
Playing 'The Game': Irregular Border Crossings in the Balkans

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Abstract

Since 2015, the 'Balkan Route' has served as the major transit point for the displaced people on their journey seeking protection and a better life in the EU. When Hungary and Croatia erected legal and physical obstacles on their borders, thousands of displaced people ended up in transit limbo in Serbia – unable to move forwards, or backwards.

This paper focuses on the northern Serbian border zone, which dozens of these people attempt to cross daily disregarding the border and asylum regulations. This paper investigates the daily realities of men who temporarily live in a Serbian transit camp and their attempts to cross the borders through forests and unmarked crossings and seek asylum in the EU.

Using photography and drawing created by these men as major research methods, the study examines how the displaced men seek to live in accordance with the broader context of asylum and border politics, their motives and attempts to execute irregular border crossings, and the consequences this involves. The paper shows how the visual presentation of the daily lived experiences of the displaced men reveals the power struggle in the Balkan transit zone, arguing that the legislative and physical obstacles created by EU-country authorities give rise to hazards (smugglers, violence, transport accidents) in the transient border spaces.

Keywords: Balkan Route, borders, migration, power struggle, visual sociology, refugee camps

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