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Of Being Stuck or Moving On: Border Temporalities Along the EU's External Border in the Western Balkans

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This article focuses on two temporal dimensions of borders in an entangled perspective: first, the temporal dimension according to which borders may establish a temporal taxonomy by marking those living across the border as being more or less advanced or backward, and second, borders in the function of channelling mobility, accelerating or slowing down movements, or even bringing them to a standstill. Referring to social anthropological case studies at the EU external border between Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia, this article shows the entanglements of the different border temporalities and their impacts on migrants' and locals' self-perceptions. It argues that it is not only migrants from the Global South who dwell in a liminal time-space due to the increasing fortification of the border, but also that parts of the native population feel stuck due to the impossibility of imagining a future and of moving forward in life in their home region. This is reinforced by the movements of others leaving or transiting the region, a situation that has become symptomatic for the Western Balkans.

Keywords: border temporalities; spatio-temporal hierarchies; EU-external border; mobility; transit; liminality; Western Balkans.

Introduction

Borders have not only spatial and social dimensions, but also temporal ones (Schiffauer et al. 2018). Obviously, borders change over time. But borders also influence the perception of time of those who live along them. In doing so, borders often establish a relational temporal taxonomy according to which those living across the border are seen as more or less advanced or backward. In their function of controlling mobility, the temporal dimension of borders is even more evident: for those who try to cross them, the border can stop, slow down, or even speed up their movements, or keep them in a circular motion. This can also have an impact on the self-perception of border crossers and people living in the region.

Using the case study of the EU external border between Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia based on ethnographic fieldwork that I carried out in 2020 together with Lara Lemac—in which we conducted participant observation and narrative interviews with residents on the Croatian

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side of the border area, as well as with reference to numerous other largely ethnographic studies in the countries of the former Yugoslavia conducted by other scientists, some of whom I worked with as part of a joint cooperation project in 2020[1]—this article explores the different temporal dimensions of borders and their impact on migrants' and locals' self-perceptions in an entangled perspective. I argue that it is not only migrants from the Global South and what has been recently called the Global East (Müller 2020) who are stranded due to the increasing fortification of the border and who often develop the feeling of living in a loop or liminal time-space. Parts of the native population also feel stuck, which is related to the poor position of their own region in the so-called development taxonomy, and the impossibility of imagining a future and moving forward in life in their home region. However, the relationship between feeling stuck in life and the possibility of migrating is not clear-cut. For some local inhabitants, the feeling of being stuck is reinforced by the movements of others leaving or transiting the region—a situation that has become symptomatic for the Western Balkans—while some migrants who do not manage to cross into the European Union, but are forced to remain in the Western Balkans and so are physically stuck, do not lose hope but continue to imagine a future elsewhere.

In the following, I introduce different border temporalities before focusing on borders in their function as spatio-temporal hierarchies. In doing so, I distinguish three temporal dimensions of borders and bordering, which I then also relate to each other. To explain what I mean, I will first refer to the Balkans in general and then zoom in on the Croatian–Bosnian border region, before drawing some conclusions.

Borders as Markers of Temporality

When looking at border temporalities, one of the temporal dimensions of borders is obvious: borders—or the specific qualities of borders, their "borderness", as Sarah Green (2010; 2012) puts it—change over time. For example, the borders in the Early Roman Empire were not only omnipresent, as the Roman Empire was highly fragmented into many rather small principalities which each had their own borders, but they also functioned quite differently from today's borders. People were used to acting across them in their everyday lives, be it in terms of their family relations, or even their membership in church communities. The Early Roman Empire was another larger political unit that united the principalities (Bretschneider 2023). The borders of and within the Early Roman Empire did not necessarily mark the full sovereignty rights over a territory; this notion became more prominent only from the end of the Thirty Years' War, with the Westphalian Peace and the emerging Westphalian order. Borders at that time were also for the larger part not meant to restrict the mobility of people, a function which developed mainly only in the 20th century. More generally, as today's borders are different from those of the past, it makes sense to study the changing functions and qualities of borders over time: their changing "borderness" (Green 2012).

Another way to look at the temporal aspects of borders is to explore the afterlife of borders: borders that have lost their geopolitical function as markers of state sovereignty, such as, to give a prominent example, the former inner German border between the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), which was abolished in 1989 but still influences the mindsets of some people after its deconstruction and even today (Berdahl 1999; Leutloff-Grandits & Hirschhausen 2021). In fact, while the inhabitants of the GDR understood themselves first and foremost as Germans at the time of the Cold War, after the fall of the Iron Curtain, attributions such as East Germans and West Germans suddenly became powerful (Kubiak 2020, 191). The potency of borders beyond their geopolitical existence has been captured by the terms "phantom borders" (Hirschhausen et al. 2019) and "tidemarks" (Green 2011). These concepts enable critical analysis of how borders continue to impact lived experiences under new social orders in which the borders no longer formally exist (Leutloff-Grandits 2022).

I would like to address these border temporalities not only by regarding them as spatial demarcations of social orders which change with time and as such have temporal dimensions, but also by regarding them as temporal demarcations. In the interrelationship between bordering, temporality, and power, borders may be markers of spatio-temporal hierarchies, meaning that some regions (and their associated societies) are seen as less advanced, peripheral, or even backward, while others are regarded as more advanced and "in the centre". These ideas are culturally constructed and are very much based on the ideas of Western modernity, according to which the imaginary development of societies follows a linear timeline: a kind of permanent moving on. Mobility, speed, and time are thus closely related to imaginings of modernity and development, and these time perspectives are again located in and bound to different territories (Ssorin-Chaikov 2017, 3, 24–25). They are also based on the Euro- or Western-centric idea that Western societies have already reached a certain, relatively speaking advanced stage of development, while other societies—including those in the Balkans, and even more so those in what used to be called, from a Western-centered perspective, "the Orient"—are still lagging behind (Said 1978; Fabian 1983; Todorova 1995). This setting of another society or region back in time because it is considered less progressive or advanced—or even "time-less", as this was thought to be the case for the people who lived apart from industrialized civilization, who were pejoratively called "primitive peoples" and were considered

not developed at all—is based on a so-imagined development taxonomy, which was paramount to colonial imaginaries and more generally the Western hegemonic view toward other, so-perceived non-Western societies, which increasingly internalized this perception (Wolf 1982; Wolff 1996; Quijano 2000; Citino 2014; Donnan et al. 2017).

Maria Todorova (1997) stressed in her seminal book *Imagining the Balkans* that (since modernity, or enlightening) the Balkans have been understood in the West as a semi-periphery of Western Europe (with "the Orient" as the periphery), while the West was perceived as the centre. This went hand in hand with temporal notions, as the West imagined itself as more advanced, while the Balkans were seen as "less developed, less modern or less civilised" (Ifversen 2019). In short, they were conceived as lagging behind the West. Western societies claimed that the Balkans as another spatially delimited region were, at one and the same time, in another time, a time that the West had already left behind. The difference between "here" and "there" (across the border, as well as between centre and periphery) was as such also marked by a "now" and a "then".

This spatio-temporal ranking of the Balkans is not unique but rather a pattern found across the globe, and could even be seen as essential to West–East (or North–South) binaries constructed within Western societies (Wolf 1982; Wolff 1996). These binaries were fuelled by evolutionary ideas that originated in the 19th century and culminated in the racist ideologies of colonial exploitation and violence, as well as the fascist Third Reich (Stone & King 2007). But even today, Western hegemonic power is often based on the idea of cultural superiority and the classification of others as backward. Taking the Balkans as an example, we can see that with the fall of the Iron Curtain, the so-called post-socialist transition followed the idea that the former socialist societies were lagging behind and had to catch up and emulate Western models. In this process, Western Europe served as a blueprint and yardstick for the post-socialist transition, without critically questioning hegemonic or even neo-colonial legacies, nor reflecting on other pitfalls of Western European capitalist development. These blind spots persist (Majstorović & Vučkovac 2016; Rexhepi 2018; Majstorović 2019).

The hegemonic power of Western modernization theory is also evident in the fact that this notion of a spatio-temporal hierarchy was not only prevalent in the West, but was also internalized in the Balkans long before the fall of the Iron Curtain. Milica Bakić-Hayden (1995) wrote a seminal article on what she called "nesting orientalism", according to which Balkan neighbours also applied a developmental taxonomy to create larger internal divisions along spatio-temporal scales: Slovenia was considered more advanced than Croatia; Croatia was more advanced than Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia; and all these countries were considered more advanced than Kosovo. This applied not only in an economic sense, but often a cultural one as well (Bakić-Hayden 1995).

As the EU accession process proceeded at different speeds in the Balkan countries, these hierarchies were mostly underlined as the different paces of EU integration followed long-established spatio-temporal development taxonomies (Kušić et al. 2019; Majstorović 2019). While Slovenia became part of the European Union in 2004, Croatia joined almost a decade later in 2013. Another 10 years later, in 2023, Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, as well as all other so-called Balkan countries, are still yet to join the EU. This means that their accession processes are moving very slowly, if at all. This also has implications for the geopolitical order. After the disintegration of socialist Yugoslavia, the Croatian border with Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia became not only a border between nation-states, but also an EU external border, which is largely also understood as a border marking the state of development, civilization, and modernity, and thus also as a timeline—a notion which became, for example, further pronounced at the Polish-Ukrainian border after the EU association of Poland (Follis 2012). Still, also within the EU, the boundary between so-perceived "old" and "new" EU states remains, and this temporal boundary translates into spatial hierarchies of "centre" and "periphery", which also bear social connotations (Kaschuba 2012). To this end, taking Croatia as an example, notions remain that "the periphery can never approach the centre", or that there is a transition which can never be finished (see Obad 2008, 9).

Temporality and Mobility Across Borders

The temporal dimension of borders also concerns mobility. In the function of channelling mobility, borders can accelerate or slow down movements, or even bring them to a standstill, especially for those without valid travel documents (Khosravi 2010; 2017). This does not happen exclusively at the territorial border between two states. The visa regime, which was widely introduced in the late 1920s, and which gained new prominence from the 1990s on, can also be seen as a paper border (van Houtum & van Uden 2021), as the need for a visa is a very effective means of controlling mobility and, for many, amounts to a barrier to mobility. This is also linked to different notions of temporality. Looking at how EU member states apply the visa regime for third-country nationals, it is clear that citizens from countries perceived and categorized as less developed, less prosperous, and less Western require a visa, which they often find difficult to obtain, while citizens from countries perceived and categorized as more modern and advanced do not need one (van Houtum & van Uden 2021). This means that being (able to be) mobile or not being (able to be) mobile is also an expression

of a taxonomy of development, progress, or lagging behind, and thus also relates to the temporal scale (Leutloff-Grandits 2021). This is perhaps less perceived by those who can be mobile, such as Western passport holders, as they see their mobility as normal, and their belonging to Western modernity is thus a blind spot for them.

In addition to the question of whether one is mobile or not, there is also the question of the speed of mobility. While travellers with a "strong" passport can travel relatively smoothly, those with a "weak" passport may need significantly more time. This is evident, for example, at border controls within the European Union, where EU citizens can move through automated border controls, while non-EU citizens have to queue to be checked face-to-face. Those who do not have valid travel documents and therefore have to cross borders without papers may take much longer, or never reach their destination, as their journeys are often expensive and dangerous and may be stopped for an indefinite time—not least as migrants may be placed in closed camps or even be imprisoned without access to a lawyer, or without any notification being given to the public or to family members: essentially, without rights or legal protection (Agamben 1998). For these travellers, waiting—to be released, for (more) money, for (connections to) a smuggler, for a good opportunity—and stuckedness—the feeling of being stuck or of not moving forward, not just in spatial, but also in existential terms—have become an endemic feature and a characteristic form of bordering (Hage 2009a; 2009b; Khosravi 2014; 2017; Altin 2022, 594).

Moreover, the temporal dimension of borders persists even when people from so-called "third countries" (i.e., non-EU countries) have crossed the borders into the EU. In fact, migrants from countries perceived as backward in Western hegemonic discourses are then often also perceived as "carriers" of a backward culture, taking it with them as "baggage". They are therefore often seen as a threat to the policies of Western nations that are perceived as civilized and can be treated as "cultural others" and discriminated against (Randeria & Karagiannis 2020). This situation is often accompanied by limited participation rights and a pressure to assimilate that is exerted unilaterally on migrants, even though they often find that conditions make it difficult for them to do so. Migrants are therefore faced with a contradictory situation: while they are forced to wait to obtain more rights, they are at the same time pressured to be particularly active in their efforts to integrate. According to Mezzadra and Neilson, "the question of how long a migrant remains migrant—which is to say of how long the migrant remains an object of difference and hence a target of integration—is intimately related to the question of temporal borders. Such temporal borders stratify the space of citizenship [...], elongating and fracturing the empty, homogeneous time assumed by theories of assimilation" (2013, 155, 163).

The Norwegian crime series *Beforeigners* (HBO-Nordic 2019), whose title is a portmanteau of "before" ("once upon a time") and "foreigners", focuses on migrants who become time-displaced and arrive through a "time hole" into the present day by "timeigration" (Krawczyk-Żywko 2022, 191). The series shows how Norway deals with these time migrants from different historical epochs—namely from the Stone Age, the Viking Age, and the bourgeois class of the 19th century—and the difficulties of integrating them, as they retain elements of their original cultures and possess a "transmemory" linking them to their former lives in other epochs (Krawczyk-Żywko 2022). They thus develop parallel societies, causing cultural clashes. Through the lens of these time migrants, the series shows in an original way that migrants in Western immigration countries are often seen as backward, as if they come from another time, and that their cultural baggage is seen as a reason behind why they are "difficult to integrate". More generally, the possibility of supposedly "uncivilized" foreigners from "backward cultures" adapting to "modern" and "civilized" lifestyles and values, and becoming part of the national community, is seen as a conflictual and gradual process that can even take generations to achieve, and that may experience setbacks along the way.

The Entanglement of Multiple Border Temporalities in the Balkans

Looking more closely at the Balkans, we can further elaborate the spatio-temporal classification of regions, states, and their populations, as well as the spatio-temporal dimensions of borders that channel (im)mobilities, and connect these different temporalities in an entangled perspective. The Balkans is a region characterized by what has elsewhere been called "double transit"—to use, in a critical reading, the term "transit" as a temporally oriented terminology that has often been used in the West, but also in the region itself (Leutloff-Grandits 2022; 2023), to characterize developments and movements that seem to be unidirectional and fluid, but which have come to a partial standstill or have also developed in opposite directions.

With a critical reading of the concept of transit, one can, on the one hand, look at the EU accession processes of the various south-eastern European countries, which have proceeded at different speeds and have left the Balkan countries at different stages of EU accession, giving the territories a different time marker on the road to the EU. As already mentioned above, Croatia has been part of the EU since 2013, while the accession process of its neighbouring countries Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina is proceeding very slowly or not at all, and has turned into what Danijela Majstorović and Zoran Vučkovac (2019, 147) have called a "perpetual transition" and a permanent "state of emergency". As a result, Croatia's border with Bosnia-Herzegovina and

Serbia has become not only a border between the newly created nation-states, but also an external EU border. This external EU border bears a temporal dimension—a border temporality—as it serves as a timeline that also divides states along imagined, differing stages of transition to EU standards, along Western notions of linear progress into modernity and development.

The term "transit" has also been used to characterize the movement of migrants along the Balkan route, a route which has been and still is shifting in reaction to the EU border regime, but which generally entails movements via Greece to Western Balkan states such as Albania, Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Northern Macedonia, Kosovo, and Serbia, and then again to Croatia and the northern European Union countries. Indeed, in 2015, the autonomous movement of migrants from countries such as Syria, Iran, Afghanistan, and other countries in the so-called Global South (and East) through the Balkans to reach northern EU countries was perceived as "transit migration", with the Balkans forming a kind of imaginary gateway to the more advanced centre of the EU, and to Germany in particular. The Balkans as such were not understood as a new, possibly permanent place of residence, but merely as a transit region for migrants; the countries on the Balkan route agreed with this reading (Tošić 2017; Bužinkic 2018; Župarić-Iljić & Valenta 2019). As a direct reaction to the sharp increase in the number of migrants passing through the region from summer 2015 onwards, and in order to regain control over their autonomous movements, this reading of the Balkans as a transit region was also supported by infrastructure projects to build a transit corridor. For a short period of time, migrants transiting through the Balkans were channelled through this corridor and were able to reach the northern EU countries easily and relatively quickly thanks to the infrastructure provided, such as buses and other forms of free transfer transport, as well as humanitarian equipment (Petrović 2018; Župarić-Iljić & Valenta 2019; Beznec & Kurnik 2020; Hameršak et al. 2022). As such, the time of their movement formed a spatialized line as a spatial representation of the duration and direction of the movement (see also Ssorin-Chaikov 2019, 13). However, this soon changed when Balkan countries started sorting migrants along the corridor according to their countries of origin and only allowing those from certain countries with "good chances for asylum" in Germany to continue their journey, while those with "bad chances for asylum" in Germany were stopped. In doing so, they adapted to a categorization of migrants dictated by those Western European countries that became the destination countries for many migrants before the corridor was completely closed in March 2016, again under the political guidance of these countries. With this, "the transit countries" of south-eastern Europe turned into a "waiting room" (Altin 2021), or even into the "backyard" of the EU, as non-member countries entrusted with the management of the EU's unwanted migrants (Petrović 2018).

At that time, the project of crossing the border to the European Union became increasingly difficult: contrary to the meaning usually associated with the term "transit", for most migrants, it was not a smooth undertaking, but an experience of being halted, stranded in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia, and thus stuck in a kind of "protracted transit" (degli Uberti & Altin 2022). The function of borders as mobility controls—one of the main functions of today's borders—is thus very much experienced by those who do not have a "good passport" from a supposedly high-ranking, developed, modern country. In the remaining part of this article, I would therefore like to first outline the perspectives of migrants on their way through the Balkans by highlighting their experiences of temporal dimensions of borders and border crossings, and then turn to the perspectives of local residents in the border regions of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia. My aim is to present the temporal dimensions of bordering in a contextualized way and, by linking the different perspectives, to look at the interconnectedness of border experiences and their temporal dimensions.

"Transit Migrants" and Their Experiences of Border Temporalities

Let me first turn to the experiences of migrants from various countries in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia who, as already mentioned, often became stuck in Bosnia-Herzegovina after the closing of the Balkan route in early 2016 and the securitization of migration, which in some places has led to the building of fences, but also to the establishment and use of digital infrastructure such as infra-red light and other means of detecting migrants, especially at "green", unfenced border lines, and the strengthening of police presence for tracking migrants in the border region, as well as the by now well-documented illegal pushbacks of migrants (Border Violence Monitoring Network 2019).

From 2017, places like the small town of Bihać in the Bosnian Federation near the Croatian border suddenly became migrant hotspots, in the sense that many migrants stayed there because they were waiting for an opportunity to cross the "green border", meaning the course of internationally recognized land borders between authorized border crossing points, which, in this region, stretched along a rather sparsely populated, hilly, and forested region that was increasingly monitored digitally and controlled by border police. Migrants stayed here as they hoped to successfully move on further north, often with the help of human smugglers, or because they were simply too exhausted to continue their journeys, sometimes also because they had only recently been pushed back by border officials (Helms 2023). Others, who had lost hope that crossing the border at this point was possible, changed their plans and tried elsewhere, crossing Bosnia-Herzegovina or even deciding to return to Greece and come up with

a new plan. This shows that the state of being stuck is not a motionless one, nor is there a linearity within the stalled movement, either in its temporal sense or in its spatial directions (see also degli Uberti & Altin 2022). Rather, it is a circular mobility consisting of migrants' attempts to cross the border, being pushed back by those guarding the EU external border (and partly also at other borders, even those of Bosnian cantons), new attempts (sometimes at another location), or even moving back in the direction they came from (Hameršak & Pleše 2018; Stojić Mitrović & Vilenica 2019: Stojić Mitrović et al. 2020). This often happens at different speeds—from slow to hurried, especially when it comes to border crossing and traversing geographical border areas—and is interrupted by periods of waiting and (forced) immobility of varying lengths. Indeed, it makes sense to look more closely at the speed and direction of mobility, as well as the duration and contexts of (forced) halts, as the different speeds and justifications of (im)mobility are closely linked to the experience of the temporal dimensions of borders.

As ethnographic studies which reveal the long journeys of migrants have shown, this state of (protracted) transit is a temporal state that can last years and may extend indefinitely, creating a state of liminality in space and time as migrants often linger for indefinite periods in a space between the borders they want to cross. At the same time they are pushed into relative invisibility and set apart from the "normal world" (Koshravi 2017; Altin 2021; degli Uberti & Altin 2022). As Altin (2021, 596) outlines in reference to Victor Turner (1969), migrants themselves can be seen as liminal figures, as threshold people, due to their irregular status which locates them outside of legality given by the state, leaving them without rights and political protection. Migrants may spend their everyday lives socializing with peers or some local inhabitants before they manage to move on, or they may be overwhelmed by the challenges of the precarious state they are in, sometimes losing direction and a sense of time, their health, or even their lives (Hassan & Biörklund 2016; Koshravi 2017). This in-between state can also be called a "third space" or "grey zone" (Green 2015; Leutloff-Grandits 2020; see also Janković 2017), as it does not fit into simple binaries such as those of migrants versus local inhabitants, Bosnia-Herzegovina versus Croatia (as migrants being on Croatian ground may still be pushed back to Bosnia-Herzegovina), movement and halt, victim and perpetrator. This is a topic worth further exploration.

In fact, migrants still have agency. Despite all the experiences of being pushed back and stopped, of being criminalized and victimized, they frequently see their (often, repeated) attempts to cross a border as a rite of passage (Altin 2021), as an act of leaving a bleak state and moving forward, of creating a future. At times when they seem to be stuck, such as during their stays in camps or in towns like Bihać, they may use the opportunity to rest and regain energy, to organize more money to be sent to them, to find information and human smugglers, or to seek out comrades they can rely on, sometimes forming communities parallel to local societies and nourishing new hopes (Hassan & Björklund 2016; Altin 2021; degli Uberti & Altin 2022, 435; 601; Altin & degli Uberti 2022). As such, they turn what appears to be "dead time", a time of standstill and "passive waiting" (Brun 2015), into a time of useful activities, or what Catherine Brun called "active waiting": of waiting for the right moment to cross the border, and preparing for this moment. Roberta Altin (2021) calls this the "waiting game", in which migrants are active players, carefully planning the timing of their next—albeit risky—border crossing attempts in order to minimize the risk of being pushed back. As Teodora Jovanović, Katarina Mitrović, and Ildiko Erdei (2023) have shown, even those migrants who seem to have no chance of continuing their journey soon—e.g., because they have no money left, or because they have children with them and thus irregular border crossing is simply far too dangerous—might see the time spent in locations like so-called transit camps in transit countries as an opportunity to move in the right direction. This is especially the case if they can use the time efficiently, by, for example, attending school, which is increasingly possible for under-age migrants in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia (Pečenković & Delić 2023). In fact, education can be understood as a kind of existential mobility that migrants can turn to once they get physically stuck on their route (see also Hage 2009b). In being active agents, some migrants also collaborate with local inhabitants and may have a positive impact on localities and local communities, and some might also decide to stay in the Western Balkans (Jovanović et al. 2023; Helms 2023). But it has to be stressed that this liminal state is by no means a linear "rite de passage" (Van Gennep 1986), and not all reach their destination and manage to fulfil their hopes.

Borderlanders in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Their Experiences of Border Temporalities

The feeling of being stuck applies not only to migrants from the Middle East, Africa, and Asia, but to some extent also affects residents within the Balkans (Majstorović 2020; 2022; Leutloff-Grandits 2022; 2023). As various scholars have observed, there are three reasons for the inhabitants of Bosnia-Herzegovina to feel held back, in a temporal dimension too.

First, Bosnia-Herzegovina is a post-war country in which peace could only be achieved with great international commitment, but whose post-war, post-socialist transformation as well as "transit" into the EU have not developed as desired. Even now, almost three decades after the Dayton Peace Agreement which ended the war there in 1995, Bosnia-Herzegovina is characterized by high unemployment, strong clientelism, and persistent

discrimination along ethnic lines, which, as Stef Jansen (2009; 2014) has explained in detail, are experienced by Bosnia-Herzegovina citizens as stagnation or even being held back.

Second, the feeling of being left behind was also found to be closely related to the deteriorating mobility options that existed, at least until 2016, as many had reasons to leave the country but almost no mobility opportunities. In his work on post-Dayton Bosnia-Herzegovina as a semi-periphery of the European Union, Jansen (2009; 2014) has highlighted that the citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina perceive their limited mobility rights as a sign of being stuck, not least because other former socialist countries, such as Romania, Bulgaria, and their neighbour Croatia, gained mobility rights (and access to the EU) much earlier. This was not only seen as a disadvantage compared to these post-socialist neighbours, but also as a step backwards compared to the socialist period. In fact, the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina also shows that the Western notion of a linear development of modernity is a chimera: the citizens of socialist Yugoslavia actually had more mobility rights under socialism—when socialist Yugoslavia as a non-aligned state was courted by Western states, and Yugoslav citizens could travel freely to Western European countries with their "red passport"—than from the 1990s onward. After the fall of the Iron Curtain, and concurrently with the bloody wars following the disintegration of socialist Yugoslavia which turned many inhabitants into refugees, countries of the European Union started to introduce visa requirements, which for many were impossible to fulfil. For citizens of the Yugoslav successor states, these sudden mobility restrictions were not only experienced as being stuck in space and time, but, compared to what they had been used to for decades, even as a step backward: a falling back in time (Jansen 2014).

This changed again when the Western Balkans Agreement came into force in spring 2016, allowing citizens from Bosnia-Herzegovina to migrate to Germany as soon as they have a work contract. This happened almost simultaneously with the closure of the Balkan route for migrants from the Global South and East, demonstrating the simultaneity of non-simultaneous (im)mobilities and the temporalities involved. But not even the mobility options for citizens of the Western Balkans are viewed unanimously. While this is seen as progress for those who manage to migrate, as they hope to leave their homeland for a better future, for those who stay behind, or for those for whom there is no demand on the German labour market, it means that a future at home is even bleaker, thus showing the simultaneity of unequal temporalities.

Third, the feeling of being stuck and falling behind is, however, also related to the closure of the Balkan route, which started in autumn 2015, when not only the border between Hungary and Serbia was secured, but increasingly also that between Serbia and Croatia, turning the Western Balkans—based on asymmetrical power relations—into agents of the EU migration and border regime. This also increased the presence of migrants in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia. Towns like Bihać in the rather uninhabited, hilly, and largely forest-covered Bosnian–Croatian border area became migration hotspots, as migrants hoped to cross the border from these locations, but, as this proved increasingly difficult, migrants remained there for an unspecified time. The fact that the so-called transit migrants had no place to go, and very limited humanitarian infrastructure was available to them, led to migrants camping in the city, squatting in uninhabited buildings, cutting down trees for firewood, leaving their rubbish in the parks, and washing themselves publicly in the riverbed, thus appearing to threaten public order. The presence of migrants thus exacerbated the difficult situation in this part of Bosnia-Herzegovina and increased the sense of marginalization and social disorder. While many local inhabitants showed solidarity with the migrants, particularly initially—partly because of their own experiences of flight and precarity during the war in the 1990s and their view of the migrants as victims of higher-level processes and decisions—over time, and without an improvement in the situation, they also became increasingly negative toward the migrants' presence and felt that their own environment had changed, and not for the better (Hromadžić 2020). The fact that many migrants had no intention of staying permanently and fully integrating into the local society, but rather were looking for opportunities to leave again, furthered this. In public opinion, migrants were increasingly characterized as uncivilized, potentially dangerous, and harmful or even exploitative to local society, which led to their further exclusion. Feeling threatened by migrants from supposedly different, backward societies, the presence of migrants limited their own mobility, as they reported avoiding certain parts of the city and staying at home more than before, meaning that local inhabitants felt alienated from their own city and increasingly out of place (Hromadžić 2020).

This increased the desire of citizens from Bosnia-Herzegovina to migrate, especially since the Western Balkans Agreement was put in place, meaning that the number of people leaving their country has not diminished. Instead, migration towards the European Union is increasingly differentiated into so-perceived legitimate migration of citizens from the Western Balkans, and so-perceived illegitimate migration by those from the Global South and East, thus setting these two groups apart even though they are moving in the same direction, often due to the same reasons and with similar experiences of having lived through war, precarity, and a dysfunctional state (Majstorović 2023). And although the migrants may send remittances to family back in their home countries, the emigration of local inhabitants does not necessarily mean progress

for the local society. Thus, it can be argued that Bosnia-Herzegovina has become a grey zone space: a space in which some have the opportunity to move forward due to more mobility options towards the EUs, while for many migrants from the Global South it means being stuck, at least for a certain time; the citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina who have stayed put experience the emigration of their co-nationals and the presence of migrants from the Global South more as a backward step—as a feeling of being thrown back in time.

Experiences of Border Temporalities in Croatia's Border Region

I would now like to turn to the inhabitants on the Croatian side of the border with Bosnia-Herzegovina and their experiences of border temporalities. The Croatian border region is a sparsely populated rural border region which has its own special characteristics, as certain parts are inhabited mainly by Serbs (Kokotović Kanazir et al. 2016), who form a national minority in Croatia. During the war of the 1990s, the Serbian army occupied this region; they announced the—never internationally recognized—Republic of Serbian Krajina on this territory and pushed out Croats living here. In 1995, the Croatian army regained the territory, which led to an exodus of the Serbian population to Serbia and to the Serbian Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina. After the war, only a minority of these Serbs—mainly elderly people—returned to their home region, while Croatian families from Bosnia-Herzegovina also settled here. Today, more than 25 years after the war, the wounds of the war are still visible locally in the form of destroyed houses that remain. But not all these houses were destroyed in the war: some have been destroyed by nature (e.g., by too much snow on the roof), by not being taken care of as no one has returned to them.

Living near the border has a huge impact on the lives of the local inhabitants in a complex and ambivalent way, and also in temporal perspectives. First of all, the Serbian residents on the Croatian side relate their practices and judgements to the changing character of the border—its changing borderness—and emphasize that with transforming this border from an inner Yugoslav border into a state border between Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia (with the disintegration of socialist Yugoslavia) and then also into the external EU border, they were increasingly cut off from their former local centre, the town of Bihać located on the other side of the border in Bosnia-Herzegovina. They recalled that, under socialism, they went to Bihać for almost everything, including schooling and health care, as the border between the republics was functionally relatively meaningless. From the 1990s on, with the proclamation of Croatia's independence, followed by war and the proclamation of the internationally never recognised Republic of Serbian Krajina, this changed radically, as the border towards Bosnia-Herzegovina became a militarily protected state border. Bihać was no longer accessible for matters such as jobs, education, health, and administration. While cross-border mobility was slowly reestablished with the Dayton Peace Agreement in 1995, public services such as healthcare and education remained inaccessible to cross-border commuters residing in another state.

Since 2013, when Croatia gained EU membership, this border gained another layer by now also functioning as a location for EU migration control. With the closing of the so-called Balkan route in 2016, and the subsequent attempts of migrants from the Global South and East to cross the green border without registration, the border regime became increasingly securitized and controlled, which also affected the local inhabitants, who again became more cut off from their former centre located on the Bosnian side (Leutloff-Grandits 2022).

Simultaneously, Croatia's EU membership is, in the eyes of local inhabitants, also a sign of development toward the rule of law, and thus toward more civility, progress, and modernity. Looking at their Bosnian neighbours across the border—who, from their point of view, remain in a state of incivility—local inhabitants in Croatia set social as well as spatio-temporal boundaries. This shows that the geopolitical border between two states, especially in its function as an EU border, marks a social and temporal hierarchy which local inhabitants enact through their discourses and practices (Leutloff-Grandits 2023).

Nevertheless, local Serbs, and also some Croats living in this region, do not feel fully integrated into the Croatian state—especially in economic terms—as the region lacks not only people, but also employment opportunities and, more generally, regional development, which would encourage young people to remain in the region, and the Croatian state seems rather disinterested in improving this situation. Therefore, local inhabitants feel marginalized, as if their lives are happening in a time-space separated from the centre, be that Zagreb as the capital of Croatia, Brussels as the seat of the European Commission, or other, more prosperous states of the European Union such as Germany. In this situation, younger people are leaving the region in even greater numbers than before. This is also linked to Croatia's EU membership, which allows Croatian citizens to move to other, more prosperous EU countries where they can find work and hope for a better life and future. With this, they are part of the trend of emigration from Croatia that started when the country gained the right of free movement of workers into 14 EU countries in 2013 and to the other 13 EU countries between 2015 (e.g. Germany) (Draženović et al. 2018) and 2020 (Austria). They are moving in the same direction as citizens from Bosnia-Herzegovina who leave for Germany on the basis of the Western Balkans Agreement, as well as in the same direction as the irregular migrants from the Global South and East who rush through their

territory. For the sparsely populated local communities in the border region—in Croatia as much as in Bosnia-Herzegovina—this has dramatic consequences, as it often means that older people are left behind. From the perspective of the borderlanders, this contributes greatly to the feeling of being in a state of decay, of having no future.

The fact that "transit migrants" rush through the Croatian border area, often led by smugglers, remaining as invisible as possible in order not to be discovered by the police, shows further temporal dimensions of borders and bordering. Even though local inhabitants hardly see the migrants, let alone interact with them—which is different from the situation in places such as Bihać across the border in Bosnia-Herzegovina—the invisible presence of migrants and their constant moving through this region affects the sense of time and space of the inhabitants in the Croatian borderlands. Fearful of going into the forests, where they might meet (larger groups of) migrants—whom they consider potentially dangerous, also because they assume that they are being guided by smugglers and because they expect communication barriers—they stay put, move less than before, or differently, and generally avoid the forest areas (Leutloff-Grandits 2022). The fact that the migrants rush through the region, seeming to take no notice of the place and its inhabitants, not establishing any connection let alone intending to stay, even briefly, makes the locals feel that their place has become a "non-place", to use the terminology of Marc Augé (2014): a transit place deprived of its identity, not worth dwelling in, and at the same time a place in which local inhabitants who do not leave are stuck (see also Pupavac & Pupavac 2020).

Conclusion

As this article has shown, borders can have multiple temporalities, and these temporalities often also interrelate. Borders can create spatio-temporal hierarchies between states or regions, and thus also their citizens, which can then be perceived as lagging behind, stuck in their development, or conversely as moving forward, overtaking others. By channelling (im) mobility—one of the main functions of today's borders—borders have additional spatio-temporal dimensions, as movements can be stopped and people pushed back across borders. People can also cross borders more or less smoothly and quickly. The possibilities of moving, being halted or staying put, also refer to temporalities that are often thought of as hierarchically ordered: as (more) progressive or fixed. In addition, borders can also assign a temporality to migrants, whereby they can become "time migrants" at the moment of crossing or even after crossing, as soon as it is assumed that they come from a different time and that this temporal backwardness sticks to them.

It is worth examining these different border temporalities in their function of assigning spatio-temporal hierarchies, of channelling the speed and direction of mobilities in a contextualized way, and considering them in their entanglements. In the Balkans, these entangled border temporalities and the attached bordering processes are particularly evident. The critical use of the concept of transit highlights the Balkan countries' slow accession process to the EU as one of the temporal dimensions of bordering. The people living in the countries of the Western Balkans experience this as being stuck in a backlog, an impossibility of moving forward. With Croatia's integration into the EU, the border between Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia became a spatio-temporal border in the sense that, on the one hand, the inhabitants of the Croatian border region see their admission into the EU as a sign of progress, as a step forward compared to their Bosnian neighbours who are set back by remaining outside the EU. However, on the other hand, the transformation of this border into a state border, and then additionally into an EU external border, also led to further peripheralization by cutting off this border region in Croatia from its former centre in Bosnia-Herzegovina. In addition, Croatia's EU accession facilitated the migration of young people, not only to other cities in Croatia, but also to wealthier EU countries like Germany. From the perspective of individual migrants, this is often linked to the dream of building a better future abroad. However, with the emigration of the young, the region they left behind became further peripheralized and more and more deprived of its future.

Moreover, we have to take note of another dimension of this border temporality: through its involvement in EU border and migration management, this border region has been associated in several ways with channelling the movements of "transit migrants", whether their movements have been stopped or accelerated. It can be observed that migrants are stuck at the EU external borders and forced to stay in the Bosnian border area—the outer edge of the EU—although they do not intend to remain there permanently, and, additionally, despite the fact that they do not find the necessary conditions for a dignified stay there, such as legal protection, legal access to work, or even sufficient humanitarian care.

On the Croatian side of the EU's external border, migrants rush through relatively invisibly. On both sides of the border, the enforcement and enabling of different (im)mobilities creates hierarchies between the different populations, often expressed in temporal terms—such as being more modern or civilized—while at the same time reinforcing the sense of marginality of their places, which are in decay, leading locals to leave their homes and move to other places that seem to promise more of a future. This illustrates that there are several spatio-temporal border mechanisms, which in turn are related to the position of these places in the

spatio-temporal ranking, as well as to the (im)mobilities this creates and the self-perception of the inhabitants. In fact, borderlanders and migrants all attempt to move in the same direction, namely to more prosperous EU countries like Germany. There, however, they do not necessarily perceive themselves as a common group, although they often share the experience of being met with suspicion within their countries of immigration, which may be related to the fact that they are seen as coming from backward areas.

Endnote

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