

# 1. Route thinking?

**Claudio Minca and Yolanda Weima**

---

The hardest thing was when I left Turkey. Making the decision to immigrate to the unknown. You heard stories of people who did it and so on, but I didn't even have that in my head. It's difficult to go out, to walk in the woods, etc. I thought the only danger would be the police and the military. Instead, there are so many dangers. Even animals. In Croatia, there are people who have been attacked by bears and wild boars. The hardest thing is also when you are struggling, walking, facing dangers, the cold, paying, finding a way to get the money, and so on. And then they catch you and send you back. [...] After all that, they send us back.

This happened to me. [...] Many people didn't make it, they went back. For me, the reason that pushed me to continue was the circumstances in which I was in [my home country]. [...] I look for work, I bring money, I try again.  
(Woman from North Africa, interviewed in Sarajevo, October 2024)

I got my food from the little shops along the Route, these shops are usually a bit improvised; we bought food from these little shops. Along the Route I slept in the open in the woods and sometimes we would go to the abandoned buildings that you find along the roads; they are practically the ruins of the buildings where I slept. [...] I didn't know this before I left, but as we travelled the Route we talked to people and as I went along, I discovered the complexity of the journey. Sometimes people talked about the places where so many migrants had died because of the many difficulties there. In fact, in Bosnia I saw people who had died. I don't know how they lost their lives.

I don't think I would ever do it again. At first you don't realise the difficulties along the Route, but once you start you realise the complexities you have to face. Now that I know, I would never do it again.  
(Man from Afghanistan, 26, interviewed in Trieste, February 2024)

The so-called 'Balkan Route' is the most significant informal land migration corridor in Europe. Although it has mainly attracted widespread news coverage since the summer of 2015 – when hundreds of thousands of people fleeing war zones used it to reach safety – it had existed long before that moment, serving as a vital passageway for refugees of diverse origins across various historical periods (Hess & Kasparek, 2021). Even in the years immediately

preceding what Kasparek and Speer (2015) termed ‘the long summer of migration’ during which a semi-formal humanitarian corridor was kept open for several months, many locations along the Route had already witnessed the sustained presence of refugees from Kosovo,<sup>1</sup> other parts of the Balkans, the Middle East, and Asia more broadly (King & Oruc, 2019). And it remains significant: according to recent estimates by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), over 600,000 people-on-the-move have crossed the so-called Western Balkans in the last five years (IOM, 2025).

Mapping a tentative geography of this corridor reveals a complex network of transit hubs, micro-routes, and border crossing points used informally by people-on-the-move. This network primarily – though not exclusively – links Turkey and Greece with a number of countries in Western Europe. The Route passes through, in shifting configurations, countries such as Bulgaria, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as Albania, Montenegro, and Kosovo, before continuing towards Hungary, Austria, and Germany. Alternatively, other trajectories extend through Croatia, Slovenia, and into Italy. Naturally, endless deviations and variations exist beyond the most prominent pathways.

As we were writing this chapter, Italian newspapers reported a meeting between the ‘interior ministries of Italy, Slovenia, and Croatia’ to ‘discuss migration management and internal security’:

The meeting [...] is part of a framework established some years ago, which provides for the exchange of information on the situation along the Western Balkan migration Route and the main security challenges faced by [these governments]. On the sidelines of the event, the directors-general of the police forces of the three countries are expected to sign a memorandum of understanding outlining the terms for implementing joint trilateral patrols along Croatia’s external border. (*Il Piccolo*, 17 January 2025, Authors’ translation)

This quote illustrates how firmly embedded the presence of the Balkan Route has become over the past decade not only in the practices of migrants and those who assist them along their clandestine journeys, but also in the geopolitical imagination of the countries directly involved. This consolidation has had far-reaching consequences for the governance of both territorial and digital borders, as well as for asylum and migration reception policies.

Stemming from the research conducted in the early stages of the European Research Council (ERC) Project: TheGAME, this book represents an initial, and partial, collective attempt to reflect on the unstable and ever-changing

---

<sup>1</sup> This designation is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

geographies of an informal migration route such as the Balkan Route. This preliminary reflection raises a fundamental question: to what extent is it appropriate to group and describe this multiplicity of diverse, clandestine migratory trajectories as a ‘route’? Building on this, what are the conceptual implications of adopting this term – one that has come under intense scrutiny in recent years? More broadly, is this merely a terminological issue, or does the spatial metaphor of the ‘route’ still offer analytical value? Or conversely, has such critical scrutiny rendered the term inadequate for capturing the complexity of the transnational geographies that define the clandestine mobilities through this region in the heart of Europe?

As the following pages will clarify, the main critique levelled against the term itself – particularly its association with a ‘route thinking’ approach – centres on its adoption as a spatial perspective by international and national institutions seeking to analyse, represent, and ultimately control or prevent the mobility of informal subjects to and across European space. This criticism has notably been advanced by scholars such as Casas-Cortés and Cobarrubias (2018, 2019, 2021), Casas-Cortés et al. (2017), Kasperek (2016), Heller and Pezzani (2016), and Tazzioli (2015, 2020). We will engage with this important critique and its implications throughout the remainder of the chapter and, more indirectly, across the volume as a whole.

Indeed, this book stems from the urge to explore how the so-called Balkan Route has been conceived as a ‘route’ across various scales and by the diverse actors involved in its ‘making’. This chapter, in particular, examines the workings of irregularized migration through the region by engaging both with critical perspectives and with the complex narratives and practices that define the informal migrant mobilities traversing this part of Europe. The Balkan Route is obviously not a linear trajectory through a series of territories, as many ‘top-down’ maps might lead one to believe (Van Houtum & Bueno Lacy, 2020; 2023) – although recent reports by international organizations have arguably become more nuanced in capturing these diverse experiences. As we have highlighted in other recent works (Carter-White & Minca, 2025; Minca & Collins, 2021), what we are analysing here is a complex and ever-changing multiplicity of spatial articulations, circuits, detours, new and old passage-ways, policing practices and barriers, formal and informal camps, shelters and safe houses, as well as varying reception and asylum systems. These elements are all, in different ways, bound up with the policies and practices of the multiple border regimes that shape the Schengen space, its peripheries, and the non-European Union (EU) countries implicated in the governance of migration in and through the ‘Western Balkans’.

At the same time, the migrants we interviewed during the first two years of the project largely described – and *de facto* planned – their journeys *as routes*, a perspective similarly shared by humanitarian workers and smugglers. This

raises a key question at the heart of the project and, to some extent, of this volume: while the production of a comprehensive cartography of the Route remains unthinkable and, arguably, unethical, we contend that a critical geographical perspective on the territories and the people who move through them should be conceptually problematized as an exercise in counter-mapping. Accordingly, the present chapter is organized into three main sections. In the first, we briefly examine how the academic literature has represented and analysed this complex migration corridor, outlining how the book seeks to contribute to those discussions. The second section engages with the critical debate surrounding what has been termed ‘route thinking’, situating the volume within that conversation and, more specifically, in relation to our ongoing work on the Balkan Route. The third section focuses on counter-mapping the Route. More specifically, we outline our theorization of ‘the Game’ as a form of ‘route thinking’ and counter-geography made material by the desire and determination of people-on-the-move to complete their journeys, and examine the interplay of different scales and actors involved in ‘making the route’. In so doing, we draw on examples of ethnographic research on clandestine migration in Central America to begin reflecting on how people-on-the-move confront the violence generated by hegemonic ‘route thinking’ aimed at curbing migration, while nonetheless persisting in re-creating routes via a diversity of spaces and practices. Beyond providing cross-regional comparisons, these ethnographies are concrete examples that confront the ethical, practical, and theoretical challenges of researching dynamic, criminalized, transnational mobilities. Accordingly, we then reflect on the specific context of our research in TheGAME ERC project, and the methodological choices that have informed the structure of the book – and, to some extent, of the broader project. We thus return to the main conceptual underpinnings that shaped both this chapter and the volume as a whole, and consider how they may represent a first, partial, yet nonetheless significant attempt at counter-mapping the Balkan Route and at problematizing the language through which it is described, managed, and continually reproduced.

## READING THE BALKAN ROUTE

The academic literature on the Balkan Route, while certainly predating the so-called ‘long summer of migration’, has become particularly vibrant since the opening of the humanitarian corridor and in the immediate aftermath of its closure (see, for example, Bužinkić & Hameršak, 2018; Kilibarda, 2016; Kogovšek Šalamon & Bajt, 2016; Rydzewski, 2023; Trakilović, 2019; for a recent critical review of this body of work see, among others, Carter-White & Minca, 2025). That period – roughly a decade ago at the time of writing – has been retrospectively defined by Rydzewski (2023) as a ‘liminal period’ leading

to the re-bordering of the region and the intensification of migration securitization along the Route.

Subsequently, a substantial portion of the critical literature<sup>2</sup> has focused on analysing the impact of EU border externalization in the region, particularly in relation to the securitization of the Route (Beznec & Kurnik, 2020; Bobić & Šantić, 2020; Carter-White & Minca, 2025; Obradovic-Wochnik & Bird, 2020; Rydzewski, 2023; Zorko, 2018). Scholars have highlighted the role of intersecting racism and anti-Muslim xenophobia in shaping many related policies (Bird et al., 2021; Helms, 2024; Rexhepi, 2022; Trakilović, 2019), as well as the production of other categories of difference and ‘deservingness’ – such as the national ‘filtering’ of individuals travelling the Route by characterizing some as ‘genuine refugees’ and others as ‘unwanted migrants’ (Rydzewski, 2023). Beznec and Kurnik (2020: 47) have described this bordering dynamic as a form of ‘hierarchical porosity’.

Many authors have emphasized the challenges of defining a route that is continually shifting and branching, with ‘multidirectional and often capillary migration routes’ (Stojić-Mitrović, 2022a: para. 1; Stojić-Mitrović & Vilenica, 2019). As observed by El Shaarawi and Razsa (2019: 93): ‘The Balkan Route by virtue of the complexity and volatility of patterns of mobility and immobility as well as the diversity of experiences and itineraries of people who have travelled it, resists simple temporal and spatial categorization’. The Route, in this sense, has remained dynamic over time – constantly reconfigured in response to changes in policies, practices, and bordering infrastructures. It converges with other routes at its multiple ‘entry’ and ‘ending’ nodes, and traverses highly distinct contexts (Ibid.). According to Stojić-Mitrović (2022b), it has therefore become increasingly difficult to speak of *the* Balkan Route. Other scholars have retained the ‘route’ terminology but conceptualize the Balkan Route as an assemblage or a set of assemblages (Beznec & Kurnik, 2020; El Shaarawi & Razsa, 2019).

In addition to scholarship challenging the notion of ‘route’, a distinct body of work questions the very construct of ‘the Balkans’ in general, and the ‘Western Balkans’ in particular (Kolstø, 2016; Lika, 2021, 2024; Todorova, 2009). The construal of ‘the (Western) Balkans’ as a discrete region overlaps and intertwines with the scalar construction of the Route itself and with the logic of ‘route thinking’, which we elaborate on in the following section. Numerous scholars have noted how the complex construct of the Balkans has sometimes been included in, and sometimes excluded from, the idea of Europeaness. The

---

<sup>2</sup> Conversely, and not reviewed here, there exists a body of literature that examines the Balkan Route from a migration management perspective, often emphasizing concerns with smuggling and criminality.

region has often been framed as a proximate-Other, associated with criminality, violence, and what has been termed ‘outlaw otherness’. These representations are closely tied to the EU’s externalized migration management strategies and violent securitization policies (see also Augustova, 2024; Augustova et al., 2023; Bird et al., 2021; Hromadžić, 2025; Rixhepi, 2022; Trakilović, 2019). The so-called ‘Western Balkans’ region, and particularly Bosnia and Serbia, has variously been conceived of as: ‘an antechamber, a kind of back yard of the zoned European Union used to corral unwanted people-on-the-move’ (Stojić-Mitrović, 2022b: para. 6); a ‘buffer zone’ (Carter-White & Minca, 2025; Minca & Collins, 2021: 7), and a ‘European borderland’ (Beznec & Kurnik, 2020: 47).

Accordingly, migrants often find themselves trapped in a ‘labyrinthine border experience’ shaped by a ‘labyrinthian border architecture’ that emerges from the ‘interruptive effects of borders and mobility’ along the Route (Bendixsen, 2023: 196). People-on-the-move may oscillate between periods of immobility and mobility, or even simultaneously experience both ‘stuckness’ and ‘hypermobility’ within the borders of a single state (Martini, 2024; Rydzewski, 2023). Stojić-Mitrović (2022a: para. 1) has proposed the notion of ‘Balkan Circuit’, given that the trajectories determined by ‘pushbacks, pullbacks, [and] readmissions’ are not unidirectional for most people-on-the-move. Rather, their movements are ‘non-linear, fragmented, often circular’ (Ibid.). This circuit also includes the mobilities of various other actors, including police, humanitarian organizations, and activists (Ibid.) This perspective has been echoed by Minca and Collins (2021), who noted that, within this ‘circular movement’, many migrants constantly move back and forth between institutional centres and makeshift encampments, between humanitarian support and abandonment, and between relative visibility and invisibility (see also Rydzewski, 2023). Drawing on Tazzioli’s (2020) Foucauldian conceptualizations of migration management, Minca and Collins theorized that this circular mobility may be understood as ‘a strategically opaque form of governing through non-governing’ in which migrants’ ‘tactics of mobility’ and attempts to move on have been ‘indirectly supported’ by the Serbian government (2021: 2).

While many scholars have noted the substantial changes and shifts in the Route since the closure of the semi-formal humanitarian corridor that was opened for nearly a year from 2015–2016, publications based on more recent research (including many of those cited in the preceding paragraphs) have largely been more site-specific, with less of a ‘route’ focus. Perhaps this fragmentation in research reflects the fragmentation of the Balkan Route itself. As the Route has become more circuitous and more frequently interrupted by border policing, research has become correspondingly more focused on the dynamics of the Route as they emerge and evolve across specific sites. The

literature on this domain has maintained a strong focus on so-called ‘bottle-neck’ or ‘chokepoint’ sites in particular – those sites where migrants remain ‘stuck’ for longer periods, and where more infrastructure and organizations emerge in response to their presence. These sites include: Greece, in particular the Greek Islands (among others, see: Jansen, 2025; Iliadou, 2023; Garelli & Tazzioli, 2018; Tsitsaraki & Petracou, 2023) and Athens (among others, see: Bejan & Glynn, 2024; Bird et al., 2021; Kreichauf, 2018; Mavrommatis, 2021; Papoutsis, 2021; Raimondi, 2019a, 2019b; Squire, 2018); Serbia (among others, see: Davies & Isakjee, 2019; Lukić, 2016; Mandić, 2021; Minca et al., 2018, 2019; Stojić-Mitrović, 2019; Obradovic-Wochnik, 2018; Rydzewski, 2020, 2023; Šantić et al., 2017; as well as Umek & Minca, Chapter 5, this volume); Bosnia and Herzegovina, and particularly the Una-Sana Canton (among others see: Augustova, 2024; Bendixsen 2023; Helms, 2023, 2024; Hromadžić, 2019, 2020, 2025; Minca & Umek, 2020; Šantić et al., 2022; Zocchi, 2023; as well as Gentili, Minca, & Weima, Chapter 6, this volume); and, to a lesser extent Trieste, Italy (Altin, 2021; Degli Uberti & Altin, 2024; as well as Minca & Umek, Chapter 7, this volume). These sites are significant because it is often here that state violence, and the violence of mobility regimes more broadly, becomes more visible, whether such violence is direct or takes place more structurally via forms of abandonment. Indeed, the second part of this volume builds on existing research in some of these key sites – specifically Serbia, the Una-Sana Canton in Bosnia, and Trieste, Italy – as entry points for exploring what it might mean to counter-map the Route at a range of intersecting scales.

Work conducted at the so-called ‘bottlenecks’ along the Route varies in focus. Hromadžić (2025: 10), for instance, has drawn attention to ‘local settings’ and infrastructures, and the ways in which ‘migrant lives and deaths are being incorporated in a patchy, uneven fashion’. Obradovic-Wochnik and Bird (2020: 41) examined the everyday ‘objects and things that constitute the “Balkan Route”’ – particularly visual objects – analysing how such artefacts shape spaces and function both as tools of European and state migration management and navigational aids for migrants themselves. Other authors have focused on forms of violence, including the connection between overt, spectacularized, and direct border violence, and slower, more structural forms of harm that emerge at specific sites (Augustova, 2024; Davies et al., 2017, 2024; de Vries & Guild, 2019). A substantial body of work, particularly by graduate students, has focused on international solidarians, volunteers, and activists (see, among many others, Cantat, 2020, 2021; Helms, 2023; Jordan & Moser, 2020; Milan & Pirro, 2018). Notably, scholarship drawing on postcolonial theory has emphasized the shared struggles of local populations in countries along the Route. This strand of research brings attention to local activists, volunteers, and movements, foregrounding their entanglement with the struggles of refugees – including in relation to the ‘European border regime’ and the

nation-state borders imposed following the dissolution of Yugoslavia (Beznec & Kurnik, 2020; El Shaarawi & Razsa, 2019; Helms, 2023; Kurnik & Razsa, 2020; Rydzewski, 2023).

While undoubtedly vibrant, the literature on the Balkan Route remains highly uneven. Invisibilities persist, particularly in relation to the ‘Southern Balkans’ (North Macedonia, Albania, Kosovo, and Montenegro) as well as Bulgaria, and arguably, the Croatia–Slovenia corridor. Additionally, there remains a notable gap in scholarship on Bosnia beyond the Una-Sana Canton, as well as on the current archipelago of formal reception facilities in mainland Greece, many of which have been rendered invisible. Yet these spaces too play a crucial role in the formation of the Route more broadly. While the chapters in Part I of this volume engage with the ‘Southern Balkan’ context to varying degrees, they do so through preliminary analysis, underscoring the need for further research – some of which is already underway within the framework of TheGAME ERC project at the time of writing. Calling for research on such spaces is not simply about drawing attention to clandestine migrant mobilities (which may benefit from remaining ‘invisible’ – a long-recurring ethical discussion in migration studies that has been covered by Khosravi, 2020, among others). Rather, as the initial chapters in this volume begin to explore in a partial and preliminary way, researching how the Route operates in these spaces may mean visibilizing obscured geographies and techniques of bordering, externalization, humanitarian custody, and violence – as well as the logics of governance that sustain them. At the same time, attending to such spaces may also open up possibilities for rethinking how overlooked local histories, solidarity, and struggles intersect with, shape, and are shaped by the Route. This remains the case even as the concept and scale of ‘the Route’ itself continue to be contested within critical scholarship on migration.

## ROUTE THINKING?

As mentioned at the outset of this chapter, the concept of migratory route has been subjected to careful critiques in geography and the social sciences in recent years. In particular, the literature has focused on how the notion of the ‘route’ may be seen as a manifestation of a top-down hegemonic geographical imaginary – in other words, as a spatial metaphor and a ‘way-of-thinking-and-knowing’ that has often been adopted and popularized by state agencies and international organizations and put into practice via physical and institutional infrastructures aimed at managing the presence and mobility of ‘irregular’ migrants. According to Casas-Cortes and Cobarrubias (2021: 153), ‘routes thinking’ reflects a way of thinking about border management that relies upon imaginaries of “hypothetical migrants” itineraries. This episteme has increasingly come to be seen as common sense among policymakers and international

organizations, and even border guards themselves, shaping the ongoing reproduction of bordering practices and spaces along imagined routes.

From this perspective, and in alignment with other scholars – including Walters, Heller, and Pezzani (2021) or, later, Tazzioli (2024) – Casas-Cortes and Cobarrubias argue that ‘the identification of routes is a way to make the changing and mutable trajectories of migrants apprehendable, making the movements into a specific object’ (2021: 153). The adoption of the ‘route’ as both a concept and a perspective represents, for these authors, a geographical and cultural paradigm shift in how a diverse group – from think-tank members, INGO (international non-governmental organization) staff, and policymakers, to border guards – think ‘about the where and how of border work’ (Ibid.: 154). In other words, the political geography that emerges from this top-down form of ‘route thinking’ is understood by Casas-Cortes and Cobarrubias, as well as other scholars, as ‘a way to read migrant trajectories and make them targetable’, and as the construction of ‘a viapolitical infrastructure of illegalization’ around ‘members of undesired populations (as perceived by the EU) [who] are said to be moving inappropriately’ (Ibid.).

It is important to note here that this critique emerges in parallel with a broader criticism of how governments and international organizations tend to represent migration ‘cartographically’ – that is, as linear movements connecting fixed points on a map. These representations are often stripped of any other content, reducing migration to the mere (illegalized) crossing of borders and territories, and typically framing it as a mass movement of human beings that may be objectively represented via quantitative data (see, for example, Van Houtum & Bueno Lacy, 2020). While the quantitative dimension of the migration phenomenon undoubtedly carries significant political weight, such cartographic portrayals – according to a body of work critically engaging with what has been termed ‘cartographic reason’ (Farinelli, 1998; Pickles, 2004) – constitute a form of epistemic violence in and of themselves (Van Houtum & Bueno Lacy, 2023). In the context of migration routes, these cartographies arguably lay the ground for, and even contribute to legitimizing, the violence later perpetrated at borders against people-on-the-move. For Tazzioli,

[m]aps reiterate a state-based knowledge about migration, at the same time that they envision tactics deployed for rerouting and foreseeing migration movements [...] This is because of the centrality of maps produced by states and international agencies about migrants’ movements, abstracting and translating them into linear routes and flows, with the purpose of diverting, containing and channelling them. (2024: 6)

The traditional cartography of migration, popularized by state agencies and the organizations that collaborate with them in the management of irregular migration, tends to naturalize the ‘irregular’ character of such movements.

It does so, at the very least, by reinforcing within the general public the perception of borders as inviolable and of the uncontrolled movement of masses of individuals across those borders as a threat to the social fabric and political stability of territorial nation-states. Cobarrubias, for instance, highlighted how Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, frames routes as ‘closed, displaced and reactivated’ and borrows academic terminology such as ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors to discuss the movements of ‘pockets’ of migrants (Andersson 2012: 9 in Cobarrubias, 2019: 11). The visualization of routes and mobilities is framed as ‘risk’ and illustrated through ‘routes-lines’ intended to depict the constantly shifting paths of people-on-the-move as tangible, traceable realities ‘on the ground’, cutting across ostensibly natural borderlines in a directed trajectory towards Europe (Ibid.). This mode of representation can then be ‘operationalized’ through military deployments and other forms of border defence and externalization.

In previous work (Carter-White & Minca, 2025), we have suggested that such representations of people-on-the-move along the Balkan Route constitute a manifestation of immunitarian biopolitics – a biopolitics that, by rendering borders selectively porous, contributes to the reproduction of the territorial logic of the nation-state based on the controlled presence of ‘undesirable’ populations on the move. These populations are consequently conceptualized and managed as a humanity-in-excess, whose presence serves to justify the proliferation of camps, the progressive militarization of borders, and even the expulsion of migrants by the authorities – often without any legal grounds. This is why, in reconsidering the intrinsic power of ‘route thinking’, it is particularly useful to focus on the possibility of crafting forms of counter-mapping in order to resist and subvert merely repressive ways of ‘seeing [migration] like a state’ and to advance new critical understandings of such informal mobilities across the European continent (Tazzioli, 2024: 4). For Tazzioli, while dominant mappings represent migration routes as a sequence of smooth border crossings,

[c]ounter-mapping practices are contrapuntal to maps that craft migration as a problem and to ‘invasion cartography’ (van Houtum & Bueno Lacy, 2020: 201), which consists in translating migration into flows & arrows that head towards Europe. In fact, at the core of counter-mapping there is the idea that mapping and knowing are co-constitutive. (Ibid.)

Indeed, even in maps that do not feature the now infamous ‘invasion’ arrows, an imaginary directionality or trajectory (towards Western Europe) can often be inferred through accompanying data on destination countries or from the broader context in which ‘migration flow’ data is presented (as in the case of IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix [DTM] flow monitoring reports for the Western Balkans [ex: IOM, 2023]). Mappings by state and humanitarian

organizations can vary significantly, and critical scholarship should be cautious not to oversimplify what can, in fact, be quite diverse cartographic representations. Humanitarian situation reports and related mappings may draw on and represent more complex data sets, including information on violent pushbacks and other forms of violence, deprivation, and the sometimes multi-year delays experienced during journeys. However, while these maps may not reproduce a putative ‘smoothness’ of journeys across borders and may be directed towards the facilitation of humanitarian response, presumed trajectories often remain. Like the most simplistic ‘invasion cartography’ arrows, even more complex representations of data on migration largely retain ‘route thinking’.

Both Tazzioli (2024) and Cobarrubias (2019), in their analyses, revisited the notion of ‘cartopolitics’, first proposed by Bueno Lacy and Van Houtum (2015) – a concept that helps to think of maps ‘as playing a crucial role in naturalizing geopolitical arbitrariness’ (Casas-Cortes & Cobarrubias, 2021: 164) and supports the claim that maps do not provide a neutral representation of migration, but rather produce a specific Eurocentric political-geographical imaginary of migration as a one-way trajectory towards Europe that is threatening to the sovereignty of member states (Tazzioli, 2024: 6). While the quantitative accuracy and aims of these representations vary, they nevertheless work to project ‘illegality’ onto these movements beyond-but-towards Europe, and thus to legitimize and normalize restrictive migration control politics, policies, and practices (Casas-Cortes & Cobarrubias, 2021: 164–165).

Overall, we feel that we can align ourselves with this set of critical perspectives, especially in relation to mappings that, starting from the identification of presumed migratory ‘routes’, offer a specific interpretation of these transnational movements of people, whereby ‘routes become the main visual protagonist grabbing the attention of the viewer, who instead of focusing on moments or lines of border crossing, starts to wander beyond the national perimeters following the hypothetical trajectories of migrants’ (Cobarrubias, 2019: 12). In other words, the borders of individual states fade into the background, as the route, rather than specific borders, becomes the target of securitization and management (Ibid.).

While routes may be understood as spatial representations used by state and international agencies to depict migration towards Europe in a ‘linear’ and unidirectional manner – as well as to implement and legitimize measures of control, as the critical literature just reviewed convincingly suggests – it is also worth considering, in the context of the Balkan Route examined in this volume, whether the notion of route has also taken on meanings beyond those described here. In other words, how can a route be counter-mapped, or thought of differently? Tazzioli has pointed out that counter-mapping does not refer solely to the literal creation of alternative maps to counter hegemonic mappings: ‘it also encompasses different knowledge production practices

which radically question and disrupt the ways in which social phenomena are mapped, known and made visible' (2024: 4). Accordingly, counter-mapping encompasses the knowledge and tactics of irregularized migrants – often 'non-cartographic' ways of knowing, assembled through the diverse sources of information compiled by people-on-the-move, as well as their negotiation of how states and other institutions may identify them (such as through digital biometric data) (Ibid.: 6).

A significant example of such embodied and experience-based counter-mapping is evident in migrants' navigation of the so-called 'Game'. The 'Game' is an ambivalent name for migrants' attempts to cross European borders, despite frequent and often violent pushbacks, which we discuss further later in this chapter (Minca & Collins, 2021). In conceptualizing the 'Game', we have argued that the migratory corridor through the Balkans is the result of, and based on, a true counter-geography produced 'from below' by migrants and those who have helped them on their irregular journeys and border crossings, including solidarity networks and humanitarian organizations, but also the smugglers that operate along the Route.

A final aspect that emerges in critiques of hegemonic 'route thinking' concerns the distinction between a 'route' and a 'corridor', and the importance of understanding the historical interconnectedness of both modes of passage in shaping the current Balkan Route. Kasperek (2016), for instance, offers keen insights into the 'semi formal humanitarian corridor' that opened along the Balkan Route during the so-called long summer of migration. What had previously been 'an invisible path across the Balkans [...] first established by these movements of migration' became, by August 2015, the focus of European and global media attention. Kasperek described this moment as marking a shift from a pre-existing migration route to a corridor partially managed by the countries of transit and those of potential destination in the Schengen area. In contrast to a route, a corridor is theorized by Kasperek as a more narrowly channelled passage (see also Cuttitta, forthcoming), and as a novel spatial strategy for governing migration, implemented alongside the creation of so-called 'hotspots'. In this way, sovereignty began to shift from individual states towards European institutions – particularly in countries affected by the 'Euro-crisis' – a shift legitimized in part by the cartopolitics of migration outlined above (Kasperek, 2016: 2).

From Kasperek's perspective, while the corridor allowed for the relatively free movement of thousands of migrants across the region for a limited period, it represented a 'half-way bridge to Europe', as it facilitated access to asylum systems at the end of these journeys, and the possible – but not guaranteed – end to the limbo of irregular or non-defined status (Kasperek, 2016: 8). Following Mezzadra and Neilson (2013: 208), he describes spaces like the one defined by this temporary humanitarian corridor as 'spaces of legal voidness,

they are saturated by competing norms and calculations that overlap and sometimes conflict in unpredictable but also negotiable ways' (Kasperek, 2016: 8). This 'historical' moment of 'openness' represents a crucial juncture in all subsequent debates on the Balkan Route. Following its official closure in March 2016, the corridor reverted to its status as a semi-invisible informal route – that is, a space where 'competing norms and calculations' (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013: 208), along with their unforeseeable interactions and outcomes, have consolidated into a specific border regime (Kasperek, 2016).

If the critique of specific institutional forms of 'route thinking' discussed above is entirely legitimate – and if we fully acknowledge that such thinking is intimately linked to the cartopolitics of the institutions engaged simultaneously in the representation *and* control of 'irregular' migrations – then a further step is needed. In the final part of this chapter, we would like to explore how other forms of 'route thinking', and the cartographies associated with them, may relate to counter-geographies produced by the desire and determination of people-on-the-move to complete their journeys and overcome all the obstacles imposed by a specific regional border regime. In other words, what we will argue in the next section is the need to recognize the existence of alternative, informal notions of 'thinking like a route' – that is, a parallel set of discourses and practices which allow us to conclude that other relevant subjects also conceive of and experience the Balkan Route as a 'route'.

## COUNTER-MAPPING THE BALKAN ROUTE

### The 'Game'

What has emerged from the more than eighty interviews we have conducted with migrants in Trieste and Sarajevo over the past year or so is that alternative forms of 'route thinking' are not only normalized by the migrants themselves, but in many ways represent a manifestation of counter-mapping and an attempt to make legible the type of turbulent, erratic, and changing geographies they are both carving and to which they are subjected. From this, a specific counter-geography emerges in response to the institutional cartographies discussed in the previous sections – a counter-geography that must be taken into account in our conceptual engagement with this specific migration context. In the pages to follow, therefore, we propose imaginatively engaging with the dimensions of both 'route thinking' and 'route making', which we have explored in some detail in the early stages of our project, and which are to some extent reflected in the structure of this volume.

In the first book of this series, *A Spatial Theory of the Camp*, we traced how these distinct but interrelated dimensions of the Route can be observed through a focus on camps – both as a key spatial technology of migration

management and as a crucial infrastructure in the journeys of many migrants. Importantly, the book highlights that the immunitarian biopolitical logics of the camps cannot be separated from broader geopolitical strategies. In the case of the camps along the Balkan Route, these geopolitical strategies (see Bejan & Glynn, 2024; Bendixsen, 2023; Bird et al., 2021; Helms, 2024; Hromadžić, 2020; Kreichauf, 2018; Minca & Umek, 2020; Obradovic-Wochnik, 2018; Rydzewski, 2020; Šantić et al., 2022; Umek et al., 2019) are primarily aimed at governing and managing migration. They are grounded in forms of ‘route thinking’ adopted by state and humanitarian authorities in the Balkan region, the EU, and some of its member states. However, this response is highly ambivalent. Indeed, as noted by Carter-White and Minca (2025: 111),

charting the implementation of geopolitical visions entails taking into consideration the further complexity that arises in the day-to-day management and workings of camps; this includes the ‘madness’ and contradictions that emerge when a given geopolitical vision conceived from above is translated into practices that impact the lives and bodies of the multitude of individuals ‘contained’ at these sites.

Even as they exercise control over informal migration, by directing and re-directing migrants’ movements, camps also provide spaces of basic humanitarian care and offer the respite needed to continue on difficult journeys. Keeping migrants largely separate from local populations in formal camps and in conditions of minimal care may both slow down mobility and, at the same time, help to keep migrants on the move towards their intended destinations. Importantly, however,

this is not to suggest that migrant mobilities along the Balkan Route are simply the passive outcome of orchestrations by the EU and individual states. Most informal migrants view the non-EU states through which their movement is channelled as places of transit rather than final destinations, even though they may stay there for years and even apply for asylum in these countries. (Ibid.: 73)

Despite the violence of border regimes and restrictions on migrants’ movements along the Route, migrants can make ‘tactical use’ of institutional camps and the related migration management mechanisms, based on their own ‘route thinking’ and desire to continue their journeys.

At the crux of the creation and continuation of the Route, across its multiplicitous iterations following the closure of the humanitarian corridor, is ‘the Game’. As analysed in a paper by Minca and Collins (2021), this ambivalent term, of uncertain origin, has come to describe the attempts of migrants to (re)enter the EU by crossing borders (see also Zocchi, 2024). For Minca and Collins (2021: 5), the term is a spatial metaphor that encompasses ‘perilous journeys and a whole geography of makeshift and institutional refugee camps,

border controls and pushbacks, smuggling networks and international support, audacious and sometimes lethal crossings of mountains, forests, rivers and fields along the Route'. These attempts are often unsuccessful, requiring individuals on the move to try and try again in the face of difficult conditions and often violent pushbacks.

This 'Game' undoubtedly results from the ways in which migration is informalized, disciplined, and managed. It thus encompasses the involvement of state authorities, the geopolitics of EU bordering, and EU funding of humanitarian sites in the 'buffer zone'. Following Tazzioli's (2020) theorization of 'governance by mobility', which includes the dispersal and forced circularity of migrants under border regimes, 'the Game' may be understood as a manifestation of the tactics used by authorities to keep migrants scattered, unsettled, and on the move within the Route, including via the use of camps described above. In the face of such governance, 'the Game' may be understood as 'a tactical spatial response by migrants' (Carter-White & Minca, 2025: 126).

Accordingly, 'the Game' retains 'an element of hope', given that the vast majority of people believe they will make it and remain determined despite taking great risks (Minca & Collins, 2021: 5). Indeed, the Route would never have come into existence – nor would it have persisted – were it not for the ways in which people, left 'stranded' by the closure of the humanitarian corridor, continued to 'forge their own informal pathways' in the face of increasing securitization, violence, pushbacks, and other setbacks along their journeys (Carter-White & Minca, 2025: 71). This forging of independent pathways, we argue, is the result of a form of 'route thinking' which is contrapuntal to the 'route thinking' of migration management actors. It imagines a route that may be forged in spite of institutional barriers, and in spite of all the de-routings, detours, and disruptions that migrants' trajectories may entail.

## **Connecting Scales**

In our two previous works (Carter-White & Minca, 2025; Minca & Collins, 2021), we underlined the importance of understanding the Balkan Route as an ever-changing assemblage of spatialities and temporalities – an assemblage shaped by different actors operating simultaneously at different scales, each contributing in distinct ways to the formation of the actual spatialities of this informal corridor. This perspective explains why, in this book, we have chosen to devote the first three chapters to a critical analysis of how certain key states and institutions have interpreted this corridor 'as a route', which is consistent with critical readings of the phenomenon advanced in the related geographical debate.

One of the reasons it was important for the opening chapters to analyse these institutional mappings – related, as we shall see, to camps, asylum procedures,

and border walls – is that they reveal, at least in part, how the Route is conceived from a state perspective by a range of institutional actors. Indeed, borders and other infrastructures affecting the Route are all managed at the level of the individual state, despite the influence and financial weight of the EU and its policies (Carter-White & Minca, 2025). This is reflected, for instance, in the ways systems of hospitality and protection are strategically implemented – or withheld – as well as in state authorities' strategic 'abandonment' of segments of the corridor, and of the people within them, to the control of smugglers or, in many cases, to the interstitial geographies made up of makeshift camps, jungles, and other informal arrangements driven by the need of people-on-the-move to continue their journeys (Ibid.). This dualistic form of 'route thinking', with its tightly interconnected strands, has a profound impact on migrants, exposing them to a wide range of hardships and risks, including, in some cases, direct violence at borders (see Chapter 6, this volume). It also leaves them vulnerable to harsh natural elements and weather, given that it is increasingly difficult to cross borders under safe conditions. At the same time, the counter-geographies produced by migrant and smuggler 'route thinking' may be interpreted as a tactical response to institutional 'route thinking' and the repressive practices associated with it (Minca & Collins, 2021; Tazzioli, 2020).

One way of differentiating between these two forms of 'route thinking' might be to conceptualize them in terms of geographical imaginaries and geographical imagination – both of which draw on and (re)produce ideas about space and place, thereby powerfully shaping the material world (Gieseking, 2017). Institutional 'route thinking' may be understood as a powerful geographical imaginary at the service of migration management, externalization, and securitization. It is perhaps not a singular imaginary but is bound up with well-known and previously critiqued 'imaginative geographies' such as Orientalism (Said, 1994), Balkanism (Todorova, 2009), as well as with imaginaries of the nation-state and its borders. Yet, geographical imagination is not only the preserve of the powerful; it can equally be a 'subaltern resource' (Daniels, 2011: 183; Jazeel, 2014). Undoubtedly, the journeys of people-on-the-move also require creative and dynamic geographical imaginations. Migrant geographical imagination is not only about how desired destinations are envisioned, as represented in some migration scholarship (ex: Robins, 2019). Rather, we understand the migrant geographical imagination as embedded in and continuously re-shaped by the lived experience of crossing borders and terrain, dwelling in camps and forests, and negotiating diverse migration management systems along with the ever-changing information encountered en route – in other words, the geographical imagination which is the basis for 'the Game'. This geographical imagination is also a form of 'route thinking', and allows people-on-the-move to navigate ever-changing trajectories and, in so doing, to continuously (re)create a dynamic route.

We thus propose that ‘institutional route thinking’ and its associated cartopolitics are generated in response to the consolidated presence of migratory mobilities in a specific region and by the attempt to conceptualize (and visualize) these very mobilities as a problem, as a threat, and as an element of disorder and violation of the territorial sovereignty of the state. At the same time, we contend that forms of ‘route thinking from below’ – affectively represented by the notion of ‘the Game’ at the core of our research project – emerge both from the authentically geographical strategies of smuggling networks, which seek to capitalize on constantly shifting border practices, and from the tactical, often imaginative responses of people-on-the-move to the near impossibility of legally seeking asylum and better living conditions in the region.

One of the key questions this book seeks to address is how to connect these differently constructed scales – and practices – of ‘route making’ in the Balkans. A useful starting point may be to reflect on some key aspects of the above-described dual and closely related manifestations of ‘route thinking’, and to consider whether analysing their meaning helps us to more effectively ‘think of the Balkan Route as a route’. First, the existing literature makes clear that

the role of cartography becomes key in constituting the current logics of migration management: we think of maps not as providing a mere representation of routes, but as practices that bring them into being, and which are also instrumental in the contestation over routes. (Casas-Cortes & Cobarrubias, 2021: 154)

Furthermore, it is important to recognize that the EU has not always managed migration through a ‘routes strategy’; rather, this approach has developed over time (Ibid.: 159).

The institutional ‘routes strategy’ has been reflected ‘on the ground’ in a tendency towards the formalization and standardization of various sites along the Route, corresponding to the increasing campization of national hospitality systems, while alternative accommodation options have gradually been phased out (see Chapter 2, this volume). This series of top-down interventions has also resulted in the closure of several informal camps and the forced relocation of people to formal camp facilities in many countries along the Route, particularly in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina (see Chapters 5 and 6, this volume). In this context, ‘thinking of migration as a state’ has meant that efforts to regulate asylum procedures along the Balkan Route have remained largely inconsistent and ad hoc; despite processes of ‘Europeanization’, accession requirements, and various bilateral and multilateral agreements (see Chapter 3, this volume), in practice, asylum systems and centres have continued to operate in divergent ways across different countries. The cartographies embedded in institutional ‘route thinking’ have also served to justify growing political and financial

investment in securitization. This is reflected in the physical infrastructure of the camps – in fences topped with barbed wire or even cement walls – and, even more prominently, in the construction of border walls at several key points along the Route (see Chapter 4, this volume). Such developments have made migrants' journeys increasingly difficult and dangerous, while simultaneously framing them as an imminent threat and contributing to a progressively more carceral atmosphere, even in so-called 'open' centres, where the prospect of full closure becomes ever more likely.

These emerging political geographies along the corridor clearly reflect institutional 'route thinking' – especially in contexts where similar strategies have been adopted by different countries in the region, significantly influencing and being influenced by broader geopolitical dynamics. On one hand, countries such as Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina have for some time played the role of buffer zones. These states have provided substantial EU-funded humanitarian assistance to people-on-the-move, while simultaneously implicitly facilitating the continuation of their journeys and rendering asylum procedures effectively inaccessible (Ahmetašević & Mlinarević, 2019; Mandić, 2021; Stojić-Mitrović, 2019). The consequences of these interventions have been profound for migrants, reflecting not only the ambivalence but also the pervasiveness of the EU's – particularly certain member states' – efforts to contain, filter, delay, or even obstruct informal mobilities towards the Schengen area (Petričević, 2022; Tazzioli, 2020).

This has also led to the increasing marginalization of migrants from major urban centres and, more broadly, from the everyday lives of local populations along the corridor. This process reflects a deliberate strategy of invisibilization (see Chapter 6, this volume). At the same time, specific sites and occasions emerge in which people-on-the-move become hyper-visible – such as in formal refugee camps or through interactions with other specialized institutions. The dynamics of invisibility and the selective spatio-temporalities of hyper-visibility are, however, also loosely connected to the emergence of grassroots forms of 'route thinking' in the Balkans. This points to the complex interplay between visibility and invisibility negotiated by people-on-the-move and those who support their clandestine journeys. On the one hand, the increased securitization of the Route and its borders has clearly contributed to the strengthening of smuggling networks. On the other, much state infrastructure and the related policies – which may appear, at first glance, to be aimed at immobilizing people-on-the-move – actually serve to channel their mobility in specific ways. For example, many asylum facilities or other camp infrastructures implicitly encourage onward movement, often by offering a brief period of rest. This pattern was repeatedly confirmed in interviews with individuals who had successfully completed the Route and reached Trieste in Italy.

This is precisely why, in the second part of this book – and throughout our broader research project – we have foregrounded migrants’ perspectives on the Route, examining how their experiences shape its spatio-temporal reproduction. Several chapters reveal a multiplicity of trajectories and assemblages of knowledge and practices that together form a kind of mapping of the Balkan Route. This mapping reimagines the Route as a space of desire – for onward movement – and of determination – to succeed in what is often referred to as ‘the Game’. Migrants must deftly weave counter-maps that take into consideration both visible territorial borders and less tangible ‘invisible administrative-legal boundaries’. The latter include an array of ‘spatial tactics’ enacted by states, such as pushbacks and deportations (Tazzioli, 2024: 6):

Migrants’ maps are counter-geographies in action not only insofar as they dodge states’ spatial traps but also because they unsettle the (cartographic) assumption about knowing as unveiling. Indeed, migrants’ maps shift the focus from a spatial visualisation of the routes towards modes of knowing as assembling. In a way, they destabilise the binary opposition that sustains cartographic knowledge between making visible and keeping invisible: even if migrants’ maps can be translated into a route, the ‘counter’ dimension of those maps relies precisely on their irreducibility to the spatial representation of their journey.

These ways of knowing – both shaped by and essential to navigating routes that are themselves continuously reshaped by states’ cartographic knowledge and practices – may be understood as forming a distinct counter-geography. Hegemonic cartographies that seek to ‘unveil’ or trace routes often fail to ‘grasp’ the subjectivities generated by migrants’ own navigation and mapping practices, which also incorporate the physical, legal and psychological impacts of borders (Ibid.). ‘Route thinking’ thus gives rise to unique migrant subjectivities – rooted in the embodied experience and assembled knowledge of navigating the Route, and desire for onward mobility – while simultaneously negotiating the ways in which routes are imagined and thus managed by institutional and state actors. It is precisely in this way that both forms of ‘route thinking’ shape one another in the making of the Balkan Route.

‘Thinking like a route’ therefore, despite all the issues with and implications of the term, can nonetheless serve as a valuable methodological lens – one that allows us to cultivate a geographical imagination of our own. Such a geographical imagination equips us to critically engage with the geographical imaginaries embedded in hegemonic forms of ‘route thinking’, while also attending to their dynamic interplay with the geographical imaginations formed and reformed by determined people-on-the-move whose journeys endlessly (re)produce a route.

## Thinking Like a Route

In reflecting on what it may mean to ‘think like a route’, we also draw inspiration from existing research on migratory routes. Ethnographic research concerning migration in Central America stands out in this respect. Notably, the ethnographic monographs, *The Land of Open Graves: Living and Dying on the Migrant Trail* (2015) by Jason De León; *The Migrant Passage: Clandestine Journeys from Central America* (2018) by Noëlle Brigden; and *Lives in Transit: Violence and Intimacy on the Migrant Journey* (2018) by Wendy Vogt, all draw attention to how people negotiate journeys of clandestine migration from Central America, through Mexico, and finally crossing (or aiming to cross) the border with the United States, risking being caught and returned. All three scholars have conducted multi-site ethnographic research, with work by Brigden and De León also crossing national borders, while Vogt’s analysis considered transit migration in relation to broader journeys from sites within Mexico. Accounts by border-crossers of their own experiences are an important element in the research presented in these books, which each, in their own way, offer perspectives on routes and borders ‘from below’.

All three ethnographies interpret the creation – and the increasingly violent and precarious conditions – of the clandestine route as direct outcomes of state policies and practices. In particular, they highlight the role of externalized US strategies of migration criminalization and the borderization of spaces that span multiple state jurisdictions.

The experience of the journey is clandestine transnationalism that is called into existence by the very effort of the State to stop it. As the anthropology of criminalization reveals, clandestine activities are never autonomous from the state, but instead are constituted by their illegality. As they return from deportations or failed border crossings, migrants continue to make multiple journeys not despite of the State but because of it. (Brigden, 2018: 18)

Beyond the violence of state (in)action, migration policing, by causing more clandestine movement, has exacerbated the threat of violence against migrants by driving an increase in organized criminal groups within the Route (Ibid.: 85). This increased violence was a predicted, and perhaps even intended effect of the USA’s ‘prevention through deterrence’ strategy (De León, 2015: 249). Yet, research shows that deterrence efforts are largely ineffective (Ibid.: 101): ‘la migra’s fancy equipment is no match for the sheer determination that propels hundreds of thousands of economic migrants’ (Ibid.: 163).

In a border zone that ‘could easily be a place of devastation and uncertainty, void of hope, and for some it is’ (Vogt, 2018: 212), people nevertheless persevere. Even when they remain stuck for long periods and experience the circular migration of returns, they still think of the route as a trajectory that

they may, one day, complete. All three authors note the centrality of hope for those seeking to continue their clandestine transnational journeys. As in our earlier account of ‘the Game’ in the context of the Balkan Route, without these migrants’ determination there would be no route.

In this context, De León (2015) theorizes the route using Callon and Law’s (1995) concept of hybrid collectif, which draws together the human and non-human components of the route that act in concert with one another. This concept is mobilized as a way to engage with the complexity of an evolving migration route – without ever claiming to fully capture or contain it:

Because of the scale, complexity, and randomness of the crossing milieu, it is impossible to account for or describe every single element or actant involved in this process. This is a difficulty characteristic of all hybrid collectifs. They can never be fully illuminated and it is impossible to identity all parts of the system from one spot. (De León, 2015: 43)

Vogt similarly notes the impossibility of any ‘finished’ study of such complex and changing contexts, given that ethnographers attempt to ‘connect lived experience to larger historical trajectories’ (2018: 24). In navigating these complex and dangerous environments, and thus becoming incorporated into the collectif, migrants acquire knowledge through experience, increasing their chances of ‘making it’. Knowledge and negotiation are also central to Brigden’s research on migrant ‘route making’ in Central America.

One of the core questions for Brigden (2018: 6) is how migrants and facilitators imagine and attempt to navigate a constantly changing and violent route, with very few resources. Attending to migrants’ physical encounters, whether with people or terrain along the route, she identifies three key, interrelated themes: the uncertainty characterizing the dangers of the route; the improvisation demanded of migrants to navigate this uncertainty; and the related dynamic emergence of resources and encounters along the way. Drawing on Reece Jones’ (2012) theorization of border zones as ‘spaces of refusal’, Brigden argues that ‘along the route, migrants convert information into practice with imagination and improvisation, generating alternative ways of seeing, knowing, and being’ beyond imposed categories and hegemonic migration governance regimes’ (2018: 23). In this way, ‘the unchoreographed, individual survival strategies employed by migrants generate a dynamic transnational social space that complicates the governance of borders’ (Ibid.).

Notably, all three authors conduct at least part of their research within migrant shelters, highlighting the importance of shelters to the route (for migrants, surrounding communities, states, and researchers), but also their ambivalence (again, for all of the groups just listed). Shelters are extremely diverse in nature, ranging from the dirt-floored back rooms of small churches

to concrete compounds surrounded by barbed wire and guarded by private security staff. They can also entertain different kinds of relationships with state actors. These highly visible sites along the clandestine route are sites of humanitarian support, as well as of formal and informal information about the route-to-come. However, as such, shelters may be ‘both a source of vulnerability and a resource for survival’ (Brigden, 2018: 16). Vogt describes shelters as places of both ‘(in)security and safety’ (2018: 155), noting the complicated relationship of shelters with local communities,<sup>3</sup> including their framing in some communities as sites of insecurity, as well as attacks against shelters by local residents, and the ways people may be ‘preyed upon’ in shelters. She describes the emergence of the ‘securitized shelter’ in a context of widespread militarization of security, dwelling ambivalently on the contradictions of safety and security they embody. While often theorized as distinct from camps, this focus on shelters as key nodes within routes, and their relation to other clandestine sites and the route more broadly, offers key insights into the methodological possibilities and challenges of studying routes from locationally fixed but dynamic institutional spaces such as camps.

For Vogt, the processes described in relation to Central American migration ‘transcend the particularities’ of that space and bear relevance to the ways in which people around the world:

negotiate the increasingly perilous and ever-changing conditions of global clandestine transit journeys [...] While the dynamics of hiring a smuggler, finding transportation, and seeking aid to cross the deserts of Niger or the waters of the Mediterranean are unique and distinct from those processes in Mexico, they speak to the social, political, and economic consequences of a more heavily militarized and bordered world. (Vogt, 2018: 207)

Indeed, these ethnographies offer a compelling foundation for what it might mean to ‘think like a route’ when studying clandestinized overland migration in Europe. They invite an analysis that moves across interconnected scales, taking into consideration diverse actors, processes, contexts, environments, and migration regimes.

### **Route Methodologies**

Our project is nevertheless distinct from the route ethnographies discussed above – not only due to its European context, but also because it is being

---

<sup>3</sup> Also of particular interest is that all three authors consider the implications for the places and societies traversed by migratory routes, emphasizing how these locations are dynamically, distinctly, and unevenly shaped through their interactions with the route.

conducted by a research team working collaboratively across multiple sites in several countries, rather than by a single ethnographer moving between locations. While some team members are mobile along the Balkan Route, others are embedded in specific locations. Yet the research remains fundamentally multi-sited and rooted in ongoing collaboration and shared analysis. Of course, studying such a vast route can never be the work of just one individual. Whether a researcher operates alone, or as part of a team, knowledge of such a context is always constructed relationally and collaboratively. Researchers themselves are part of the assemblage of the Route, even if our role may appear marginal. As emphasized by the authors referenced above, our goal is not to produce a complete or definitive documentation or theorization of the Route – such a task is simply impossible. Rather, this project aspires to offer a form of ‘counter-mapping’, which itself is something new and inherently political. In studying the Route, we too become part of its ongoing (re)mapping.

A key methodological challenge lies in bridging the grand cartographic imaginaries of state and supra-state ‘route thinking’ – and the corresponding migration management regimes – with the micro-scale impacts of the Route as experienced by individuals, and the embodied ‘route thinking’ of actors ‘on the ground’ in diverse contexts. This is a challenge that this book only partially addresses and which we certainly do not claim to have captured in all its complexity. Nevertheless, the chapters collectively engage with multiple levels of analysis, exploring the potential of ‘thinking like a route’ across scales.

The chapters in Part I focus on the various infrastructures (asylum systems, camps, and walls) built by authorities at sites across the Balkan Route, relating them to how the Route is imagined – the ‘route thinking’ of state and supranational actors. These chapters largely draw on secondary data and the existing literature, yet they offer novel readings of infrastructural patterns, as well as suggesting directions for future research. In attempting to analyse infrastructures at a ‘route scale’ (a scale that, like any other, is constructed), each chapter identifies recurring patterns as well as critical context-specific divergences. These divergences are especially evident at the level of individual states, which continue to play a significant role in migration management, even as supranational organizations exert considerable influence.

Each of the three chapters in Part II focuses on a specific locale along the Route but does so at a different scale: a state, a canton, and a city. Such a multi-scalar approach, we argue, offers a way to avoid the trap of ‘methodological nationalism’ (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002) and other overly bounded frameworks for studying migration (Schwarz, 2020) (what geographers might refer to as a ‘container space’ approach). By grounding each case in empirical and analytical connections to broader dynamics of mobility and mobility governance along the Route, these chapters move beyond isolated analyses. Each explicitly engages with the relationship between the specificities of the

(non)governance of migration in the given locale, the wider migration regime shaped by ‘route thinking’, and how these intersect with the routes and desired trajectories of irregularized migrants beyond the specific space under analysis. As suggested by Schapendonk et al., ‘a place-based perspective enables us to understand how various trajectories (of return or intended onward movement) intertwine in places and intersect with mobility regimes’ (2020: 213). Indeed, scholarship on migration has found that ‘mobility regimes may have important local connotations’, even between cities in a given state (Schwarz, 2020: 219), as well as through time. This is certainly the case across the Balkan Route, as this set of chapters demonstrates. Furthermore, within a route, as Part II illustrates, such ‘local connotations’ both actively respond to and in turn shape how the Route is navigated and constantly assembled. Additionally, these chapters begin to address the kinds of subjectivities that are produced by route geographies, as people framed as illegalized ‘humanity-in-excess’ navigate diverse locales.

A notable thread running through the volume is the central focus in several chapters (2, 4, 5, and 6) on formal camp systems. These chapters reflect a broader tendency to forcibly dismantle informal encampments and transfer people into formalized camps, accompanied by increased patrolling of former sites to prevent reoccupation. As a result, makeshift camps are becoming increasingly precarious and peripheral. This formalization in the management of the Route on the part of the authorities has gone hand in hand with the distancing of informal migration from urban centres and its growing invisibilization. At the same time, it has created sites of agglomeration where migrants become hyper-visible. This process is often intertwined with securitization, reflected in the materialities of many camps, and linked to investment in the securitization of the Route more broadly (in terms of border walls and fences, as well as border surveillance and policing). Such material infrastructures all contribute to framing people-on-the-move as threats to security.

Yet, as with all state-centric approaches to migration infrastructure, even as they have been shaped by European funding, each chapter addresses how the geopolitics of migration are differently articulated in different spaces, both at the state and sub-national level. Accordingly, these are sites of tension, contradictions, and endless negotiations, reflecting the broader ambivalences inherent in the making of the Balkan Route. For example, much of the infrastructure and policies, which at a glance seemed designed to keep people in place, in reality channel their movement in specific directions, or are negotiated in unplanned ways by people-on-the-move. The chapters in Part II highlight how many of the contradictions marking the governance of the Route are embodied in the shifting temporalities of migrant mobility – whether through policies that hold people in prolonged states of liminality, or those that compel them to move on, or at least attempt to do so, over and over

again. These tensions, contradictions, and ambivalences of the Route generate conditions of exhaustion, uncertainty, and fear. Yet, they are continually negotiated through the persistence and endurance of people-on-the-move with their own 'route thinking' from below. It is therefore essential not to overlook the counter-geographies forged by these multiple subjectivities on-the-move along this corridor in Europe as they engage with a rich diversity of spaces, places, and communities.

## REFERENCES

- Ahmetašević, N., & Mlinarević, G. (2019). *People on the move in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2018: Stuck in the corridors to the EU*. Heinrich Böll Stiftung. <https://ba.boell.org/en/2019/02/21/people-move-bosnia-and-herzegovina-2018-stuck-corridors-eu>
- Altin, R. (2021). The floating karst flow of migrants as a rite of passage through the Eastern European border. *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 26(5), 589–607.
- Andersson, R. (2012). A game of risk: Boat migration and the business of bordering Europe. *Anthropology Today*, 28(6), 7–11.
- Augustova, K. (2024). *Everyday violence at the EU's external borders: Games and pushbacks*. Routledge.
- Augustova, K., Farrand-Carrapico, H., & Obradovic-Wochnik, J. (2023). Push and back: The ripple effect of EU border externalisation from Croatia to Iran. *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*, 41(5), 847–865.
- Bejan, R., & Glynn, T. (2024). 'A total black hole': How COVID-19 increased bureaucratic violence against refugees in Greece. *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees*, 39(2), 1–18.
- Bendixsen, S.K.N. (2023). Journeys interrupted: The labyrinthine border experience along the Balkan Route. In A.J. Knudsen & K.G. Berg (eds), *Continental encampment: Genealogies of containment in the Middle East and Europe* (pp. 190–215). Berghan.
- Bez nec, B., & Kurnik, A. (2020). Old routes, new perspectives: A postcolonial reading of the Balkan Route. *movements*, 5(1), 33–54.
- Bird, G., Obradovic-Wochnik, J., Beattie, A.R., & Rozbicka, P. (2021). The 'badlands' of the 'Balkan Route': Policy and spatial effects on urban refugee housing. *Global Policy*, 12(S2), 28–40.
- Bobić, M., & Šantić, D. (2020). Forced migrations and externalization of European Union border control: Serbia on the Balkan migration route. *International Migration*, 58(3), 220–234.
- Brigden, N.K. (2018). *The migrant passage: Clandestine journeys from Central America*. Cornell University Press.
- Bueno Lacy, R., & Van Houtum, H. (2015). Lies, damned lies and maps: The EU's cartopolitical invention of Europe. *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 23, 477–499.
- Bužinkić, E., & Hameršak, M. (eds). (2018). *Formation and disintegration of the Balkan refugee corridor: Camps, routes and borders in the Croatian context*. Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research.
- Callon, M., & Law, J. (1995). Agency and the Hybrid Collectif. *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 94(2), 481–507.

- Cantat, C. (2020). The rise and fall of migration solidarity in Belgrade. *movements*, 5(1), 97–123.
- Cantat, C. (2021). Refugee solidarity along the Balkan Route. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 34(2), 1348–1369.
- Carter-White, R., & Minca, C. (2025). *A spatial theory of the camp: Geopolitics, biopolitics and the immunitarian state*. Edward Elgar.
- Casas-Cortes, M., & Cobarrubias, S. (2018). It is obvious from the map! Disobeying the production of illegality beyond borderlines. *movements*, 4(1), 29–44.
- Casas-Cortes, M., & Cobarrubias, S. (2019). Genealogies of contention in concentric circles: Remote migration control and its Eurocentric geographical imaginaries. In K. Mitchell, J. Reece, & L. Fluri. *Handbook on critical geographies of migration* (pp. 193–205). Edward Elgar.
- Casas-Cortes, M., & Cobarrubias, S. (2021). Routes thinking. In W. Walters, C. Heller, & L. Pezzani (eds). *Viapolitics: borders, migration, and the power of locomotion* (pp. 153–182). Duke University Press.
- Casas-Cortes, M., Heller, C., & Pezzani, L. (2017). Clashing cartographies, migrating maps: The politics of mobility at the external borders of Europe. *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies*, 16(1), 1–33.
- Cobarrubias, S. (2019). Mapping illegality: The i-Map and the cartopolitics of ‘migration management’ at a distance. *Antipode*, 51(3), 770–794.
- Cuttitta, P. (forthcoming). Tra produzione e controllo delle rotte migratorie. Assemblaggi itineranti di confine. *Memorie Geografiche*.
- Daniels, S. (2011). Geographical imagination. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 36(2), 182–187.
- Davies, T., & Isakjee, A. (2019). Ruins of empire: Refugees, race and the postcolonial geographies of European migrant camps. *Geoforum*, 102, 214–217.
- Davies, T., Isakjee, A., & Dhesi, S. (2017). Violent inaction: The necropolitical experience of refugees in Europe. *Antipode*, 49(5), 1263–1284.
- Davies, T., Isakjee, A., & Obradovic-Wochnik, J. (2024). The politics of injury: Debilitation and the right to maim at the EU border. *Geopolitics*, 1–29.
- De León, J. (2015). *The land of open graves: Living and dying on the migrant trail*. University of California Press.
- De Vries, L.A., & Guild, E. (2019). Seeking refuge in Europe: Spaces of transit and the violence of migration management. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 45(12), 2156–2166.
- Degli Uberti, S., & Altin, R. (2024). Historical layers of refugee reception in border areas of Italy: Crossroads of transit and temporalities of (im)mobility. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 25, 1133–1152.
- El-Shaarawi, N., & Razsa, M. (2019). Movements upon movements: Refugee and activist struggles to open the Balkan Route to Europe. *History and Anthropology*, 30(1), 91–112.
- Farinelli, F. (1998). Did Anaximander ever say (or write) any words? The nature of cartographical reason. *Ethics, Place and Environment*, 1(2), 135–144.
- Garelli, G., & Tazzioli, M. (2018). The humanitarian war against migrant smugglers at sea. *Antipode*, 50(3), 685–703.
- Gieseking, J.J. (2017). Geographical imagination. In D. Richardson, N. Castree, M. Goodchild, A. Jaffrey, W. Liu, A. Kobayashi, & R. Marston (eds). *International encyclopaedia of geography: People, the earth, environment, and technology*. Wiley-Blackwell.

- Heller, C., & Pezzani, L. (2016). Ebbing and flowing: The EU's shifting practices of (non-) assistance and bordering in a time of crisis. *Near Futures Online*, 1(1), 1–33.
- Helms, E. (2023). Social boundaries at the EU border: Engaged ethnography and migrant solidarity in Bihać, Bosnia–Herzegovina. *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, 38(2), 283–301.
- Helms, E. (2024). Race in place: Scales of difference along the Balkan Route of migration. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 48(3), 472–497.
- Hess, S., & Kasperek, B. (2021). Historicizing the Balkan Route: Governing migration through mobility. In W. Walters, C. Heller, & L. Pezzani (eds). *Viapolitics: Borders, migration, and the power of locomotion* (pp. 183–207). Duke University Press.
- Hromadžić, A. (2019). Uninvited citizens: Violence, spatiality and urban ruination in postwar and postsocialist Bosnia and Herzegovina. *Third World Thematics: A TWQ Journal*, 4(2–3), 114–136.
- Hromadžić, A. (2020). 'Migrant crisis' in Bihać, Bosnia and Herzegovina. *movements*, 5(1), 163–180.
- Hromadžić, A. (2025). Patchy internalization: Transnational migration and local buildings in the Bosnian borderland. *Society*, 62, 1–10.
- Iliadou, E. (2023). *Border harms and everyday violence: A prison island in Europe*. Bristol University Press.
- Il Piccolo. (2025, January 17). *Accordo trilaterale sui controlli lungo il confine croato dell'Ue*. Il Piccolo.
- IOM. (2023). *Mixed migratory flows in the Western Balkans*. <https://dtm.iom.int/reports/western-balkans-mixed-migratory-flows-report-may-2023>
- IOM. (2025) *Western Balkans mixed migratory flows report – January 2025*. <https://bih.iom.int/resources/western-balkans-mixed-migratory-flows-report-january-2025>
- Jansen, B.J. (2025). The humanitarian border as a violence-producing environment: Revisiting aid and anti-migration protests on Lesbos, Greece. *Disasters*, 49(2), e12679.
- Jazeel, T. (2014). Subaltern geographies: Geographical knowledge and postcolonial strategy. *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, 35(1), 88–103.
- Jones, R. (2012). Spaces of refusal: Rethinking sovereign power and resistance at the border. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 102(3), 685–699.
- Jordan, J., & Moser, S. (2020). Researching migrants in informal transit camps along the Balkan Route: Reflections on volunteer activism, access, and reciprocity. *Area*, 52(3), 566–574.
- Kasperek, B. (2016). Routes, corridors, and spaces of exception: Governing migration and Europe. *Near Futures Online*, 1(1).
- Kasperek, B., & Speer, M. (2015, September 9). *Of hope. Hungary and the long summer of migration* (E. Buck Trans.). Bordermonitoring.eu. <https://bordermonitoring.eu/ungarn/2015/09/of-hope-en/>
- Khosravi, S. (2020). Afterword. Experiences and stories along the way. *Geoforum*, 116, 292–295.
- Kilibarda, P. (2016). Serbia facing the refugee and migrant crisis. *Sudosteuroopa Mitteilungen*, 56, 32–45.
- King, R., & Oruc, N. (2019). Editorial introduction: Migration in the Western Balkans – Trends and challenges. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 21(1), 1–10.
- Kogovšek Šalamon, N., & Bajt, V. (eds) (2016). *Razor-wired: Reflections on migration movements through Slovenia in 2015*. Peace Institute.

- Kolstø, P. (2016). 'Western Balkans' as the new Balkans: Regional names as tools for stigmatisation and exclusion. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 68(7), 1245–1263.
- Kreichauf, R. (2018). From forced migration to forced arrival: The campization of refugee accommodation in European cities. *Comparative Migration Studies*, 6(7), 1–22.
- Kurnik, A., & Razsa, M. (2020). Reappropriating the Balkan Route: Mobility struggles and joint-agency in Bosnia and Herzegovina. *Two Homelands*, 52.
- Lika, L. (2021). The Western Balkans at the crossroads of European integration and the emerging powers' projection of influence. *Journal of Cross-Regional Dialogues*, 2, 7–30.
- Lika, L. (2024). The meaning of the Western Balkans concept for the EU: Genuine inclusion or polite exclusion? *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 24(1), 63–78.
- Lukić, V. (2016). Understanding transit asylum migration: Evidence from Serbia. *International Migration*, 54(4), 31–43.
- Mandić, D. (2021). A migrant 'hot potato' system: The transit camp and urban integration in a bridge society. *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 43(6), 799–815.
- Martini, C. (2024). Stuck but not immobile. Waiting, (im)mobility and agency of refugees and asylum seekers along the Balkan Routes. *Italian Sociological Review*, 14(9S), 255–276.
- Mavrommatis, G. (2021). Transnational lives on the move: Looking beyond binational sedentarism. *Population, Space and Place*, 27(5).
- Mezzadra, S., & Neilson, B. (2013). *Border as method, or, the multiplication of labor*. Duke University Press.
- Milan, C., & Pirro, A.L.P. (2018). Interwoven destinies in the 'long migration summer': Solidarity movements along the Western Balkan Route. In D. della Porta (ed.), *Solidarity mobilizations in the 'refugee crisis'* (pp. 125–153). Springer Nature.
- Minca, C., & Collins, J. (2021). The Game: Or, 'the making of migration' along the Balkan Route. *Political Geography*, 91, 102490.
- Minca, C., Šantić, D. & Umek, D. (2018). Walking the Balkan Route: The Archipelago of Refugee Camps in Serbia. In I. Katz, D. Martin, & C. Minca (eds), *Camps revisited: multifaceted spatialities of a modern political technology* (pp. 35–59). Rowman & Littlefield.
- Minca, C., Šantić, D. & Umek, D. (2019). Managing the "refugee crisis" along the Balkan Route: Field notes from Serbia. In C. Menjivar, M. Ruiz, & I. Ness (eds), *The Oxford handbook of migration crises* (pp. 445–464). Oxford Handbooks.
- Minca, C., & Umek, D. (2020). The new refugee 'Balkan Route': Field notes from the Bosnian border. *Rivista Geografica Italiana*, 127(1), 5–34.
- Obradovic-Wochnik, J. (2018). Urban geographies of refugee journeys: Biopolitics, neoliberalism and contestation over public space in Belgrade. *Political Geography*, 67, 65–75.
- Obradovic-Wochnik, J., & Bird, G. (2020). The everyday at the border: Examining visual, material and spatial intersections of international politics along the 'Balkan Route'. *Cooperation and Conflict*, 55(1), 41–65.
- Papoutsis, A. (2021). Temporal bordering in the space of the camp: Producing and contesting abandonment in Skaramagas and Elaionas camps in Athens. *Political Geography*, 89, 102423.
- Petričević, I. (2022). *Beyond transit: Precarious emplacement and the wavering reception of migrants in the City of Zagreb* [Doctoral thesis]. Stockholm University.

- Pickles, J. (2004). *A history of spaces: Cartographic reason, mapping, and the geo-coded world*. Routledge.
- Raimondi, V. (2019a). For 'common struggles of migrants and locals'. Migrant activism and squatting in Athens. *Citizenship Studies*, 23(6), 559–576.
- Raimondi, V. (2019b). Resisting the camp: Migrants' squats as antithetical spaces in Athens's City Plaza. In J. Darling & H. Bauder (eds), *Sanctuary cities and urban struggles* (pp. 191–216). Manchester University Press.
- Rexhepi, P. (2022). *White enclosures: Racial capitalism and coloniality along the Balkan Route*. Duke University Press.
- Robins, D. (2019). Imagining London: The role of the geographical imagination in migrant subjectivity and decision-making. *Area*, 51(4), 728–735.
- Rydzewski, R. (2020). Hope, waiting, and mobility. *movements*, 5(1), 75–96.
- Rydzewski, R. (2023). *The Balkan Route: Hope, migration and Europeanisation in liminal spaces*. Routledge.
- Said, E. (1994). *Culture and imperialism*. Vintage.
- Šantić, D., Minca, C., & Umek, D. (2017). The Balkan migration route: Reflections from a Serbian observatory. In M. Bobić & S. Janković (eds), *Towards understanding of contemporary migration: Causes, consequences, policies, reflections* (pp. 221–240). Institute for Sociological Research, University of Belgrade.
- Šantić, D., Oruc, N., & Degiorgi, S. (2022). Transitional shelters on a policy landslide – Experiencing displacement on the frontline in Bosnia and Herzegovina. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 24(3), 520–541.
- Schapendonk, J., Van Liempt, I., Schwarz, I., & Steel, G. (2020). Re-routing migration geographies: Migrants, trajectories and mobility regimes. *Geoforum*, 116, 211–216.
- Schwarz, I. (2020). Migrants moving through mobility regimes: The trajectory approach as a tool to reveal migratory processes. *Geoforum*, 116, 217–225.
- Squire, V. (2018). Mobile solidarities and precariousness at City Plaza: Beyond vulnerable and disposable lives. *Studies in Social Justice*, 12(1), 111–132.
- Stojić-Mitrović, M. (2019). The reception of migrants in Serbia: Policies, practices, and concepts. *Journal of Human Rights and Social Work*, 4(1), 17–27.
- Stojić-Mitrović, M. (2022a, July 1). Balkan Circuit. *E-ERIM: An Online Network of Keywords of the European Irregularized Migration Regime at the Periphery of the EU*. <https://e-erim.ief.hr/pojam/p-balkanski-kruzni-tok-p?locale=en>
- Stojić-Mitrović, M. (2022b, July 10). Balkan Route. *E-ERIM: An Online Network of Keywords of the European Irregularized Migration Regime at the Periphery of the EU*. <https://e-erim.ief.hr/pojam/balkanska-ruta.pdf?locale=en>
- Stojić-Mitrović, M., & Vilenica, A. (2019). Enforcing and disrupting circular movement in an EU Borderscape: Housingscapes in Serbia. *Citizenship Studies*, 23(6), 540–558.
- Tazzioli, M. (2015). Which Europe? Migrants' uneven geographies and counter-mapping at the limits of representation. *movements*, 1(2), 1–20.
- Tazzioli, M. (2020). *The making of migration*. Sage.
- Tazzioli, M. (2024). Assembling traces of border violence. Counter-mapping as counter-archiving. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 43(3), 525–542.
- Todorova, M.N. (2009). *Imagining the Balkans* (Updated ed.). Oxford University Press (Original work published in 1997).
- Trakilović, M. (2019). 'On this path to Europe' – the symbolic role of the 'Balkan corridor' in the European migration debate. In R. Buikema, A. Buyse, & A.C.G.M. Robben (eds), *Cultures, citizenship and human rights* (pp. 49–63). Routledge.

- Tsitsarakis, P., & Petracou, E. (2023). A making of a border island: The example of Lesbos. *European Journal of Geography*, 14(1), 11–20.
- Umek, D., Minca, C., & Šantić, D. (2019). The refugee camp as geopolitics: The case of Preševo (Serbia). In M. Paradiso (ed.), *Mediterranean mobilities* (pp. 37–54). Springer.
- Van Houtum, H., & Bueno Lacy, R. (2020). The migration map trap. On the invasion arrows in the cartography of migration. *Mobilities*, 15(2), 196–219.
- Van Houtum, H., & Bueno Lacy, R. (2023). Humans, not arrows: Countering the violent cartography of undocumented migration. In I. Van Liempt, J. Schapendonk, & A. Capos-Delgado (eds). *Research handbook on irregular migration* (pp. 49–65). Edward Elgar.
- Vogt, W. (2018). *Lives in transit: Violence and intimacy on the migrant journey*. University of California Press.
- Walters, W., Heller, C., & Pezzani, L. (2021). Viapolitics: An introduction. In W. Walters, C. Heller, & L. Pezzani (eds), *Viapolitics: Borders, migration, and the power of locomotion* (pp. 1–34). Duke University Press.
- Wimmer, A., & Glick Schiller, N. (2002). Methodological nationalism and beyond: Nation–state building, migration and the social sciences. *Global Networks*, 2(4), 301–334.
- Zocchi, B. (2023). Contesting the EU border: Lessons and challenges from the Bosnian frontier. *Postcolonial Studies*, 26(1), 165–182.
- Zocchi, B. (2024). The Game: Ritualized exhaustion and subversion on the Western Balkan Route. *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, 39(5), 875–895.
- Zorko, M. (2018). Hardening regional borders: Changes in mobility from South Asia to the European Union. In R. Jones & Md. A. Ferdoush (eds), *Borders and mobility in South Asia and beyond* (pp. 187–203). Amsterdam University Press.