balkans," *Society+Space* (February 14, 2019), bit.ly/3GAY1Mu; and: Claudio Minca and Dragan Umek, "Landscapes Of Precarity And Vulnerability: Makeshift Refugee Camps in the Balkan Region," *Society+Space* (February 25, 2019) https://bit.ly/3NO3f9Y.

along Bosnian and Croatian borders, an equally large number of migrants are still stranded in Serbia. The necessity of bringing attention to squats is even more urgent at the local scale, where the lives of citizens and those of migrants scarcely intersect. Given their hidden and peripheral location, makeshift camps constitute an unknown geography, and their existence can easily go unnoticed. The study of informal encampments as material traces of presence helps to make sense of the durable time of migration and the structural character of violence. It examines how those are inscribed in a thick net of relationships, which link care, control, politics, and economy and pushes us to reflect on meaning and matter of life at the border.

As already mentioned, the occupation of abandoned buildings is a practice closely related to movement, the factors that favour it, and those which hinders it. This does not mean that it is a carefully organised strategy, but neither is it accidental. Rather, it is dynamic, precarious, and influenced by many causes. The proximity of reception centres usually plays a role in the very first phase of the emergence of squats.

Over time, their rearrangements, dislocations, or expansions follow the directions of smugglers and the discovery of new informal crossing points. The way in which occupied spaces are used and what they are intended for changes in relation to the distance of the border. The closer it is and the more chances of making a successful crossing, the more people decide to settle down and stay as long as the preparation for the next move requires. In other words, not only the use but also the meaning of such spaces is affected by movement. Open spaces, such as the parks in Belgrade, are not so much intended for inhabitation as they are for information, exchange, and for passing time. Their occupation, therefore, does not leave concrete traces on objects or spatial arrangements. Rather, it is only visible through the physical presence of people.

The situation is reversed along the border zone, in which the use of inside and outside spaces, as well as the daytime and night-time activity, is completely reconfigured. Closer to the Hungarian border, in villages such as Horgoš and Majdan, those who settle in view of crossing tend to stay away from public, open areas. Instead, they appropriate abandoned buildings (houses, stables, old stations, factories) and reorganise them as much as possible into living spaces. Things which are found on site, recovered from the trash, or donated by volunteers form minimal furniture to sustain survival.

FIG. 6.3 Water collection station in the occupied farm. Horgoš (Serbia), September 2020. Source: photo by author.

This is generally made up of a few mattresses lying on the ground (fig. 5.18, 5.20, 5.23), sleeping bags and some blankets. Buckets and a few pots serve the functions of the kitchen or are used for washing (fig. 6.3). All these items suggest the carrying out of domestic activities,[386] shading them with a gloom of desolation and abandonment.

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[386] Cf. Grabowska, "Anxious Architecture," 127.

FIG. 6.4 Shoes left in the sun in the occupied farm. Horgoš (Serbia), September 2020. Source: photo by author.

In the occupied houses of border villages, the daytime hours are the time of rest. They are quiet to such an extent that it is often difficult to determine which spaces are still used as squats and which, instead, have already been emptied. The objects left outside, scattered here and there, are the only clues of presence, proving that some sort of movement has occurred. Mismatched shoes with broken soles and holes come out of the tall grass, showing that they have fulfilled their task and are now useless (fig. 6.4 and 6.5).[387] In the daylight migrant squats convey a sense of inertia and surrender. This impression, however, is inaccurate. The still daytime is actually layered by potential action. It is a time of vigilance and attention to what is happening around, a mode of waiting oriented toward the upcoming opportunity of movement and change.[388]

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[387] Cf. with the role of shoes discussed in: De León, "Undocumented Migration, Use Wear, and the Materiality of Habitual Suffering in the Sonoran Desert."

[388] Shahram Khosravi, "Waiting, a State of Consciousness," in *Waiting and the Temporalities of Irregular Migration* eds. Christine M. Jacobsen, Marry-Anne Karlsen, and Shahram Khosravi (London and New York: Routledge, 2021): 205, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429351730 .

There is a marked acceleration from the apparent stillness and slowness of the daytime hours to the activity of crossings during the night.[389] Therefore, waiting during the day becomes itself an activity functional to the preparation for a (potentially) successful crossing, charged with hope and determination. The time of waiting is informed by past experiences, filled by the stories of others, enriched with practical advice on the best routes and on tactics to avoid the police. It also possesses the projective capacity to imagine one's own presence elsewhere.[390]

Although border crossers experience a certain degree of freedom and even excitement during waiting times,[391] their actual condition remains inscribed in precariousness and risk. The long-awaited attempt of crossing can be unsuccessful and result in apprehension or violent push-backs. On the other hand, one must consider that the duration of the waiting time is not always under control of each individual. While large attention has been paid to the role of state authorities and reception strategies in regulating migrants' time,[392] hierarchies of power also persist in informal camps, where decisions and movements are negotiated within smuggling networks.[393] All these factors generate differences within the community of border crossers, cause frustration and may increase the sense of being stuck.

[389] See the work of the filmmaker Laura Waddington, in particular the documentary "Border": https://www.laurawaddington.com/films/1/border. Accessed on 14-03-2023.

[390] Cf. with the concept of active waiting (previously mentioned) in: Brun, "Active Waiting and Changing Hopes."

[391] See for instance the case of Site Survey#5 in chapter five.

[392] See: Ruben Andresson, "Time and the Migrant Other: European Border Controls and the Temporal Economics of Illegality," *American Anthropologist* 116, no. 4 (2014): 795-809, https://doi.org/10.1111/aman.12148; Melanie B. E. Griffiths, "Out of Time: The Temporal Uncertainties of Refused Asylum Seekers and Immigration Detainees," Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies 40, no.12 (2014): 1991-2009, https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2014.907737; Katerina Rozakou, "The Violence of Accelerated Time: Waiting and Hasting during 'the Long Summer of Migration' in Greece" in *Waiting and the Temporalities of Irregular Migration,* eds. Jacobsen et al. (London and New York: Routledge, 2021):23-39.

[393] Cf. Grabowska, "Anxious Architecture," 121.

Indices of Violence

The things that populate migrant squats do not only inform about the carrying out of life at the border but also describe the continuation of transit. Sport shoes are especially significant in the context of the Balkan Route, as they point out the most common way to move across the border, namely, on foot. In addition, they also point to a specific entanglement of practices of aid and related strategies of control. Along with shoes, also clothes, sleeping bags, blankets and tents constitute a large part of the provisions offered by NGOs and volunteers that operate outside the national channels of reception. The groups of aid workers who reach migrants in their hiding spaces represent a different type of humanitarianism that possesses qualities of political solidarity.[394] With their donations, mobile grassroots-level organisations not only deal with the distribution of basic necessities but also provide those tools that allow migrants to keep walking. It is through their material support, therefore, that humanitarian actors take a clear political stance in favour of the right to move. Among the things supplied, even the objects not commonly associated to movement, such as clothes and blankets, can turn into special technologies in the context of border crossings. Their use can change and adapt to protect from razor wire cuts and to facilitate climbing or digging across the fence according to the particular kind of knowledge developed on the move.[395]

To be able to reach migrant communities and to navigate the unstable geography of squats, humanitarian workers also engage in the interpretation of material traces of migrants' presence. The signs of a break-in into an abandoned building (fig. 6.6) or the remains of a fireplace (fig. 6.7) inform them of the possible presence of people in transit. Yet, the same buildings and objects may also turn into the concrete ground of border struggles. Humanitarians are not the only ones to go in search of makeshift camps. The police and local authorities operate a similar interpretation of traces to detect the settlement of irregular(ised) people.[396]

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[394] The relationship between practices of solidarity, humanitarianism, and political activism has been studied in detail in the works of various scholars, see among others: Óscar García Agustín, Martin Bak Jørgensen, *Solidarity and the 'Refugee Crisis' in Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2019) https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-91848-8; Robert Vandevoordt, "Subversive Humanitarianism: Rethinking Refugee Solidarity through Grass-roots Initiatives". *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 38 (2019): 245–265, https://doi.org/10.1093/rsq/hdz008; Donatella Della Porta, ed., *Solidarity Mobilizations in the 'Refugee Crisis'* (Palgrave Studies in European Political Sociology 2018).

[395] On the relationship of movement and tactical, material knowledge see: Jason De León, "'Better to Be Hot than Caught': Excavating the Conflicting Roles of Migrant Material Culture," *American Anthropologist* 114, no.3 (2012): 477–49, http://www.jstor.org/stable/23322335.

[396] Cf. with the idea of architecture as an "exposing trace" in: Grabowska, "Anxious Architecture," 122.

FIG. 6.6 Open gates of the apparently empty or abandoned properties may suggest the presence of migrants in border villages. Majdan (Serbia), September 2020. Source: photo by author.

FIG. 6.7 Remains of a fireplace in Majdan (Serbia), September 2020. Source: photo by author.

The cases of Belgrade and Subotica are exemplary of the way violence can be exerted through the very buildings and occupied spaces. In the capital city, the people in transit have been progressively removed from public view through several interventions. First, they have been pushed from the urban parks in Savamala neighbourhood into the barracks along the river front. Their permanence in the shacks lasted until the evictions of 2016, when the urban plan for the Waterfront Project forced people out again and determined the demolition of the barracks.[397] The eviction, in this case, was organised, massive, and rapid. Nowadays, construction fences and glass buildings cover any trace of migrants' earlier occupation. The urban renovation of Savamala resulted in the relocation of some of the people to reception facilities, while others attempted to move north and settled informally. Those in transit to the Hungarian border found shelter in an old brick factory nearby the station of Subotica and turned it into the first and, at that time, most crowded migrant squat.

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397 Jelena Obradovic-Wochnik, "Urban Geographies of Refugee Journeys: Biopolitics, Neoliberalism and Contestation over Public Space in Belgrade," *Political Geography* 67 (2018): 65–75, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2018.08.017.

The stay, however, did not remain undisturbed for long. After a first eviction from the factory, migrants were later denied the possibility of finding shelter in the abandoned buildings of the old train station, as reported by the migrants during the field visit in Subotica.[398] The local police, with the help of a few residents, intervened by bricking up the openings of the few run-down structures in the proximity of the station (fig. 5.13, 5.15, 6.8, 6.9).[399] By materially obstructing the possibility of shelter, local authorities not only attempt to remove migrants from public view but also expose them to atmospheric agents, enacting a slower, prolonged, practice of violence.[400] Occupied spaces, therefore, are sites at which migrants recover only a temporary sense of familiarity. In the event of evictions, demolitions, and obstructions, they are reminded that the home is never their own, but can be taken away at any time.[401] Migrants inhabiting the border are always ready to leave, both in the attempt of new crossings and in search for a new safe place to stay.

Yet, the destruction of migrants' personal belongings and, particularly, cell phones is also one of the most widespread practices of violence perpetrated by border guards and police officers in episodes of push-back.[402] These acts are aimed at hindering the mobility of migrants, impeding the use of GPS, and discouraging future attempts of crossing. Many of those who have been captured along the borders of Balkan countries have reported the damaging of possessions, the theft of money, and unjustified confiscations of backpacks, food, or power banks.[403] Others confided that they have been forced to undress and were exposed to very low temperatures for a prolonged period of time.[404]

The humiliation and physical pain inflicted on people and the dispossession and destruction of personal items trap bodies and objects in a tangle of violence and rights violations. This tangle is systematic, arbitrary and, above all, it is an end in itself.

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[398] See Site Survey#4 in chapter five.

[399] See chapter five in this dissertation.

[400] See: Schindel, "Death by 'Nature'".

[401] See: Georgina Ramsay, "Materialising Transformative Futures," in *Material Culture and (Forced) Migration*, Yi-Neumann et al. eds. (London: UCL Press, 2022): 33-52.

[402] The various forms of violence perpetrated during push-backs are regularly collected and catalogued in the Border Violence Monitoring Network's database. The data collected is also published monthly in the form of regional reports and special reports, available at: www.borderviolence.eu. See also: BVMN, *The Black Book of Push Backs*, Volumes I and II (2020), https://bit.ly/3zgcVGx. Accessed on 01-12-2022.

[403] See: Karolina Augustova and Jack Sapoch "Border Violence as Border Deterrence: Condensed Analysis of Violent Push-Backs from the Ground". *Movements* 5, no.1 (2020): 219-231.

[404] BVMN, "Annual Torture Report 2020" (2020), https://www.borderviolence.eu/annual-torture-report-2020/. Accessed on 01-12-2022.

FIG. 6.8 Building sealed with bricks and concrete by the local authorities to prevent migrants from sheltering. Subotica (Serbia), September 2020. Source: photo by author.

FIG. 6.9 Small structure sealed by the local authorities in the proximity of the station of Subotica to prevent migrants from sheltering. Subotica (Serbia), September 2020. Source: photo by author.

Indices of Flight

In the large aggregate of items that are found in the proximity of the border, the tools in use and those which have accomplished their function, those lost and those that have been thrown away blur the labile margins of presence and absence. From an indexical perspective, the encounter with these things on the ground calls for attention and tries to retrace, as much as possible, fragmented and ambiguous stories of capture and escape. The material remains that testify to the passage of migrants invite the observer to discard simplistic conclusions and ponder a larger number of possible explanations.

In contrast, the most common rhetoric that surrounds the debates on illegal(ised) border crossings in Europe, as well as around the world, tends to label these remains as "trash".[405] This is not just a simplistic interpretation but a specific, productive meaning of migration, which reorients discourses and political actions. This terminology that gravitates around the idea of garbage and dirt is, in fact, a powerful tool to depict migrants' behaviour as uncivilised, harmful for the community and the environment, and even dangerous for citizens' health.[406] Such discourses, therefore, push for urgent and drastic measures aimed at "cleaning up" the border not only from the garbage but especially from those who produce it. In other cases, language and images of trash can be associated with migrants' living conditions, and become analogies of being treated "like trash".[407] The media and political discourses that define material traces as garbage, whether they are aimed at denigrating migrants or empathising with their dramatic situation, share a common limitation.

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[405] For the context of the U.S.–Mexico border see: Jason De León, "Undocumented Migration, Use Wear, and the Materiality of Habitual Suffering in the Sonoran Desert."; Juanita Sundberg, "'Trash-talk' and the Production of Quotidian Geopolitical Boundaries in the USA–Mexico Borderlands," *Social & Cultural Geography* 9, no.8 (2008): 871–890, https://doi.org/10.1080/14649360802441424; and Vicki Squire, "Desert 'trash': Posthumanism, Border Struggles, and Humanitarian Politics," *Political Geography* 39 (2014):11–21, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2013.12.003.

[406] See: Cyberpress, "The civil guards of Sopronkövesd cleaned their environment". *Cyberpress.* (May 17, 2022) https://cyberpress.hu/megtisztitottak-kornyezetuket-a-sopronkovesdi-polgarorok/. Accessed on 13-12-2022; Alfahir, "Digging pile: Shocking what was lurking in UN backpacks abandoned by migrants". *Alfahir* (July 30, 2016) https://alfahir.hu/2016/07/30/toroczkai_laszlo_asotthalom_migrans_bevandorlas. Accessed on 13-12-2022; Alfahir, "Péter Tóth: Let's clean the Horgos railway line from the filth of migrants!" *Alfahir* (October 05, 2015). https://alfahir.hu/toth_peter_tisztitsuk_meg_horgosi_vasutvonalat_a_migransok_mocskatol. Accessed on 13-12-2022; Zsolt Kerner, "Chief medical officer: Treat migrants' garbage only with rubber gloves because it can infect". *24.HU* (September 16, 2015) https://24.hu/kozelet/2015/09/16/tisztifoorvos-migrancsok-szemetet-csak-gumikesztyuvel-kezeld-mert-fertozhet/. Accessed on 13-12-2022.

[407] Cf.: Squire, "Desert 'trash'," 17.

In both cases, the reasons and processes that underlie the emergence of such traces remain obscure.[408] Narratives of trash do not inquire about the many different causes that force or motivate migrants to inhabit the border, the risks to which their lives are exposed on a daily basis, and the reasons why certain objects are left behind.

During the field visits to Serbia and Hungary, the quantity and spread of objects left behind generated different reflections on either side of the border. For what concerns the Serbian context, the presence of things which seemed abandoned or thrown-away raised doubt as to whether someone was still inhabiting the place or not. They opened questions on whether the person to whom they belong succeeded in crossing the border or whether they would soon return to use them. Mattresses, blankets, and pots left unattended for several days may be recovered by other border crossers and put back into operation. On the "outside" of the border, the apparent neglect of spaces and things suggests that life in Serbia is a very temporary condition of transit. Buildings and objects are treated as tools, functional for a temporary scope, and seem to establish no affective relationship with their owners. For this reason, they are prepared to be abandoned at any moment, as soon as the chance for a better life appears.

The things left behind by migrants blend into the landscape of desolation that characterises Serbian border villages. These small towns, abandoned and forgotten by many of their own residents, tell the story of those who have left in search of better opportunities. In this sense, migrants and local residents seem to share the same view of a future that will continue far away from the border.

On the opposite side of the fence, in the woods of Àsotthalom, plastic bags, clothes, water bottles, and broken shoes—colloquially called "migrants' trash"—become elements of a much more violent environment. They are clues for the local guards to uncover new hiding stations, where those who managed to climb the fence wait for their smugglers. Border crossers get rid of any superfluous item which may reveal their previous stay in Serbia or be too bulky for the overcrowded vans that will take them north (fig. 6.10 and fig. 6.11).

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[408] Cf.: Sundberg, "'Trash-talk' and the Production of Quotidian Geopolitical Boundaries in the USA–Mexico Borderlands," 874.

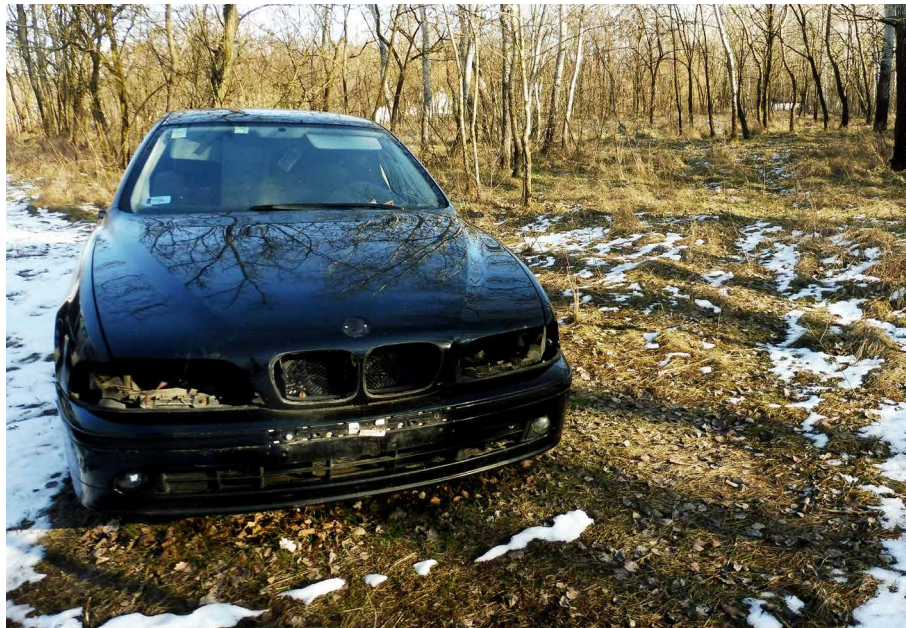FIG. 6.10 Sleeping bags left in the forest of Àsotthalom (Hungary), January 2022. Source: photo by author.

FIG. 6.11 Clothes and items left behind by migrants after crossing the fence. Àsotthalom (Hungary), January 2022. Source: photo by author.

FIG. 6.12 Car left in the forest, possibly abandoned after a failed attempt of smuggling. Àsotthalom (Hungary), January 2022. Source: photo by author.

Across the hectares of thick woods, not only border crossers but also smugglers leave traces of their activity. It is not rare to see cars abandoned in the forest; their drivers might have been arrested by the police, or they may have managed to run away on foot (fig. 6.12). Local villagers usually do not miss out on the opportunity to convert the pieces of the vehicles into items to trade. Over time, a large quantity of remains has been amassed in the woods. In daylight, the items appear immobile and out of place, but at a closer look they narrate the border struggles happening overnight. Every single object carries within itself the story of a different individual who ventured on that dark and cold journey. Yet, these things do not answer questions on the fate of their owner. No trace of the human is left. The mountain of objects without owners almost merges with the bare terrain, forming a harsh topography of escape.

In the encounter with the objects that have been left behind, the indexical reading of material traces emphasises the absence of an individual who could tell his/her own story.[409] Personal experiences remain hidden from view, and the observer does not take the authority to narrate the story of others. On the other hand, indices reveal the material dimension of the process of spatial formation. They confer concrete, physical qualities to presence, movement, and struggles, which manifest in a manifold of things. Although the indexical approach cannot answer all questions of experience, it does show the potential for an alternative narration of border events that unfolds through space and matter.

Indices render the stories of violence and movement concrete. At the same time, they take distance from the representation of the migrant as a weak and wounded victim. They show violence in its rawness, exposing how its structural perpetration tries to erase the migrant from the border. Through the materiality of traces, the indexical approach produces a different type of knowledge of border events, which is physical but not necessarily bodily. Such knowledge does not seek to provide evidence for specific facts; it does not aspire to absolute legibility of traces, nor does it engage with representation and resemblance. On the contrary, the indexical approach calls attention to the existing materiality in its incomplete, at times obscure, form. It invites us to make room for ambiguity, doubt, and uncertainty in the study of borders. It fosters the acknowledgment of a level of complexity that cannot be reduced to causal, linear explanations, clear representations, fixity/ mobility dichotomies, or all-encompassing definitions. From this perspective, the indexical approach addresses the intensive capacity of space from a more practical

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[409] Kitty Hauser, "Stained Clothing, Guilty Hearts," in *If looks could kill: cinema's images of fashion, crime and violence,* edited by Marketa Uhlirova (London: Koenig Books, 2008): 68-75.

perspective: it proposes a way of analysing the sites (of struggle, inhabitation, or transit) through sensorial attentiveness and affective relations.

In this way, materiality and objects as indices of particular dynamics and interactions acquire an active role in the becoming of border spatiality, and increase its complexity. The inclusion of objects in the process reinforces the idea that the border is not a passive receiver of form, produced exclusively by law or by human agents. Rather, it comes to be in a dynamic way through the interaction of bodies and things, nature and technologies, discourses and matter. The spatial system that emerges from such interactions is complex, space-time specific and multi-layered.

The challenge of studying this space in the making is that of tracing and retracing the links between non-synchronised histories, overlapping geographies, potential and actualised forms. In other words, to navigate the complexity of the border as a spatial system in formation one must rethink its actual dimension through the capacity of becoming multiple, hence, through the capacity of difference as the generative principle of new spatial forms. This requires a detachment from the diagrammatic, virtual dimension that thrives to contain space in a set of relations through the establishment and manipulation of scales, measures, and distances. The manifestation of the actual form of the border corresponds to the moment in which it becomes multiple, producing a space that can only be grasped in terms of multi-scalarity and multi-dimensionality. If also the spatial qualities that characterise the border are reinterpreted in plural terms, one can get closer to its spatial complexity and recognise the intensive capacity of difference within the spatial system itself. In the same way, approaching the material form of the border as a formation means making room for intensity and differentiation within matter. This is proposed through the indexical approach, as a practice that favours sensorial attentiveness over measure and evidence: a mode of rethinking meaning-matter relations as open and dynamic.

To conclude, rethinking the border as a spatial formation proposes a way to detach from any ideas of fixity and separation, imagining instead what other spatial form borders may assume in the near future. A spatial study of the border that urges to take multiplicity seriously brings attention to the generative capacity of difference to produce new meanings of migration and alternative material configurations of borders as open spatial systems.

Ásotthalom (Hungary), January 2022. Source: photo by author.

7 Conclusions

7.1 Architecture and Borders

The introduction to this thesis has emphasised the renewed and growing attention of political, media, and academic debates on the topic of borders and their securitisation. In particular, it mapped the changes, efforts, and tendencies in the theorisation of borders and methodological approaches to their study. The same attention has also influenced architectural practice and education through different experiments, designs, and investigations aimed at documenting border reinforcement or analysing cross-border movements. While some architects are engaged in the design of borders since several decades,[410] others manifest a more recent,[411] or only occasional interest,[412] which may become accessible in temporary events, exhibitions, or installations. Similar differences are also found in architecture universities with relatively well-established networks of knowledge production on the topic of borders,[413] and more timely exercises developed in the frame of workshops,

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[410] Teddy Cruz+Fonna Forman Estudio, Tatiana Bilbao Estudio, Ronald Rael are probably the most representative examples of a long-term design experience in the US-Mexico border region.

[411] See, for instance, the work of Theo Deutinger in relation to securitization practices and, more generally, power.

[412] In terms of occasional design experiments see: "Border City" project by Fernando Romero or Studio Folder's "Italian Limes". More recently, the exhibitions for the section "Across Borders" of 17th Venice Biennale 2021 have included both the work of longer-term studies on borders (i.e. DAAR, Forensic Oceanography and, from a border ecologies perspective, FAST and Monsoon Assemblages) but also new experiments such as the projects "Aeroscene" for the central pavilion, or "Oræ" for the Swiss Pavillion. In other cases, such experiments take the form of conceptual and provocative ideas —see Marc Thorpe's installation "Citizens of Earth", No-to-Scale Studio's satirical proposal of a dining table along the U.S.-Mexico borderline, and Rael's installation of pink seesaws on the same site.

[413] I am thinking, for instance, of the Centre for Urban Conflict Research of the University of Cambridge, Border Ecologies Network, FAST, Topological Atlas, System of Systems collective, and, in part, Forensic Architecture (more specifically through the work of Charles Heller and Lorenzo Pezzani).

summer schools, or thematic studios.[414] This doctoral research itself has developed within the "Borders&Territories" research group, which places (national) boundaries, their (re-)production, and their transgression at the centre of its courses and studies since several years. An even larger group of architecture scholars and professionals approach the border from its periphery, centring their focus on migration and camps —a perspective which is reversed in this doctoral study.

The architectural production, whether it involves design or research, constitutes part of the material that I have investigated, consulted, and examined throughout the years of my doctoral studies. It has certainly influenced and shaped my way of referring to and mentally visualise the spatial dimension of borders — to such an extent that it would by now be impossible to retrace the exact sources. At a later stage of the research, however, this production has been progressively (yet not completely) put aside in the search for a conceptualisation of the border that would not take for granted what is at stake when speaking of space. From a practical perspective, it should also be mentioned that a large part of the results of architecture's engagement with borders is geographically dispersed, clustered within its own discipline and, often, only temporarily available. This does not facilitate the creation of a long-term and shareable ground of conversation among architects and, especially, with other disciplines. From my side, I can admit a difficulty in accessing and, thus, understanding what is being discussed in architecture education, given that the largest part of thinking processes of studios, workshops, and seminars remains within the walls of architecture schools. The potential is immense, but the dialogue struggles to emerge.

From a conceptual and methodological perspective, some important lessons coming from the architectural field can inform the study of borders which is developed in human and social sciences. Design examples emphasise the capacity of architectural practice to be an agent of socio-political critique and change. Projects that place the interdependence between the two sides of the border at the centre of their conceptual design are initiators of a mode of building across boundaries, and promote a strategy to un-do, or better un-wall, the borderline.[415] This is especially visible along the U.S.-Mexico border, where a longer tradition of architectural engagement has developed over decades. From a landscape perspective, instead, other studies stress the same interdependence through the analysis and visualisation

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414 Such as the Echoing Borders initiative of Columbia GSAPP or the Transborder Landscapes seasonal workshops organized by the Architectural Association.

415 See the design idea for UCSD community stations by Teddy Cruz+Fonna Forman Estudio: http://bit.ly/3FSvyml. Accessed on 25-03-2022.

of flows, circulations, and movements of both human and natural elements.[416] Such an approach —which conceptually resonates with the theory of borderscapes— addresses the imagination of more fluid political notions of state, territory, and citizenship.

Nevertheless, two risks hover over the discussions emerging in the architectural field —some of them at least— and deserve attention. The first risk consists of blurring the distinction between the border and the barrier which separates two countries. Not specifying the difference between the two may have the effect of reinforcing the assumption and simplification that the border coincides with the borderline, its political institution, and its localised reinforcement. In this sense, the border(wall) risks to remain a given, separate from a larger border-zone in which spatial, social, and political dynamics become performative. Accordingly, notions of transgression and opposition may only manifest against the barrier, as the sole form of control and violence. The second risk, on the other hand, concerns a disciplinary assumption that sees the possibility of architecture's engagement through design practice, overlooking the potential of design thinking. From this perspective, the risk is that of treating the spatiality of the border as a tool of human action, hence, a passive receiver of spatial form.

The concept of spatial formation developed in this thesis addresses and mitigates both these risks, opening a ground of dialogue within and beyond the discipline of architecture, as it will be better addressed in the next section. Understanding the border as a spatial formation allows placing the materialisation of separation and the militarisation of space in a larger process of actualisation. Such an approach grounds control in a multilayered effort at structuring, legitimising, and performing exclusion. This localises control across both virtual and actualising fields and recognises the possibility to counter it as multiple and intertwined in the same process. The effort at imposing a precise spatial form (one of separation) manifests in the attempt at defining and containing space through the establishment and manipulation of scales, measures, and distances by means of specific technologies. The border fence is, in fact, one of those. This effort, however, remains tied to a certain degree of virtuality. The concept of spatial formation emphasises the very impossibility of reaching a condition of "actualised diagram"; that is to say a condition in which the relational continuity between migration-security-borders, which is structured at the virtual level, becomes substantial through spatial closure and division.

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416 These themes are discussed in research by collectives such as FAST, Border Ecologies network, Monsoon Assemblage, and at the intersection of research and design, for instance, in the project for the exhibition Mexus by Teddy Cruz.

As discussed in chapter four, the construction of the border fence does not end the process of actualisation. Rather, it signals the moment in which the border's actual form becomes substantial, therefore, autonomous in its becoming and detached from virtuality. The emergence of actual form marks a condition of non-correspondence (as it has been called throughout the thesis) with the diagram: the impossibility of fixing space while it is in becoming. In this moment of non-correspondence, plasticity emerges and it makes clear how the border as a spatial system de-forms through the intra-action of different forms of agency: forces of control (that attempt the fixing of lines of division), forces of movement (that resists immobility and engage in acts of disruption), and forces of the environment (that oppose the striation of space). Plasticity, therefore, predisposes a ground of transgression, in which the agency that counters control multiplies through space itself, and expands from the human to the non-human. In other words, it makes room for difference to become performative.

To stress even more the emergence of non-correspondence between virtual and actual form, the logbook of site surveys interrupts the theoretical argumentation, before resuming it in chapter six. The purpose of the logbook is that of creating a disruption that reverses perspectives and may deliberately destabilise the reader. Chapter five does not aim to present the perspective of migration — in the vein of "what happens beyond the fence." It introduces, instead, the becoming from the ground: difference within the same formation. The logbook prepares the discussion on multiplicity that follows in chapter six. It exposes through specific spaces, conversations, and images the impossibility of containing the actual dimension of border spatiality in scales, measures, and distances: these pertain to the field of virtuality and the arbitrary arrangement of relationships. To rethink the border as actualised spatial form, one should bring in multiple, movable scales, and multidimensionality.

The concept of border formation, in these terms, shows the potential of architectural engagement by "design thinking", here understood as a process of material becoming that brings together virtual and actual dimensions. Architectural knowledge —that is to say spatial-material and theoretical knowledge— has the capacity to engage with re-thinking the border, with the prospect of imagining other possible ways of un-doing separations, beyond mere engagement with fences and walls. It calls to reconsider assumptions on space starting from the very notions that are commonly associated with it: scales, measures, and distances. Instead, it brings attention to other possible spatial qualities, such as that of plasticity and multiplicity, difference and becoming to rethink the spatial dimension of borders, as well as of any other spatial system, in terms of ontological plurality. From this perspective, conventional parameters of spatial analysis can also be envisioned in plural terms like multi-scalarity and multi-dimensionality.

In summary, the key findings of the present dissertation consist of: the recognition of borders' complexity as a spatial system in formation; the division and containment of space in scales and measures as a strategy of control and the impossibility of its complete actualisation; the becoming multiple of space as a capacity of differentiation generative of spatial form and the related need for multi-scalarity and multi-dimensionality; and, lastly, the capacity of architecture's engagement through design thinking.

These findings can be considered as the onto-epistemological contribution of the thesis. From the view of ontology, the thesis achieves the conceptualisation of the border as a spatial formation, taking distance from assumptions that simplify the border as a barrier, but rather recognising its spatial complexity. The border as a spatial system in formation is differential in and of itself. Accordingly, the study of the border's spatiality should include spatial characters or qualities, rather than parameters, which allow difference to become performative and grasp the intensive dimension of space. Multiplicity and plasticity are the characters that this thesis has highlighted and proposed as inherent in the actualised form of the border. The recognition of multiplicity and plasticity as qualities of borders' spatiality brings to the fore the need to analyse space in terms of multi-scalarity, multi-dimensionality, and consider approaches to its materiality apt to grasp its intensity, such as the indexical one.

Epistemologically, the thesis achieves the recognition of the potential of the concept of formation to develop as a mode of knowing the border. This, however, does not mean that the methodology used in this doctoral study to reach the formulation of the concept corresponds to the aforementioned potential. It means, instead, considering the capacity of the concept to connect a variety of theories and approaches committed to think borders beyond separation and reinforcement, including epistemological borders. This is not an achieved and completed goal, but rather a prospect. Understanding the epistemological potential of the border formation requires further testing and the possibility of closely engaging with the space and matter of specific cases. Obviously, time and resources of the present doctoral study did not provide enough room to continue in this direction. Investigating the potential of the border formation as a site-specific method, therefore, may be the following phase of this doctoral study.

In the light of the above, the end of this dissertation does not aim at the closed definition of the border's formation, or the codification of a mode of knowing. Rather, it should be considered as an opening: the predisposition of a ground of conversation that may bring closer architectural studies and other investigations of the border. The structure of this thesis presents through its chapters several lines of

actualisation that can potentially expand the research, connecting different expertise, and go deeper into the spatial complexity of the border. In this way, complexity can be addressed with a concrete multi-layered and trans-disciplinary approach.

7.2 Limits and Openings of a Diagrammatic Study

Throughout my doctoral trajectory, the main research efforts have been directed towards the selection and connection of spatial manifestations of the border within particular fields. These have been inscribed in a larger frame of actualisation, namely, the spatial formation of the border. Such an approach, which has been discussed in the introduction as diagrammatic, values the systemic composition of different conceptual-relational fields and spatial-material components. Nevertheless, it also presents a limitation constituted by the impossibility of thoroughly investigating each of them. Therefore, traces of the partiality, or openness, of the research are present throughout the dissertation.

In chapter two, a detailed political history of the case study has been set aside, favouring instead the tracing of genealogical connections between selected European and local Hungarian issues. The choice of contextualising the case study in the frame of the European integration process obscures many other historical lines which could have helped to discuss the ambiguity and transformability of the border from other angles. An example can be found in the relationship with neighbouring Serbia, the redefinition of the boundaries of the Vojvodina region, the (re)partition and (re)naming of border cities. These would have provided equally interesting and valid insights to discuss the spatial formation of the border. Imagining a future expansion of the research on this case study, it would certainly be interesting to reorient the focus to this still peripheral area of Europe.

Chapter three investigates digital and visual infrastructures in a deliberately simplistic way, as the main goal of the analysis is not that of examining technical mechanisms in detail. Neither does it exclusively discuss power relationships within the realm of the digital and remote surveillance (issues largely, and more accurately, dealt with in critical security studies). The attention has been selectively focused on the ways space is manipulated through the fragmentation into visual sections

and the assemblage of data items. Obviously, a lot more can be done to enlarge this relevant field of research. A possible direction of further investigations could be oriented towards the spatial agency of the vision regimes discussed in this thesis. The modes of capturing particular border sections or the thick visualisations of digital systems have the potential to expand as studies of their own.

While the limitations discussed above are mostly related to reasons of expertise and selection, which are inevitable to define the trajectory of the research, chapter four presents a different type of conscious omission. In this part of the research, which studies the architectural dimension of the fence and its construction processes, official structures of reception are not included in what is called the "design of immobility". The network of camps on the Hungarian and the Serbian sides of the border are only mentioned; they hover in the logbook of site surveys, but they are not studied in detail. There is no doubt that reception and transit centres are an important part of the physical infrastructure that advances the materialisation of borders as complex spatial systems. The reasons behind their exclusion, in this case, are not conceptual but practical.

On the Hungarian side, the law prohibits the access to official reception centres to any non-governmental organisation, civil organisation, or individual, except those actively involved in the legal representation of the camp's residents. In general, after the so-called "LexNGO" became effective, the political climate in Hungary has increasingly limited the possibility of contact with refugees and asylum seekers in the official camps.[417] This prevented the possible mediation of organisations that could facilitate access to these structures. The field visits in Hungary have been mediated and guided by the local border police and, accordingly, they were limited to selected areas, in which the police act as the competent authority. Regarding the Serbian side, instead, my attempts to get in contact with the Commissariat (or any non-governmental body that could mediate the relation with it) simply never received a response. Given these conditions, I preferred to include in the analysis only those sites that I have been able to visit.

Regarding the empirical research discussed mostly in the logbook, the main objective was to document space. While it is true that an alternative form of narration and documentation may have arisen from the stories of individuals encountered in the field, the constraints imposed by the short stay and the ongoing pandemic limited the time available to build trust through long-term commitment on site. The same condition of short stay

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[417] The unofficial translation of the "LexNGO" of 2017 is available on the website of the Hungarian Helsinki Committee: Hungarian Helsinki Committee, "Act LXXVI of 2017 on the Transparency of Organisations Receiving Foreign Funds," https://bit.ly/3nRoJrw. Accessed on 08-12-2022.

also impacted the possibilities of engaging with the places of investigation. In both Hungary and Serbia, the time spent in specific locations was restricted due to facilitation and access conditions, leaving no opportunity for returning at my discretion. As a result, the way to document each visit had to be quick and I tried to make the most of it.

The later re-elaboration of the data that I managed to collect through the empirical research has led me to the recognition of the necessity for analysing space in multi-scalar, multi-dimensional, and indexical terms. These call for a more practical testing of the research findings, potentially, through the search for alternative visualisations of space in the light of its multiplicity, or with more extensive site surveys. At this point, however, the present research stops and a new line of application could depart.

To summarise, each of the chapters of this dissertation has the potential to expand as a field of research of its own, with specific frameworks and questions. Each of them could deepen the study of borders' spatiality on various levels and with a different focus (technology, design, objects, discourses, and so on). Such an expansion could, on the one hand, develop an architectural expertise on borders. On the other, it may create new links between architectural studies and existing research fields engaged with borders.

7.3 Towards a Critical Technology of Borders

Although this doctoral thesis approaches the study of borders from an architectural perspective, it does not limit the debate to the discipline of architecture. Rather, it enlarges the net of possible disciplinary interactions. While the first part of the conclusions summarises *what* this project has (or has not) achieved and *how*, these last paragraphs turn to the *why* and *who* of the research, in particular, why it is relevant for architects and architecture students to engage with the study of borders, and who should be involved to collaborate in this engagement.

Studying borders in a faculty of architecture and, especially, in a technical university is not a common research line. If it is true that the study of borders is getting increasing attention in the field of architecture, its marginality is also evident when compared to themes such as that of sustainability, building technology, or data-driven design, to name a few. Very often during my doctoral trajectory, I had to explain what exactly borders have to do with architecture or which aspects of national borders and migration constitute the object of my inquiry. I had to reiterate

on several occasions that I was not interested in designing "houses for refugees" (or border walls!). The necessity for such clarifications is rooted in the widespread assumption that architecture is a matter of designing products. Accordingly, research projects developed within a faculty of architecture are somehow expected to find a concrete application in the realm of building and planning, their management, or their critique.

Such an understanding of architecture brings along the risk of forcing the discipline to deal exclusively with "relations between clients and entrepreneurs, landowners, critics, connoisseurs, and architects."[418] In these terms, I join Giancarlo De Carlo in his critique of the architectural discipline. In the conference of Liège in 1969, De Carlo warned that such a tendency, which is concerned with commissions, investments, and products, only takes into account the economic, social, cultural, and aesthetic values that are shared within the class in power.[419] Then, like today, orienting architecture towards building products leaves the decisions on space (which also includes the space of borders) "in the sphere of economic, bureaucratic, and technological powers".[420]

This orientation interprets the value of architecture research only in terms of profit, what is (re)producible and marketable. Obviously, I do not mean that this is the *only* trend in current architecture discourse and that alternative ways of thinking about the discipline do not exist. I do want to emphasise, however, that this risk is ever-present and that assumptions in architecture should be taken into more serious consideration.

The study of borders makes this problem very tangible and calls the discipline to question its position in relation to powers and to reconcile with society's claims. Borders display power struggles on a concrete spatial setting. They are the material ground of the claim of those rights that touch architecture at its core: rights of space, rights of access, rights to inhabit, rights of movement, and rights of safety. The study of borders calls architecture to a renewal of its questions, in order to foster a change in those structures that control the transformation of space. The discipline of architecture can mediate the ground of political and social struggles and initiate the discussion for change. Yet, architecture (and architects) alone is not enough to produce a change. It should enlarge the circle of its research and join forces with those disciplines that share common concerns.

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[418] Giancarlo De Carlo, "Architecture's Public", in *Architecture and Participation*, eds. Peter Blundell Jones, Doina Petrescu, Jeremy Till (London and New York: Spon Press, 2005): 6.

[419] Ibid.

[420] Ibid., 11.

In the last decades, the field of Border Studies has expanded into a wide multidisciplinary debate, which ranges from human and political geography to international relations, political science, criminology, migration studies, cultural studies, media theory, and the arts. This ever-growing field of study provides a fundamental ground from which new questions about borders can be formulated and interesting lines of reasoning can connect with spatial questions. The ongoing challenge in border studies and its ambition for the future is that of searching for new links among the different ways in which borders manifest themselves and their social-political implications.[421]

While the search for new connections recognizes the complexity of borders and sounds promising for the positioning of the present architectural study, the predominantly socio-political focus generates a reflection. Although many disciplinary ramifications have oriented the study of borders toward a manifold of frameworks and perspectives, a large part of research still maintains a strong foundation in the humanities and in critical theory. This shows that the multidisciplinary approach to the study of borders runs the risk of limiting the debate to a selected range of disciplines and, accordingly, of questions.[422] These questions do advance the existing knowledge, but they do not expand much towards other lines of the systemic complexity of borders. As this thesis has discussed, the matter of borders and its performative potential are affected by this problem and remain marginal in the ongoing debate.

Without questioning the relevance of the existing studies, which I myself continually try to navigate, I want to stress that the intersection between the theories that contest bordering practices and the matter and technologies that that allow the concrete construction and functioning of borders as barriers is till weak. What is missing is a *critical technology* of borders, the start of a conversation between critical thinking and technological making, or better, un-making.

[421] See: James W. Scott, ed., *A Research Agenda for Border Studies* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2020): 9.

[422] This understanding of multidisciplinarity, especially regarded vis à vis transdisciplinarity, is taken from: Gertrude Hirsch Hadorn, Susette Biber-Klemm, Walter Grossenbacher-Mansuy, Holger Hoffmann-Riem, Dominique Joye, Christian Pohl, Urs Wiesmann and Elisabeth Zemp, "The Emergence of Transdisciplinarity as a Form of Research" in *Handbook of Transdisciplinary Research*, edited by Gertrude Hirsch Hadorn et al. (Springer, 2008):24. This interpretation also relates to the distinction of multi-, inter-, and trans-disciplinarity discussed by Peter Osborne, "Problematizing Disciplinarity, Transdisciplinary Problematics" *Theory, Culture and Society* 32, no. 5-6. (2015): 3-35. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276415592245.

In this regard, I am not calling for border scholars to add other technological questions to their agenda (actually some studies are already going in that direction). I am calling for the consideration of a shift from the multidisciplinary debate to a trans-disciplinary engagement, which would include those disciplines whose discoveries are currently integrated in the very making of borders (such as science, design, architecture and engineering). Transdisciplinarity, in this sense, is regarded as a movement across disciplines,[423] rather than a selective clustering, which values heterogeneity over similarities.[424]

This means the acknowledgement and acceptance of doing research in other ways, recognising the value of other questions, focuses, methods, criteria of scientificity, and academic cultures. Such an approach does not necessarily imply hybridisation, but makes room for the specificity of expertise, the raising of new questions, and the opportunity of going deeper and deeper into different directions within the border's complexity.

The introduction of new methods and other perspectives coming from more technical domains, for instance, could be very productive in the fight against the assumptions of established meanings and, especially, makings of borders.

By encouraging such trans-disciplinary engagement, border studies can be reconsidered as a plural field of studies-of-the-border: multiple, hence, differential. Within this field, different forms of research can dialogue, complement one another, and seek connections from unexpected entry points. In the light of architecture's challenges discussed above and the limitations of the predominant social-political focus in border studies, it seems that the start of a committed dialogue between these two fields could be mutually beneficial. As a starting point, more than a conclusion, I would encourage the consideration of the discipline of architecture as a first link towards the development of critical-technological bifurcations in an ever-expanding net of studies of the border.

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[423] In this sense, transdisciplinarity is understood in processual terms, as "transversality" in the words of Guattari. According to this interpretation, transdisciplinarity can provide for the singularization, the particularization (or specificity as it is later called in these conclusions) of research. See: Felix Guattari, "Transdisciplinarity Must Become Transversality," *Theory, Culture and Society* 32, no. 5-6. (2015): 131-137. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276415592245.

[424] Cf. Gertrude Hirsch Hadorn, "The Emergence of Transdisciplinarity as a Form of Research," 26.

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Curriculum Vitae

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Education

2023	**Ph.D. in Architecture**. Delft University of Technology. The Netherlands Title: "Border Formation: The Becoming Multiple of Space" Promotor: M.G.H. Schoonderbeek, co-promotor: H. Sohn
2016	**Master of Science in Architecture (LM-4), summa cum laude. University of Camerino, School of Architecture and Design Eduardo Vittoria. Italy.**
2015	Erasmus Plus Traineeship (spring/summer quarter). Delft University of Technology. The Netherlands.
2013	**Bachelor in Architecture, summa cum laude. University of Camerino, School of Architecture and Design Eduardo Vittoria. Italy.**

Conferences | Workshops | Seminars

2022   Conference "Entangled Milieus: Co-Constituting a Shared Futurity", Nicosia (Cyprus), October 22 - 30, 2022. Member of the team of the organizers.

2022   Conference "Border Walls and Borderlands: Security, Environment and Resistance", Montreal (Canada), October 20-21, 2022. Poster presentation "Plastic Form: The Design of (Im)mobility along the Hungarian-Serbian Border".

2021   Summer School "Borders and Migration in Digital Times", Viadrina Center B/orders in Motion, European University Viadrina in Frankfurt Oder (Germany), August 16-18, 2021 (online).

2021   Conference "NGOs/CSOs: Migration Management and Border Control", Université Sorbonne Paris Nord (France), March 15, 2021. Paper presentation "Humanitarianism as Activism: Notes from the Balkan Route" (online).

2020   Ph.D. Seminar "Risk, (In)security, Indeterminacy", ResArc National Research School Framework, KTH (Sweden), December 2020 - March 2021 (online).

2020   Workshop "Freeport 1. Anatomies of a Black Box", Matadero Madrid (Spain), October 1-25, 2020 (online).

2019   Conference "Mediating the Spatiality of Conflicts", Delft (The Netherlands), November 6-8, 2019. Paper presentation (Ph.D. session) "Border Drift: The Multiplication of Liminal Spaces in the Time of the Migrant Crisis".

Teaching Experience

2022   Lecture "The Hungarian-Serbian Border as Spatial Formation" September 15, 2022. Lecture Series for the Borders & Territories Graduation Studio. Delft University of Technology, The Netherlands.

2020   Lecture "Boundaries, Escape Maps and Disciplinary Orientations" June 11, 2020. Lecture Series for the Borders & Territories MSc2. Delft University of Technology, The Netherlands.

2020   Teaching Tutor, Borders & Territories International Design Studio MSc2, AR2BO010, "Don't Mention the War! Spaces of Contested-ness and In/Exclusion in Belgrade" spring quarter 2020. Delft University of Technology, The Netherlands.

2016   Teaching Tutor, Workshop AfA Architecture for Africa, spring semester 2016. University of Camerino, School of Architecture and Design Eduardo Vittoria, Italy.

Work Experience

Oct. 2017 - Apr. 2018   Architecture and Urban Research intern at FABRICations Sustainable Architecture. Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

Jul. 2017 - Sept. 2017   Architect at Studio Bocci & Partners. San Ginesio (MC), Italy.

Oct. 2016 - Jul. 2017   Researcher at Crimson Architectural Historians. Rotterdam, The Netherlands.

Oct. 2016 - Jul. 2017   Researcher at International New Town Institute (INTI). Rotterdam, The Netherlands.

Grants and Awards

2016   Grant for Study or Training outside Italy for Recent Msc
                  Graduate of the University of Camerino (UNICAM).

2015   Erasmus Plus Traineeship at the Delft University of
                  Technology, The Netherlands.

Extracurricular Activity

ongoing   2GO Maatjesproject (buddy program for victims of human
                  trafficking and domestic violence). Stek, Den Haag
                  (The Netherlands).

2022   Online Course 'Exhibition Design'. NODE Centre for
                  Curatorial Studies Online.

2020   PhD representative in the PhD Council of the Department
                  of Architecture from June 2020 to June 2021. Delft
                  University of Technology (The Netherlands)

2016   Italian language support for women with migrant
                  background. Caritas, Montelupone (MC, Italy).

Professional Skills

Academia and Practice   Architecture and urban research; trans-disciplinary
                            research; architecture design; architecture drawing; public
                            speaking (lectures and presentations).

Softwares   Adobe Series (Photoshop, Illustrator, InDesign); Auto
                            CAD (2D drawing and 3D modelling); 3D Studio Max
                            (rendering); Microsoft Office (Word, Excel, Power Point).

Languages   Italian (native speaker); English (full professional
                            proficiency); Spanish (intermediate proficiency); Dutch
                            (basic proficiency); French (basic proficiency)

List of Publications

Tona, Grazia."Infrastructures of Reduction. The Re-organization of Scale and Measure in the Digital Governance of Borders." In *Borders and Migration in Digital Times*, edited by Carolin Leutloff-Grandits, Asher Goldstein, Nordert Cyrus. Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft. (In preparation).

Tona, Grazia. "Book Review. Borders as Infrastructure: The Technopolitics of Border Control, by Huub Dijstelbloem, Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 2021. ISBN: 9780262542883" *Journal of Borderland Studies* 37, no.5 (2022): 1099-1101. https://doi.org/10.1080/08865655.2022.2125042

Tona, Grazia, Gokçe Önal, and Dirim Dinçer. "Airport as a 'Border Condition' or Please Mind Your Bounding." In *FreePort: Anatomies of a Black Box*, edited by Bani Brusadin, 104-113. Madrid: Matadero Critical Studies, 2021.ISBN 978-84-18299-10-0

Tona, Grazia. "Border Drift: The Multiplication of Liminal Spaces in the Time of the Migrant Crisis." In *Mediating the Spatiality of Conflicts: International Conference Proceedings*, edited by Armina Pilav, Marc Schoonderbeek, Heidi Sohn, and Aleksandar Stanicic, 303-310. BK Books, 2020. ISBN 978-94-6366-325-0.

23#08

Border Formation

The Becoming Multiple of Space

Grazia Tona

This doctoral thesis examines the militarisation of the Southern border of Hungary as a process of spatial formation, expanding the debate on borders from the political to the architectural arena. Combining spatial theory with empirical research on the case study, the thesis rethinks the border as a complex spatial system, with an agency of its own. From this perspective, it contests the enforcement of spatial boundaries from the above and related ideas of fixity. It brings attention to the agency of space in the advancement of a material becoming; the role of migration in the radical redefinition of meanings and functions of space; and the action of technologies in the strategic manipulation of measures and scales. While conceptualising the border as a space in formation, this thesis builds a diagrammatic method of study and moves the research in an onto-epistemological direction. With the aim of fostering a change in those structures that control the partition and governance of space, this doctoral study calls the discipline of architecture to review its questions, methods, and practices. It invites to use architectural knowledge to engage with borders' complexity and challenge their established meanings and makings.

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