MONITORISH

Revija za humanistične in družbene vede

Journal for the Humanities and Social Sciences

XXVII/2 • 2025
CENA 6,30 EVRA

MONITORISH

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Journal for the Humanities and Social Sciences

Izdaja:
Univerza Alma Mater Europaea – Institutum Studiorum Humanitatis, Fakulteta za humanistični študij, Ljubljana

Published by:
University Alma Mater Europaea – Institutum Studiorum Humanitatis, Ljubljana School of the Humanities

Monitor ISH
Revija za humanistične in družbene vede / J*ournal for the Humanities and Social Sciences*
ISSN 1580-688X, e-ISSN 1580-7118, številka vpisa v razvid medijev: 272

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Revija je vključena v mednarodno bazo / Abstracting and indexing
IBZ - Internationale Bibliographie der Zeitschriftenliteratur
ERIH PLUS - an academic journal index for the HSS (Humanities and Social Sciences)

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Podoba d.o.o., Rogaška Slatina

Naslov uredništva / *Editorial Office Address*
MONITOR ISH, Kardeljeva ploščad 1, 1000 Ljubljana, Tel.: + 386 40 834 874

Založnik / *Publisher*
Univerza Alma Mater Europaea, Alma Mater Press / Alma Mater Europaea University Press

Za založbo / *For publisher*
Ludvik Toplak

Korespondenco, rokopise in recenzentske izvode knjig pošiljajte na naslov uredništva. / *Editorial correspondence, enquiries and books for review should be addressed to Editorial Office.*
Revija izhaja dvakrat letno. / *The journal is published twice annually.*

Naročanje / *Ordering*
AMEU-ISH, Kardeljeva ploščad 1, 1000 Ljubljana, tel. 059333070
E-naslov / *E-mail:* gasper.pirc@almamater.si

Cena posamezne številke / S*ingle issue price* 6,30 EUR
Letna naročnina / *Annual Subscription* 12,50 EUR
Naklada / *Print run* 100

http://www.ish.si/?page_id=3610

Revija je izšla s finančno pomočjo Javne agencije za znanstvenoraziskovalno in inovacijsko dejavnost Republike Slovenije (ARIS).

Kazalo / *Contents*

Petra Hamer[1]

Between Camp and Cross: Ambiguity, Memory, and Commemoration in Trnopolje

ABSTRACT: This article examines how historical narratives, collective memory, and embodied personal experience shape postwar nation-making and border-making in Bosnia-Herzegovina, through an ethnographic analysis of commemorative landscapes in the north-western municipality of Prijedor. Based on personal narratives, everyday practices, and situated encounters with sites such as the former Trnopolje detention camp, the Trnopolje Cross, the Kozarac memorial, and the Prijedor Cross, the article explores how ethno-national modes of commemoration produce and sustain contested 'deathscapes'. It argues that, despite profound ethno-national and religious divisions between Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Muslims (Bosniaks) living in Republika Srpska, the dead are publicly acknowledged and ritually commemorated in comparable ways, so long as remembrance remains anchored within nationalistic frameworks of 'us' versus 'them'. Drawing on anthropological theories of collective memory (Halbwachs 1980), nationalism and nation-making (Gellner 1987; Smith 1991), and the political lives of the dead (Verdery 1999), the article demonstrates how routine, everyday engagements with monuments and commemorative practices reproduce ethno-national belonging and sediment post-conflict divisions in Prijedor.

Keywords: Bosnia-Herzegovina; Trnopolje; Postwar Society; Collective Identity; Memorialisation; Monumentalisation; Remembrance

POVZETEK: Ta članek skozi etnografsko analizo spominskih pokrajin v severozahodni občini Prijedor preučuje, kako zgodovinski narativi, kolektivni spomin in osebne izkušnje posameznikov in posameznic oblikujejo povojne procese oblikovanja naroda in meja v Bosni in Hercegovini. Na podlagi osebnih pripovedi, vsakdanjih praks in umeščenih srečanj s kraji, kot so nekdanje taborišče Trnopolje, trnopoljski križ, spomenik v Kozarcu in prijedorski križ, članek raziskuje, kako etno-nacionalni načini komemoracije proizvajajo in ohranjajo sporne »pokrajine smrti«. Trdi, da so kljub globokim etno-nacionalnim in verskim razdelitvam med bosanskimi Srbi in bosanskimi muslimani (Bošnjaki), ki živijo v Republiki Srbski, mrtvi javno priznani in ritualno komemorirani na primerljive načine, dokler je spominjanje zasidrano znotraj nacionalističnih okvirov »mi« proti »njim«. Z opiranjem na antropološke teorije kolektivnega spomina (Halbwachs 1980), nacionalizma in oblikovanja narodov (Gellner 1987; Smith

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1991) ter političnega življenja mrtvih (Verdery 1999) članek pokaže, kako rutinska, vsakdanja soočanja s spomeniki in komemorativnimi praksami reproducirajo etno-nacionalno pripadnost in utrjujejo povojne delitve v Prijedorju.

Ključne besede: Bosna in Hercegovina, Trnopolje, povojna družba, kolektivna identiteta, memorijalizacija, monumentalizacija, kultura spominjanja

Introduction[2]

More than three decades after the formal end of the war, Bosnia-Herzegovina (B-H[3]) continues to be shaped by the material and symbolic legacies of violence. The war between 1992 and 1995 not only resulted in genocide, displacement and destruction, but also produced enduring spatial, social and mnemonic divisions that continue to structure everyday life. While armed conflict officially ended with the Dayton Peace Agreement in December 1995, the war's consequences remain deeply embedded in the postwar commemorative landscape, where memory, identity and political power intersect in highly contested ways. The Dayton peace agreement institutionalised these divisions also through the creation of two entities, the Serbian controlled *Republika Srpska* and the Bosniak and Croat dominated *Federacija*, alongside the jointly governed *Distrikt Brčko* (Jansen 2011). This territorial arrangement largely reflected the outcome of systematic campaigns of ethnic cleansing carried out by the leadership of *Republika Srpska* in cooperation with the Yugoslav National Army (JLA) and the Army of Republika Srpska (VRS), aimed at producing an ethnically homogeneous Serbian territory. The conflict claimed approximately one hundred thousand lives and displaced about two million people, almost half of the pre-war population. Many who later returned to their homes encountered devastated landscapes, abandoned properties, and the absence of family members who had been killed or who remain missing. For many returnees, including several of my interlocutors, returning also meant becoming ethnic or religious minorities in places that had once been their own communities. Such demographic transformations have reinforced internal borders that separate not only territory but also identities, memories, and

2 This article is based on research funded by the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation programme (grant agreement No. 101095729, project DEAGENCY)

3 B-H refers to Bosnia and Herzegovina, and I will use this abbreviation throughout the article.

everyday commemorative practices. These divisions are most pronounced in *Republika Srpska*, a Bosniak-minority entity where I conducted fieldwork for this article.

Within this broader context, commemorative landscapes have emerged as key sites through which postwar identities are negotiated and reproduced. Monuments, memorials, cemeteries, mass graves, and former detention camps are not neutral remnants of the past. Rather, they are active political and cultural instruments through which particular interpretations of history are legitimised, contested, or silenced. Scholars of memory have long emphasised that collective memory is socially framed and spatially anchored, produced through shared narratives, rituals, and material sites rather than stored as a fixed record of events (Halbwachs 1980; Nora 1989). In post-conflict societies, these processes are particularly fraught, as remembrance is closely tied to questions of responsibility, victimhood, and moral legitimacy.

This article focuses on the spatial constellation of the former Trnopolje detention camp and the Trnopolje Cross in northwestern B-H. Trnopolje[4] is not only a physical location, but also a symbolic node in wider struggles over memory, identity and political legitimacy. As Maddrell (2013) argues, contemporary *deathscapes* are characterised by the entanglement of grief, identity, and territorial belonging, revealing how spaces associated with death are deeply implicated in the politics of the living. The former camp, remembered internationally through iconic media image of Fikret Alić and legal testimony, functions as a site of Bosniak and Croat suffering under Bosnian Serb control. In contrast, the Trnopolje Cross, erected in 2000 in front of the former camp, materialises a rival narrative that centres Serbian sacrifice and foundational statehood. Additionally, the article gives a comparison between Kozarac[5] and Prijedor[6] monuments, providing an additional analytical lens through which to approach research questions by illustrating how selective commemoration operates differently across closely connected localities. By juxtaposing survivor-driven memoriali-

4 Latitude: 44.9800° N, Longitude: 16.7800° E.

5 Latitude: 44.97238° N, Longitude: 16.82864° E.

6 Latitude: 44.9808° N, Longitude: 16.7133° E.

sation grounded in lived experience with institutionally sanctioned, ethno-national commemorative dominance, the analysis demonstrates how everyday encounters with memorial landscapes actively shape ethno-national belonging and reinforce 'us' versus 'them' distinctions in post-conflict B-H.

Read together, these sites form a composite and deeply contested deathscape, in which different collectives inscribe, defend, and negotiate their interpretations of the past. The juxtaposition of presence and absence, commemoration and erasure, produces a mnemonic palimpsest, where memory is neither stable nor consensual, but continuously reshaped through everyday encounters and practices. This dynamic is not unique to Trnopolje, but reflects broader patterns of memorialisation across B-H, including the selective recognition of some victims, the marginalisation of others, and the uneven visibility of monuments and memorial plaques.

The article adopts an ethnographically informed, bottom-up approach that foregrounds personal narratives and everyday interactions with commemorative landscapes. Rather than treating monuments as static symbols imposed from above, it examines how individuals engage with, contest, and reinterpret these sites in their daily lives. In doing so, it situates personal storytelling and embodied experience at the centre of postwar memory production, highlighting how private narratives intersect with and reproduce broader socio-political dynamics such as ethno-nationalism.

The analysis is guided by two research questions. First, how do personal narratives, experiences, and everyday interactions with commemorative landscapes shape and reproduce ethno-national identities in postwar divided societies? This question explores how collective memory is produced and maintained at the level of lived experience, and how my interlocutors actively make sense of entity borders through daily engagements with monuments, former camp sites and commemorations. Drawing on Halbwachs' concept of collective memory (1980), it emphasises the role of social frameworks and embodied practices in shaping identity and belonging. Second, how do practices of memorialisation and the selective absence or presence of monuments contribute to the construction of 'us versus them' dichotomies in post-conflict societies and nation-building processes? This question directs attention to the

material culture of memory and to the politics of visibility and silence. Building on theory of imagined communities (Anderson 2007), it examines how monuments and their absence function as active instruments in the production of national narratives, disciplining memory in ways that reinforce binary oppositions such as 'ours' versus 'theirs'. I argue that in B-H, commemorative landscapes are central to the ongoing reproduction of ethno-national boundaries. Through the interplay of personal narratives, everyday practices and material sites of memory, the war continues to be lived and reinterpreted in the present. The case of Trnopolje demonstrates how deathscapes become arenas of mnemonic struggle, where the political lives of the dead shape identities, moral claims, and forms of belonging long after the violence has ended.

Methodology

Although the ethnographic research was conducted in three municipalities in northwestern B-H[7] in the time frame from February 2024 to June 2025, this article deliberately narrows its analytical focus to Prijedor in order to examine in greater depth the local dynamics of commemorative practice and ethno-national identity formation. Participants were recruited either at random or based on referral. I included all individuals who wished to participate regardless of nationality, religion, gender, education, or socio-demographic background. All interlocutors had personally experienced the war and/or had been in the country when it began. The final sample consisted of ninety interlocutors and nineteen public events, and all participants were over eighteen years old with diverse ethnic identifications including Bosniak, Muslim, Bosnian Herzegovinian, Serb, Croat, Slovene, and Yugoslav. Semi-structured interview questions, previously validated within my research team, allowed for both comparability and flexibility. Core questions were asked consistently across interviews, while additional questions were adapted to personal wartime experiences. Usually, interlocutors invited me into their homes where I observed that many rebuilt properties displayed a modern architectural style and contained

7 In municipalities Prijedor in *Republika Srpska* with predominantly Bosnian Serb population; Sanski Most, and Ključ in the *Federacija* with predominantly Bosniak population.

religious symbols, family portraits, and in some cases the only surviving possessions of relatives killed in the conflict. My opening question, what had happened to participants and their families during the war, frequently elicited sharply divergent narratives.

Interviews were recorded, transcribed, anonymised, and supported by fieldwork notes, a fieldwork diary (for my private usage), photographs, videos, and audio recordings of public speeches. I excluded those interviews and materials that did not relate to the research questions of this article. To organise the material, I maintained a participant registry and catalogued all interviews, events, observational notes, and audio-visual materials with identifiers and metadata. Data analysis followed established qualitative procedures, including thematic coding, grounded theory techniques, narrative and discourse analysis, and ethnographic interpretation. Field notes and interviews were coded inductively and codes were developed into thematic categories through the identification of recurrent ideas, behavioural patterns, contradictions, and divergent accounts of similar events. Triangulation involved cross analysing interviews, observations, documentary material, and the varied perspectives of actors in different social positions.

I attended nineteen public events across the three field sites and conducted participant observation, collecting photographic material and audio recordings of speeches delivered by political, religious, and community figures. I observed each event from the moment participants began to gather, noting how spatial arrangements reflected underlying hierarchies, and how the dramaturgy and protocols structured interactions and flows of events. I documented who assumed particular roles, how rituals unfolded, and how audiences responded. For the purposes of this article I included only those elements that provide essential contextual understanding for the analysis that follows. All data collection and analysis procedures were designed to ensure confidentiality, informed consent, and sensitivity to the emotional weight carried by participants.

Theoretical Framework

A foundational assumption of this article is that memory is socially produced, emerging from individual experiences that are shaped, organised,

and given meaning through both bottom-up practices and top-down institutional and political influences. Maurice Halbwachs (1980) conceptualises collective memory as a process through which social groups reconstruct the past according to present needs and shared frameworks of meaning. Collective memory differs from history, is rooted in lived social relations and sustained only as long as the particular group exist. It is embedded in institutions, rituals, and spatial settings that give memory durability and authority. Individuals often internalise these shared narratives, making collective memory central to the reproduction of national and ethno-religious identities. Halbwachs' emphasis on the present oriented nature of memory is complemented by Eric Hobsbawm's concept of invented traditions (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). Hobsbawm demonstrates how rituals, symbols, and narratives are deliberately created, often by political or religious elites, to appear ancient and natural even when they are of recent origin. While Halbwachs highlights the social shaping of memory through everyday interaction, Hobsbawm foregrounds intentional fabrication as a political strategy. Together, they show that remembrance is neither neutral nor spontaneous. What is remembered, forgotten, or ritualised is selected to legitimise authority and stabilise collective identities.

In post-conflict settings, memory is also structured by silence. Yael Danieli's (1998) concept of the conspiracy of silence captures how traumatic experiences may be publicly acknowledged while remaining privately suppressed, with emotional legacies circulating informally within families and communities. Silence functions as a social practice that manages pain and political risk, but it can also reinforce exclusion by allowing dominant narratives to prevail while marginalising others. In B-H, such silences often coexist with highly visible commemorative practices, producing a fragmented memory landscape in which official narratives and private recollections remain disconnected. This is especially visible in the Prijedor municipality, where one ethno-national narrative is visible in monuments, commemorations, including in the local museum, while the other is deprived, denied, and ignored. In this case, it produces symbolic boundaries that allow collective memory to become a site of political struggle, closely linked to questions of responsibility, victimhood, and moral legitimacy.

The dynamics of collective memory are inseparable from broader processes of nation-building and territorialisation. Memory does not circulate in abstraction, but is embedded in projects that seek to define who belongs to a nation, where a nation is located, and how its history should be publicly recognised. In this sense, commemorative practices are constitutive of national and ethno-religious identities. Classical theories conceptualised nations as relatively stable formations grounded in shared culture, history, and myth (Gellner 1987; Smith 1991), or as imagined political communities sustained through shared narratives and symbols (Anderson 2007). These approaches remain useful for understanding how national identities are institutionalised and rendered socially intelligible, particularly through education, ritual, and public commemoration. However, following Rogers Brubaker, this article treats nationhood as a dynamic and relational process rather than as a bounded group identity (Brubaker 2004). Brubaker's critique of groupism is especially relevant in postwar B-H, where political discourse often presents ethnic groups as homogeneous and internally coherent despite the fluid and situational nature of everyday identification. In Prijedor, commemorative practices repeatedly reinforce these essentialised representations by framing identity as natural, territorially anchored, and mutually exclusive.

Across all these perspectives, territory remains a central stake. The assumption that a nation requires its own territory to complete its nation-building project is deeply embedded in nationalist thought (Yiftachel 2001, cited in Özkırımlı 2002). In post-conflict B-H, commemorative landscapes play a crucial role in symbolically securing territory by embedding national narratives in specific places. The marking of some sites of violence and the neglect or erasure of others contributes to the naturalisation of ethnic ownership over space and to the consolidation of postwar borders in everyday life. These processes operate not only through official commemorations but also through actions of what Michael Billig (1995) described as banal nationalism. He argues that national identity is reproduced through everyday encounters with monuments, flags, plaques, and commemorative rituals. Such practices function as constant but often unnoticed reminders of national belonging, embedding ethno-national distinctions in ordinary spatial experience. Billig also highlights the asym-

metry between dominant memory practices framed as legitimate and defensive, while alternative narratives are portrayed as excessive or threatening. In Prijedor, this asymmetry is visible in the differential recognition of wartime suffering and in the framing of commemorative practices as either acceptable expressions of loyalty or challenges to social order.

To understand how memory is lived and encountered, this article draws on the concept of deathscapes (Maddrell and Sidaway 2010), which refers to both places associated with death, and to the meanings and emotions attached to them. These include cemeteries, memorials, mass graves, former detention camps, and domestic spaces of remembrance, all of which form dense mnemonic terrains through which identity is materially and emotionally inscribed. The concept has a wider genealogy in work on informal memorialisation and the emotional geographies of death (Hartig and Dunn 1998; Kong 1999), emphasising that deathscapes are not passive backdrops to mourning but active social spaces where memory, power, and belonging are negotiated. Many scholars have explored the social, cultural, and emotional dimensions of deathscapes such as cemeteries and memorial landscapes across diverse contexts (Cameron 2009; Teather 2001; Yeoh 1999; Romanillos 2015; Maddrell and Sidaway 2010), but in the case of B-H, deathscapes are central to postwar life because the dead and the missing remain politically, symbolically, and emotionally present. The landscape is permeated with traces of violence and its aftermath, and everyday movement through space frequently involves encounters with contested sites of remembrance. As Maddrell observes, contemporary landscapes are overlaid with multiple '-scapes', including deathscapes and memorialscapes, which shape how people experience and interpret their surroundings (Maddrell 2013, 510). Deathscapes also foreground the politics of absence. Unmarked graves, missing memorial plaques or monuments, and the erasure of certain sites from official commemorative maps, are not neutral omissions. They are meaningful practices that structure whose losses are publicly recognised and whose remain invisible. Such absences can intensify vernacular remembrance while simultaneously reinforcing exclusion at the institutional level.

The final theoretical pillar of this article is Katherine Verdery's concept of the political lives of dead bodies. Verdery argues that the dead possess

political agency because their remains, graves, and symbolic representations can be mobilised to assert territorial claims, legitimise authority, and articulate collective identities (Verdery 1999). In post-conflict contexts, acts such as reburial, monument construction, and the marking or non-marking of mass grave sites are not only expressions of mourning but also interventions in political and moral order. In B-H, the dead continue to shape political discourse and community formation. Their presence or absence in commemorative landscapes generates narratives that legitimise certain identities while delegitimising others. The dead thus remain active participants in social life, shaping moral hierarchies, spatial claims, and collective memory long after violence has ended.

Taken together, these theoretical perspectives conceptualise remembrance as layered, contested, and politically consequential. Collective memory is shaped through social frameworks, selective narration, invention, and silence (Halbwachs 1980; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Danieli 1998). Nationhood and territory are reproduced through everyday practices and commemorative landscapes that normalise ethno-national boundaries (Brubaker 2004; Billig 1995). Deathscapes provide the spatial and affective settings in which these processes are lived and negotiated (Maddrell and Sidaway 2010; Maddrell 2013), while the dead continue to exert political influence through their symbolic and territorial significance (Verdery 1999). Together, these approaches offer a robust framework for analysing how ethno-national identities are reproduced in post-conflict B-H and how commemorative practices sustain enduring 'us' versus 'them' divisions, particularly in contested localities such as Prijedor.

Short Historical Context

In the spring of 1992, the municipality of Prijedor in north-western B-H, in the *Krajina* region, now part of *Republika Srpska*, became one of the earliest and most systematic sites of ethnic cleansing. Following the seizure of power by Bosnian Serb authorities affiliated with the Serbian Democratic Party (SDS), the non-Serb populations were subjected to coordinated campaigns of intimidation, isolation, expulsion, and violence (Neuffer 2002; Vučkovac 2021). Approximately 30,000 Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian Croats were detained in detention camps, most notably Omarska, Keraterm,

and Trnopolje, which rapidly became sites of severe abuse, torture, and killing (Vučkovac 2021, 234). From spring to autumn 1992, at least 3,176 Bosniaks were killed, alongside 186 Croat, and 78 Serb civilians (Medić 2019, 445). Their remains were later exhumed from more than two hundred mass graves in and around Prijedor (Izvor 2012; Tabeau and Bijak 2005). Children[8] and minors were also among the victims, underscoring the indiscriminate nature of the violence (Medić 2019). The consequences of these events continue to shape post-war Prijedor, influencing patterns of refugee return, local peacebuilding, and deeply contested practices of remembrance (Belloni 2005). Contemporary commemorative initiatives, such as White Armband Day (*Dan bjelih traka*), demonstrate how memories of Prijedor have moved beyond the local context to become transnational symbols of injustice and resistance against denial (Paul 2021) and silence (Danieli 1998).

Trnopolje is a small village in the municipality of Prijedor, where in the spring of 1992 (24th of May) Bosnian Serb authorities established a detention camp in a former school building, cinema, and cultural centre. The camp was primarily used to detain Bosniak and Croat civilians, particularly women, children and elderly, who were held under conditions of fear, deprivation, and violence (Mihajlović Trbovc 2014, 28; Jennings 2013, 80). Bosnian Serb authorities, alongside with my Bosnian Serb interlocutors describe Trnopolje as a transit centre: 'These were centres to which Muslim individuals from the surrounding areas, from the *Bosanska Krajina* region, were unquestionably brought, most often people who were of military age and who, in one way or another, were armed and had offered resistance to the authorities at the time' (PH_007)[9].

In contrast, survivor testimonies and journalistic accounts place Trnopolje alongside Omarska and Keraterm as part of a broader system of detention and persecution in the Prijedor region (Riding 2015, 379). In August 1992, the camp gained global visibility when British journalists Ed Vulliamy and Penny Marshall visited first the Omarska camp and then Tr-

8 Till today, a monument to commemorate the 102 killed children remains absent in the municipality of Prijedor because of continued ethnic divisions (Riding 2015, 391).

9 PH_007, male, 42 years, Bosnian Serb.

nopolje and photographed detainees behind barbed wire (PH_001)[10]. One image, showing the emaciated Bosniak detainee, Fikret Alić, appeared on the covers of international magazines Guardian, Time, and TN (Sadiković 2018), becoming one of the most recognisable visual symbols of the Bosnian war (Karčić 2022, 3; Paul 2021).

Today, the deathscape of Trnopolje does not have an official memorial dedicated to the civilian victims of the camp. During this year's commemoration that took place on 26th of May (2025), I entered the 'memorial room' situated within the former cultural centre; its complete emptiness starkly underscored the absence of institutional recognition for the camp's victims (PH_n_016)[11]. Instead, a monument honouring Serb soldiers who lost their lives for the creation of *Republika Srpska* was installed in 2000 in front of the former camp complex, at a site where no fighting took place, effectively overwriting the site's history (Paul 2021, 7). This commemorative inversion reflects a broader pattern in Prijedor, where monuments to Serb combatants are highly visible, while memorials to non-Serb civilian victims remain absent or are actively prevented (Riding 2015, 391–393). This dissonance is particularly stark given local memories of Trnopolje as a historically multi-ethnic village, where at least twelve national minorities lived before the war, including Ukrainians, who also had their own church. One interlocutor recalls how this plural social fabric was violently ruptured during the war, when his family was also forcibly separated (PH_011)[12].

Case Study of Trnopolje Camp and Trnopolje Cross

As a deathscape, the former camp is marked as much by absence as by presence. The camp operated between May and November 1992. Unlike

10 PH_001, male, 53 years, Bosniak.

11 PH_n_016 designates record from a commemoration at which I conducted participant observation. It was a 33rd anniversary of the establishment of the Trnopolje camp, held on 26 May 2025. The commemoration is organised by the Association of Camp Survivors of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Regional Association of Camp Survivors of the Banja Luka region, the Association of Camp Survivors 'Prijedor '92', and the Kozarac Association of Camp Survivors. The event included a commemorative programme in front of the former camp facilities, political speeches, a prayer and laying of flowers.

12 PH_011, male, 64 years, Bosniak.

some massacre sites, Trnopolje is not dominated by mass graves or extensive cemeteries. Instead, its deathscape character arises from the knowledge of what occurred there, from survivors' testimonies, and from the social and bodily memories that continue to inhabit the space. It is a landscape of terror and displacement, where absence is palpable in the form of those who have not returned. In Halbwachsian terms, the camp is inscribed into a global framework of memory that transcends local disputes. However, the local spatial ordering of memory tells a more complicated story. As my interlocutors indicated, the camp area is for them a place of daily encounter with the past: 'I live close by, and I get the chills every time I pass the cross.' (PH_043)[13]

Here, Trnopolje appears as a lived deathscape in Maddrell's sense, where everyday mobility is haunted by traumatic recall and where commemorative practice is experienced as a moral obligation to absent victims. The chills described by the interlocutor are not simply individual affects, but are socially produced responses generated by the collision of personal experience, collective narrative, and a spatial environment that refuses closure.

If the former camp anchors a narrative of atrocity, the monument erected in 2000 in front of it reconfigures the mnemonic field in a markedly different direction. It is dedicated to 'soldiers who gave their lives to build the foundations of *Republika Srpska*.' The monument is made in the shape of an eagle with outstretched wings, emblazoned with metal plaques explaining, the meaning of the monument (Riding 2015, 392–393).

Several implications follow from this juxtaposition. First, there is a striking dissonance between the historical function of the site and the dedication inscribed on the monument. The monument does not mention the detainees of the camp at all. Instead, it honours Serb fighters who are framed as foundational to *Republika Srpska*. The spatial and symbolic centrality of the monument in front of the former camp effectively privileges a Serb narrative of sacrifice and state-building over recognition of non-Serb suffering. In Foote's (2003) terms, the site is not simply neglect-

13 PH_043, female, 68 years, Bosniak.

ed or obliterated but actively re-marked in a manner that redirects moral attention. Second, the iconography of the monument combines national and religious symbolism. The eagle is a long-standing emblem in Serbian heraldry and orthodoxy, and the superimposed cross sacralises the soldiers' deaths as a Christian sacrifice. This configuration casts Serb fighters as martyrs who 'gave their lives' for the freedom and existence of *Republika Srpska*. The monument thus embodies what Verdery (1999) identifies as one of the core political uses of the dead, namely the capacity of corpses and symbolic representations of the dead to legitimise new forms of authority and territorial claims. By honouring the Serb dead at the very site associated internationally with Serb perpetration, the monument performs an inversion of the moral geography of the war. Third, the timing of the monument's erection in 2000 situates it firmly within the postwar period of entrenching ethno-national divisions in B-H. Rather than opening space for shared commemoration, it reasserts a unilateral narrative that aligns with nationalist rhetoric in both public and private spheres. It participates in what Kromják (2017) identifies as a memorial culture in which the existence and absence of monuments become key mechanisms for shaping collective consciousness. Additionally, my Muslim interlocutors from Trnopolje expressed criticism towards the existing monument, saying it is not right to honour the perpetrators in front of the former camp. For them, this deathscape is full of sad and bad memories, experiences, and traumas. It signals an awareness that the landscape itself has become an arena in which the meaning of death and suffering is negotiated, and in which mnemonic violence can be exercised by elevating some dead while silencing others.

Viewed together, the former camp and the Trnopolje Cross constitute an entangled deathscape shaped by competing mobilisation of the dead. On the one hand, the Bosniak and Croat dead associated with the camp are often physically absent from the site, whether because they were killed elsewhere, remain missing, or are buried in different locations. Their political presence is sustained through survivor testimony, commemorative gatherings and demands for justice. On the other hand, the Serb dead invoked by the monument are symbolically hyper present in the immediate landscape, despite the site not being primarily associated with Serb deaths during the war. Following Verdery (1999), we can understand the Bosniak

and Croat dead as having a political life that is fundamentally linked to claims for recognition of atrocity, accountability, and the moral delegitimisation of ethno-nationalist violence. They haunt Trnopolje through absence. Their absence from the monument, and indeed in official local memorial culture, becomes a powerful negative sign. It testifies to their exclusion from the dominant narrative and to an ongoing struggle over whose suffering counts.

Commemorations at Trnopolje Camp

My interlocutors attend two commemorations in Trnopolje every year. the first is in May, organised by Camp survivors organisations together with the Islamic community. The second is the event *Night in Trnopolje*, organised every august by the youth NGO *Kvart*.

The annual commemoration that I attended this year (2025) constitutes an act of counter-memory that attempts to reinscribe these dead into the moral landscape of the village. Interestingly, my Bosniak interlocutor, who attends all commemorations regarding the former camps, critically explained:

> Commemorations held at former camps have become monotonous and predictable, each year follows the same pattern: national anthem, political speeches, minute of silence, prayer *Al-Fatiha*[14], laying of flowers, allowing everyone to pay their respects in a personal way. But in general, those events are always the same. For a few hours, the site becomes a space of remembrance, after which it reverts once again to private ownership and everyday use. (PH_004)[15]

The continuity of the commemoration is not always seen as negative. Many interlocutors confirmed they see it as their moral obligation towards the victims, remembering them, speaking out their names means they did not die in vain. They do agree and are critical, towards those, who use commemorations for political agitation. It was interesting observing the

14 Al-Fātiha (Arabic: 'The Opening') is the first chapter of the Qur'an, recited by Muslims in daily prayers and often read at graves or memorials as a prayer for the deceased. In B-H, it is recited not only during daily prayers but also at funerals, memorial gatherings, and graveside visits, serving both as a prayer for the deceased and an expression of respect and remembrance. My interlocutors usually used the word *fatiha*.

15 PH_004, male, 53 years, Bosniak.

dynamics of the event, seeing the absurdity of the situation, when a long speech by one of the camp survivors representatives evoked negative comments from the crowd, saying it is too hot to listen to them (PH_n_016).

In order to deliberately avoid politics and nationalisation of the Trnopolje camp, the local NGO *Kvart* organises an alternative commemoration *Night in Trnopolje*. Through the criticism of nationalistic politics of Bosniaks and Bosnian Serbs authorities, it is an alternative commemoration carried out in a way that is completely different from those held elsewhere.

> It takes place at night. By doing so, we wanted to convey something important: the camps existed at night as well, they were not only a daytime reality. Because the event is held outdoors, we chose 5 August, the date of the visit by British journalists, when the wider international public first became aware of what was happening. Only a small part of the programme is dedicated to speaking directly about Trnopolje itself. The rest consists of film screenings, exhibitions, book promotions. Everything is framed within a human-rights perspective. (PH_001)[16]

Bosniak victims hold annual commemorations at a site where Serb perpetrators have erected a monument honouring their soldiers. In one place two ethno-national and religious narratives coexist, mobilising the living and the dead. The Serb fighters honoured by the monument have a political life that revolves around asserting the legitimacy of *Republika Srpska* and recasting Serbs primarily as victims or heroic defenders. Their inscribed presence works to normalise a reading of the war in which Serb violence is either downplayed or framed as necessary defence. The monument thus mobilises the dead to contest the international portrayal of Trnopolje as a site of Serb perpetration. It does so not through explicit denial, but through strategic forgetting and re-emphasis, a process that Mijić (2018) identifies as central to the maintenance of contested narratives. The site becomes a layered space, where one group legitimises symbols of national endurance, while another group sees this a painful provocation that honours those perceived as perpetrators and contributes to a sense of ongoing injustice.

16 PH_001, male, 53 years, Bosniak.

The co-existence of the former camp and the Trnopolje Cross in a single locality can be read as an architectural diagram of Bosnia's broader memory politics. Together, these processes sustain ethnic separation by suppressing uncomfortable truths and perpetuating contested narratives (Mijić 2018, 138). Privileging the dead of one group and marginalizing the dead of others is not merely a matter of symbolic injustice. It also has practical implications for the possibilities of coexistence and reconciliation. These frameworks support different interpretations of the same space, resulting in what might be termed parallel memory regimes.

Comparative Case of Kozarac and Prijedor: Selective Commemoration, Lived Experience, and the Reproduction of Ethno-national Belonging

The Kozarac Memorial stands in the centre of the predominantly Muslim town of Kozarac and serves as a tribute to Bosniak victims of wartime atrocities. Unveiled on 31st of July 2010, the open-air memorial commemorates more than 1,200 victims. Its circular form invites movement and reflection, while its white marble structure is punctuated by iron rods of varying lengths symbolising the different ages of the victims. The walk-in interior bears the names of both civilians and soldiers, collapsing rigid distinctions between categories of wartime loss. Its central location means that residents and visitors cannot avoid passing by the memorial, embedding memories of violence into everyday routines. This spatial centrality makes Kozarac's memorial landscape inseparable from the lived experiences of its inhabitants. 'In Kozarac stands the only monument in Republika Srpska that commemorates Bosniak victims. The people of Kozarac erected it because they respect themselves and their dead.' (PH_048)[17]

For survivors the memorial does not simply represent the past but articulates a moral claim grounded in embodied suffering. Laying of flowers and praying *Al-Fatiha* at the monument is part of every commemoration, bringing people together, and many see this as their moral obligation towards the dead. This understanding of the memorial as a moral claim root-

17 PH_048, male, 80 years, Bosniak.

ed in lived suffering is further articulated through the voices of survivors themselves. For those who endured the camps, remembrance is not confined to a physical site or ritualised commemoration, but rather entails an ongoing obligation to speak, to demand recognition, and to resist erasure. As one survivor from Omarska explained, his engagement in memorial activism is inseparable from a sense of responsibility toward those who did not survive: 'My commitment has never been solely to remembering the dead, but to ensuring that the detention camps of 1992–1995 are formally recognised and commemorated. I believe that my work is driven above all by respect for those who did not survive. I have always felt, in a very real sense, that I am their voice… I live to tell.' (PH_040)[18]

Today, Kozarac has become a symbolic reference point in transnational discourses on ethnic cleansing, genocide, and human rights. According to Verdery, the dead continue to exercise political agency through memory, mobilised as testimony that demands recognition and accountability beyond the local context. At the same time, Kozarac's visibility is partial. While the memorial exists, there are no plaques marking the numerous mass graves scattered over Prijedor municipality[19]. This selective recognition signals that commemoration remains politically constrained. The absence of such markers reinforces feelings of marginalisation and strengthens in-group solidarity among Bosniaks, while deepening mistrust towards dominant political institutions. Personal trauma is thus translated into collective identity, with commemoration functioning as a site where memory, morality, and belonging converge. As Halbwachs suggests, collective memory is anchored in social frameworks, but these frameworks are sustained through lived experience. In Kozarac, memory is reproduced through survivor testimony, ritual repetition, and everyday engagement with a memorial that validates Bosniak victimhood within an otherwise hostile commemorative environment.

In Prijedor a seven-metre high Serbian Orthodox cross, erected in 2012, occupies a central urban location and commemorates the fallen and in-

18 PH_040, male, 52 years, Bosniak.

19 The exception is a tombstone in Stari Kevljani secondary mass grave where 456 bodies were exhumed in 2004.

jured fighters of the so-called Defensive Homeland War of 1990–1996. The inscription *Za krst časni* (For the Honourable Cross), drawn from the phrase *Za krst časni i slobodu zlatnu* (For the Honourable Cross and Golden Freedom), invokes deeply rooted Serbian religious and historical symbolism, expressing devotion to Orthodoxy and readiness to sacrifice for freedom. Its invocation situates the violence of the 1990s within a longer narrative of national struggle and moral righteousness. Nearby, in *Kozarski park*, stands the *Spomen kuća Kameni cvijet* (Stone Flower Memorial House), a small chapel-like structure listing the names of Serbian fighters. Visitors may enter, light candles, and pray, embedding remembrance into routine religious practice. The symbolic reference to the Stone Flower monument at Jasenovac concentration camp[20] reinforces parallels between the wars of the 1990s and the atrocities of the Second World War, anchoring contemporary Serbian victimhood in a longer historical continuum.

Both monuments are part of the annual commemorations, with the most significant taking place on the 30th of May, marking the anniversaries of liberation in the Second World War and the defence of the city during attacks by Muslim and Croatian paramilitary formations. On this occasion, a *parastos*[21] is held in the local Orthodox Church, followed by a ceremonial parade through the city of Prijedor. After wreaths are laid and prayers are offered at both monuments, the commemoration concludes at the main square dedicated to Major Zoran Karlica,[22] one of the 15 members of the Bosnian Serb army and police forces who died in 1992, while 27 others were wounded.

20 Jasenovac, a town in Croatia, was the site of one of Europe's largest concentration camps during the Second World War, run by the fascist *Ustaše* regime from 1941 to 1945. Part of the Nazi-aligned Independent State of Croatia (NDH), the camp was known for its brutal treatment of Serbs, Jews, Roma, and political dissidents. The number of victims remains disputed. For Bosnian Serbs, Jasenovac symbolises a genocide against their people that remains unrecognised by the international community (Kužnar, Odak and Lucić 2023). Among my Bosnian Serb interlocutors, majority is convinced that the Second World War atrocities committed in Jasenovac are still not properly researched and elaborated.

21 *Parastos* is a memorial service in the Serbian Orthodox Church. Alongside the liturgy, they consist of prayers performed by priests in remembrance of the dead, often held at gravesites or memorials, and dedicated to the repose of the souls of those who were killed (PH_007).

22 In *Republika Srpska* a single official Serbian state narrative prevails, contrasted with a Bosniak narrative in the Federation, or the absence of a Croatian narrative, and the erasure of supranational Yugoslav identity (see Džankić 2015; Lendák-Kabók 2024), exemplifying what Billig terms banal nationalism through everyday symbols such as street names and public commemorations.

Viewed comparatively, the memorial landscapes of Kozarac and Prijedor demonstrate how selective commemoration sustains rather than bridges ethno-national divisions. While Kozarac's survivor driven memorial makes Bosniak suffering locally visible, Prijedor's dominant commemorative regime foregrounds Serbian sacrifice and asserts symbolic control over public space and historical meaning. The resulting spatial separation of memory produces parallel mnemonic worlds within the same municipality, reinforcing the us and them distinctions and limiting moral engagement with crimes committed against non-Serb civilians. Rather than fostering reconciliation, these memorial practices entrench competing moral geographies, ensuring that remembrance continues to reproduce post-conflict division in B-H.

Conclusion

This article has examined how commemorative landscapes in post-conflict B-H operate as active sites of ethno-national identity formation rather than as neutral spaces of remembrance. Through a comparative analysis of Trnopolje camp, Trnopolje cross, and monuments in Kozarac and Prijedor, grounded in personal narratives and everyday encounters with memorial space, it has demonstrated that practices of commemoration are deeply implicated in how individuals interpret both the violent past and the contemporary political order. Far from fostering reconciliation or shared understanding, selective memorialisation often reinforces ethno-national belonging and entrenches divisions that remain central to post-war life.

The analysis has shown that personal experiences of detention, torture, forced displacement, and the loss of family members profoundly shape how people engage with commemorative landscapes. For survivors, memory is not an abstract historical concern but an embodied and ongoing reality that informs their moral and political judgements. The spatial constellation of the former Trnopolje camp and the Trnopolje cross constitutes a dense mnemonic landscape in which competing narratives of the Bosnian war are articulated, contested, and sedimented. As such, it exemplifies what Maddrell (2013) describes as the entanglement of grief, identity and territorial belonging in contemporary deathscapes, where spaces of the dead are deeply implicated in the politics of the living.

In Kozarac, survivor driven memorialisation translates lived trauma into a collective moral claim. The central visibility of the Kozarac Memorial affirms Bosniak suffering and asserts belonging within a political entity where such suffering is otherwise marginalised. Annual rituals, survivor activism, and everyday encounters with the memorial reproduce a shared framework of meaning through which Bosniak identity is sustained and transmitted across generations. In this sense, collective memory, as theorised by Halbwachs, is shown to be inseparable from lived experience and social practice.

In Prijedor, by contrast, commemorative practices are institutionally sanctioned, spatially dominant, and oriented towards Serbian national and religious narrative. The central placement of the Orthodox cross and related memorial structures embeds a particular interpretation of the war into everyday urban life, framing it as a defensive and morally justified struggle. Through religious symbolism, historical references, and ritual accessibility, these monuments normalise Serbian ethno-national identity as the default and legitimate mode of belonging. According to Billig, they function as banal nationalism, continuously flagging Serbian ownership of space, history, and moral authority.

All the examples discussed illustrate how opposing commemorative regimes can coexist spatially without convergence, stabilising parallel mnemonic worlds that reproduce 'us' versus 'them' dichotomies. Within the same municipality, post-conflict memory in B-H is not negotiated through shared narratives but through selective recognition and exclusion, with the dead continuing to exert political agency in Verdery's sense by shaping identity, belonging, and moral order long after the violence has ended. This study, which directly addresses the research questions, has demonstrated that personal narratives and everyday engagements with commemorative landscapes play a central role in reproducing ethno-national identities, as experiences of extreme violence remain embedded in how individuals interpret the present and position themselves within contested national frameworks. Practices of memorialisation that privilege a single ethno-national narrative do not merely reflect existing divisions but actively strengthen them by aligning memory with territory, morality, and legitimacy. From my experience in the field, this raises a critical question

about whether meaningful coexistence is possible as long as communities remain oriented primarily towards their own suffering, without fully acknowledging the pain and continued existence of others, both the dead and the living. As long as memorial landscapes remain selective, spatially segregated, and aligned with exclusive narratives, they are likely to function as sites of boundary making rather than spaces of shared reflection, constraining the possibilities for a more inclusive post-conflict future.

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Mazlum Kemal Dagdelen[1]

Constructing the Discursive Frontiers: A Discourse-Theoretical Analysis of the Blue Homeland Doctrine in a TRT Documentary

ABSTRACT: This article examines how Turkey's maritime borders are discursively constructed in the *Mavi Vatan* [Blue Homeland] doctrine as sites of national identity, historical justice, and power. Analysing a TRT documentary on ***Mavi Vatan*** and its YouTube audience reception, this study identifies three nodal points, namely, Homeland, Justice, and Power, that organise a hegemonic discourse linking territorial claims to existential questions. The findings illustrate how the hegemonic claims of the ***Mavi Vatan*** doctrine naturalise controversial maritime boundaries, mobilise collective emotion, and construct antagonistic others such as Greece and Western powers. The study highlights the crucial role of media in shaping border imaginaries and argues that the doctrine's success in unifying national sentiment also constrains democratic debate and diplomatic flexibility. By analysing the discursive processes behind frontier-making, the article advances understanding of contemporary nationalism and the politics of borders.

Keywords: Borders; Nationalism; Blue Homeland; Eastern Mediterranean; Discourse Theory; Discourse-Theoretical Analysis; Public Service Media

POVZETEK: Ta članek preučuje, kako so pomorske meje Turčije v doktrini ***Mavi Vatan*** [Modra domovina] diskurzivno konstruirane kot prostori nacionalne identitete, zgodovinske pravičnosti in moči. Z analizo dokumentarca TRT o doktrini Mavi Vatan ter odzivov občinstva na YouTubu študija identificira tri nodalne točke – domovino, pravičnost in moč – ki organizirajo hegemonistični diskurz, ki teritorialne zahteve povezuje z eksistencialnimi vprašanji. Ugotovitve kažejo, kako hegemonistične trditve doktrine Mavi Vatan naturalizirajo sporne pomorske meje, mobilizirajo kolektivna čustva ter konstruirajo antagonistične Druge, kot so Grčija in zahodne sile. Študija poudarja ključno vlogo medijev pri oblikovanju mejnih imaginarijev ter trdi, da uspeh doktrine pri poenotenju nacionalnega sentimenta hkrati omejuje demokratično razpravo in diplomatsko prožnost. Z analizo diskurzivnih procesov, ki stojijo za vzpostavljanjem meja, članek prispeva k boljšemu razumevanju sodobnega nacionalizma in politike meja.

Ključne besede: meje; nacionalizem; Modre domovine; vzhodno Sredozemlje; diskurzivna teorija; diskurzivno-teoretska analiza; mediji javne službe

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Introduction

There is always tension when writing about borders, a tension that is rooted in the uncertain ways territories are marked and the constant feeling of trespassing. Borders are often imagined as fixed lines on maps that separate sovereign territories and regulate interstate relations. However, these essentialist understandings are far from being uncontested; Agnew (2008, 175–176), for instance, argues that borders cannot be reduced to technical objects or mere 'facts on the ground.' Accordingly, borders are seen to be discursively constructed through meaning-making processes that shape collective understandings of identity, belonging, and difference (Agnew 2008; Newman 2003; Paasi 1996). They are not simply 'there,' but are invoked, reproduced, and legitimised through language, rituals, media texts, and symbolic representations.

Borders are not only material demarcations, but also historically contingent social constructs, shaped by ongoing struggles over their meaning, and attempting to produce spatial imaginaries that aim to homogenise cultural and political formations. Yet, as Garane (2005, 14) reminds us, 'local particularities continue to be created or maintained' inside and through borders, even as they seek to impose uniformity. Thus, borders emerge not simply as barriers, but as sites of contestation, transformation, and negotiation between self and other. Said's (1979, 54) notion of 'imaginative geographies' captures how border-making symbolically constructs distinctions between 'ours' and 'theirs,' regardless of how those positioned as outsiders perceive themselves. As Newman (2003) argues, borders simultaneously function as protective barriers, mechanisms of exclusion, and markers of cultural and political homogeneity.

In line with such views, this article examines the discursive construction of borders as mediatisation of the Turkish *Mavi Vatan* [Blue Homeland] doctrine, a strategic and symbolic vision of Turkey's sovereignty claims, particularly in relation to maritime borders. This research therefore argues that *Mavi Vatan* is not only a geopolitical strategy, but also a discursive project that naturalises, dramatises, and legitimises particular constructions of borders.

The study is grounded in Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory (DT), which sees discourse as 'a structure in which meaning is constantly nego-

tiated and constructed' (Laclau 1988, 254). Adopting this lens, this research argues that borders are not merely material demarcations, but discursive constructs shaped by historical contingencies, political strategies, and discursive struggles. To better understand how borders are discursively constructed, particularly within the context of *Mavi Vatan*, this study employs Discourse-Theoretical Analysis (DTA), as elaborated by Carpentier and De Cleen (2007). Methodologically, the analysis employs a retroductive approach (Glynos and Howarth 2007), which facilitates iterative movements between the theoretical framework and the empirical material. In order to capture how meanings are produced multimodally in the documentary, DTA is further strengthened by multimodal analysis techniques.

The analysis focuses on a documentary produced by Turkey's public service broadcaster, TRT, and its online reception through YouTube comments, thereby bridging institutional and digital media. By examining how *Mavi Vatan* is articulated as a set of hegemonic claims over maritime borders through the TRT documentary, and how such claims are debated in YouTube comments, this article explores the media's capacity to 'order our lives, and organise social space' (Couldry 2003, 1). By discussing how media operate not as neutral transmitters but as active participants in the construction of hegemony, this study unpacks how borders are discursively produced across legal, affective, and mythic registers that circulate in both 'institutional/official' and 'vernacular' texts.

Furthermore, the article situates the empirical analysis within the context of the Eastern Mediterranean disputes, acknowledging the enduring salience of contested maritime sovereignty in Turkey's geopolitical imagination and highlighting how the *Mavi Vatan* doctrine draws upon earlier struggles over sovereignty and belonging. The doctrine becomes legible not only as a security strategy, but as part of a longer genealogical struggle over borders, one that continues to shape Turkey's nationalist imaginaries.

From Cartographic Lines to Discursive Formations: Theorising Borders

Laclau and Mouffe's (2001) discourse theory (DT) provides the theoretical backbone of this study. DT represents a significant departure from essentialist understandings of society, politics, and identity, offering instead a

non-foundationalist approach that emphasises contingency, antagonism, and the discursive struggles for hegemony (Laclau and Mouffe 2001; Howarth 2000). DT argues that social reality is discursively constructed, and thus, argues that the concept of discourse extends far beyond language to encompass the totality of meaningful practices and relations that constitute the social (Carpentier 2017, 18).

DT argues that discourse is 'a relational totality of signifying sequences that determine the identity of the social elements' (Torfing 1999, 87). This implies that objects and practices acquire meaning through their inscription within discursive formations. In this sense, DT sees discourse as 'a framework of intelligibility providing meaning to social phenomena, objects, and actors' (Dagdelen and Carpentier 2024, 146). This does not suggest that material reality does not exist, but that objects and practices acquire meaning through their inscription within discursive formations. Carpentier (2017, 19) argues that although discourse is distinct from the material, it is crucial for making sense of it. DT therefore views discourse not just as a reflection of the social but as constitutive of it. The social, in this conception, is never given but constructed through articulatory practices (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002).

DT defines discourse as 'a structure in which meaning is constantly negotiated and constructed' (Laclau 1988, 254). Central to this process is the concept of articulation, which is, according to Laclau and Mouffe (2001, 105), 'any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice.' Through articulation, distinct elements are woven around privileged signifiers called nodal points that serve as organising centres for meaning making. Nodal points function to temporarily arrest the flow of signification, creating partial fixations that enable the construction of identities and political projects. As Stavrakakis (2007, 58) puts it, nodal points 'describe the signifier which, in every chain of signification, serves as [a] reference point, the 'anchoring point' uniting a whole set of signifiers.' Nodal points, then, 'function as a central category in discourse theory, designed to explain how meaning achieves a (partial) fixation without which social and political discourse would surely disintegrate into psychotic rumbling' (Stavrakakis 2007, 68). As Jørgensen and Phillips (2002, 28) argue, nodal points are 'emp-

ty in themselves.' This implies that different discourses engage in discursive struggles to invest these signifiers with meaning in particular ways. Thus, a nodal point 'refers to a point of crystallisation within a specific discourse' (ibid.).

Such struggles over meanings constitute the terrain of hegemonic struggles. DT's understanding of hegemony has been largely inspired by the work of Gramsci, for whom hegemony could be seen 'as the organisation of consent' (Barrett 1991, 54). Hegemony, thus, 'explains how power may be exercised not just through physical coercion but covertly, through ideology and discourse' (Flowerdew and Richardson 2018, 4). The concept therefore refers to 'the processes through which subordinated forms of consciousness are constructed without recourse to violence or coercion' (Barrett 1991, 54). In other words, it is a condition in which authority is legitimised through the tacit consent of the governed rather than through coercive means (Flowerdew and Richardson 2018, 4). Hegemony, for DT, is not simply domination but rather 'a political type of relation, a form […] of politics, but not a determinable location within a topography of the social' (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, 139). In DT, 'hegemony refers to situations where particular discourses obtain social dominance' (Carpentier 2017, 21). However, 'even in cases where the establishment of hegemony concludes antagonistic struggles, this hegemony is not permanent, as new (or old) antagonisms can always (re)surface' (Dagdelen and Carpentier 2024, 147). Laclau and Mouffe (2001, 135) argue that 'hegemony […] emerge[s] in a field criss-crossed by antagonisms.' Therefore, as Mouffe (2005, 18) puts it, 'every hegemonic order is susceptible of being challenged by counter-hegemonic practices […] which will attempt to disarticulate the existing order so as to install other forms of hegemony.'

Antagonisms can also be found at another level, involving both discursive identification and the exclusion of others. As Carpentier (2017, 22) argues, antagonisms 'attempt to destabilise the "other" identity but desperately need that very "other" as a constitutive outside to stabilise the proper identity.' Perhaps most significantly for the study of borders and nationalism is the discourse-theoretical conceptualisation of antagonism as constitutive of identities. Antagonism represents the tension arising when an 'other' disrupts or threatens one's identity. As Laclau and Mouffe

(2001, 125) argue, 'antagonism constitutes the limits of every objectivity,' revealing the contingent nature of all social formations by showing that 'the presence of the Other prevents me from being totally myself.' This understanding of antagonism has profound implications for analysing nationalist discourse and border construction. National identities are not given entities but emerge through antagonistic relations with Others, who are often positioned as threatening the coherence and continuity of the nation. The frontier of antagonism thus becomes both a discursive and material boundary that separates 'us' from 'them,' inside from outside, legitimate from illegitimate.

The application of DT to border studies reveals that borders are discursive phenomena rather than natural or purely material entities. As Foucault (1980, 68) observes, 'territory is no doubt a geographical notion, but it is first of all a juridico-political one: the area controlled by a certain kind of power.' In this sense, borders are not simply lines on maps but are constituted through discursive practices that define, legitimise, and reproduce relations of power and authority over space. This perspective challenges conventional approaches that treat borders as given territorial demarcations, emphasising instead how borders are constructed, maintained, and contested through discursive practices (Newman 2003; Paasi 1996). Such understanding calls for a critical rethinking of borders, moving beyond a territorialist lens to see borders as dynamic, dispersed practices embedded across society, technology, and governance rather than fixed lines on maps (Parker and Vaughan-Williams 2009, 583). According to Agnew (2008, 175), borders must move beyond being seen as simple 'artefacts on the ground' and instead be recognised as 'artefacts of dominant discursive processes through which chunks of territory and people have been fenced off from one another.'

This processual understanding reveals how borders represent 'a gradual evolution of the conceptualisation of the border from a territorially placed boundary and filter, to a semantically constructed, ritualised, and performed symbolic border, and finally to a discursive (textual) construction' (Kurki 2014, 1055). Borders, in this view, are not simply inscribed on maps but actively produced through everyday practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural representations. They function as sites where

identities are negotiated, differences are constructed, and belonging is determined (Rumford 2006).

The discursive construction of borders is intimately connected to processes of national identity formation. As Anderson (2006) argues, nations are 'imagined communities' that are both limited and sovereign. These imagined boundaries do not simply describe pre-existing differences but actively produce the distinctions they purport to reflect. Nationalist discourses construct borders as natural expressions of cultural, ethnic, or historical differences, thereby obscuring their contingent and political character (Billig 1995). Through processes of symbolic bordering, national communities are imagined as bounded, coherent entities with clear inside/outside distinctions (Lamont and Molnár 2002, 168). This imaginative geography creates what Said (1978) termed 'imaginative geographies,' which are spatial representations that construct 'ours' and 'theirs' distinctions independent of any recognition by those deemed to be outside.

Performativity also plays a crucial role in understanding borders, as borders are not static lines but dynamic processes that are enacted, materialised, and performed in multiple ways. Border discourses actively construct borders through repeated acts that both delineate and reinforce their meaning. The performativity of borders thus resembles Butler's (1990, 140) notion of the 'stylised repetition of acts,' wherein boundaries are constituted through practices that sustain their legitimacy. As Paasi observes, borders are 'enacted and performed not only as "discursive or emotional landscapes of social power" [...] but also as "technical landscapes of control and surveillance,"' underscoring their dual nature as both symbolic and material constructs (Johnson et al. 2011, 62). From this perspective, the legitimacy of national subjects – like that of refugees, whose 'genuineness' emerges only through recognition (Nyers 2006, 92–95) – is also produced through discursive practices that define authentic citizenship in opposition to various forms of otherness. The performativity of borders reveals that they are never fully complete or secure, either materially or discursively; thus, they demand constant reiteration and reinforcement. Each act of border crossing, policy speech, and media representation participates in

the ongoing construction of the border as a meaningful and contested boundary (Johnson et al. 2011, 66). This understanding opens space for analysing how borders may be challenged, reimagined, or transformed through alternative discursive practices.

Emphasising the 'polysemy' and 'heterogeneity' of borders, Balibar (2002, 75) argues that it is impossible to 'attribute to the border an essence which would be valid in all places and at all times.' However, one can argue, using the discourse-theoretical vernacular, that borders resemble hegemonic articulations that temporarily stabilise territorial and identity configurations. Border discourses construct chains of equivalence linking territory, security, identity, and sovereignty while positioning various others as threats to national coherence (Balibar 2002). However, no hegemonic border construction can ever be complete or permanent. They remain vulnerable to dislocation through counter-hegemonic contestations, just as any hegemonic discourse (Laclau 1990, 28). Alternative articulations may emerge that challenge dominant border imaginaries, proposing different ways of organising space, identity, and belonging (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013, 281–84).

The Geopolitical Context of *Mavi Vatan*

Turkish geopolitics in the Eastern Mediterranean has developed from the Ottoman Empire's collapse into an assertive maritime strategy shaped by history, territorial disputes, and energy competition. Following the 'inward-looking first decades' (Mufti 2009, 31) of the Republic, the post–World War II period marked Turkey's integration into the Western security architecture (Chiozzo and Neves 2024, 261–62). However, tensions with Greece over Cyprus and Aegean disputes, disagreements with the United States, and the Cyprus question pushed Turkey to diversify its foreign policy (Ayanoğlu 2022, 10). Towards the end of the Cold War period, most visibly during the Özal era, strong pro-American alignment reconfigured Turkey's foreign policy towards a more economy-oriented trajectory, in which processes of economic liberalisation sought to reconcile Turkey's traditional Western orientation with deeper engagement in the Islamic world, emphasising economic integration and advocating for Turkey as a bridge linking East and West while promoting liberal market reforms (Aral 2001).

The early twenty-first century witnessed a paradigm shift under the AKP government. With the 'Strategic Depth' doctrine, Anatolia began to be seen 'as a hub between Europe, Africa, and Asia,' calling for active engagement in areas of former Ottoman influence (Areteos 2020, 4; Denizeau 2021, 11). This strategic reorientation overlapped with the maritime strategy of the *Mavi Vatan* doctrine. The doctrine has become a key element of Turkey's foreign and security policy, which seeks to position Turkey as a regional naval power in the Mediterranean (Areteos 2020, 2). As one of the most significant maritime geopolitical developments in contemporary Turkey, *Mavi Vatan* has fundamentally reshaped Turkish foreign policy and regional dynamics, marking a departure from traditional defensive postures towards an assertive maritime nationalism and the 'remilitarisation of Turkish foreign policy' (Chiozzo and Neves 2024, 263).

The doctrine emerged from within Turkey's naval establishment as a strategic response to perceived maritime encirclement and the country's diminishing access to sea-based resources. It was initially conceptualised by Admiral Gürdeniz in 2006 (Moudouros 2021, 465). From 2009 onward, Admiral Yaycı took an interest in the outline of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) claimed by Turkey and contributed significantly to the development and popularisation of the doctrine (Denizeau 2021, 7). In outlining his approach, Gürdeniz criticised the EU's reliance on the Seville map, arguing that it lacked legal justification and further calling on Turkey, which is not a party to the Montego Bay Convention, to assert a broader EEZ, which he termed the *Mavi Vatan* (Chiozzo and Neves 2024, 265; Denizeau 2021, 7). The doctrine established a comprehensive framework asserting Turkish claims over approximately 462,000 square kilometres of maritime territory. In doing so, it reflects a broader maritime sovereignty strategy, as Parlar Dal and Matsumoto (2024, 7) note: 'the doctrine reflects a maritime sovereignty approach and a growing trend towards the territorialisation of the maritime domain.'

The doctrine's rise as a core element of Turkey's security policy is tied to ongoing power struggles in Ankara (Areteos 2020, 2). In its early years, the doctrine remained largely confined to naval circles (Stergiou 2022, 80). The transformation of *Mavi Vatan* from a fringe naval concept to a central pillar of Turkish state policy represents a significant shift in contemporary

Turkish geopolitics. This transition was catalysed by the failed coup attempt in 2016, which fundamentally altered Turkey's ruling coalition and created space for previously marginalised nationalist voices within the security establishment (Denizeau 2021, 4). The coup attempt resulted in the dissolution of Turkey's existing power bloc and the formation of a new 'survival of the state' coalition (Moudouros 2021, 461). The *Mavi Vatan* doctrine became a unifying element within this coalition, providing a framework for Turkish assertiveness that appealed to both Islamist and secular nationalist constituencies.

The political uptake of the doctrine was facilitated by its adaptability to different ideological frameworks within the Turkish governing coalition. For (ultra-)nationalist and Kemalist elements, the doctrine represented a return to Atatürk's vision of Turkish maritime power and resistance to Western attempts to confine Turkey to a limited coastal zone (Areteos 2020, 2–3). Gürdeniz consistently emphasised the Kemalist credentials of the doctrine, which he viewed as protecting state interests against neo-Ottoman expansionism and Islamist influences (see, Gürdeniz 2015). However, the doctrine simultaneously accommodated neo-Ottoman and Islamist interpretations that resonated with the AKP's ideological base (Moudouros 2021, 467). This dual character allowed *Mavi Vatan* to serve as what could be described as a legitimising axis unifying disparate elements of Turkey's ruling coalition around a common assertive agenda.

The doctrine's nationalist imaginaries extend beyond immediate maritime claims to encompass broader visions of Turkish regional leadership. In this view, Turkey is constructed as a bastion of stability it the middle of Eurasia (Yeşiltaş 2013, 667). This pan-Turkic dimension adds another layer to the doctrine's ideological appeal, while also expanding its perceived strategic significance.

The Eastern Mediterranean contains significant energy reserves, making control over maritime zones economically and strategically valuable (Stergiou 2022, xi). *Mavi Vatan*, which challenges the claims of Greece and Cyprus, has transformed the region into what some describe as a volatile 'geopolitical battleground,' marked by competing claims over maritime rights, energy resources, and regional dominance (Evriviades 2025).

Turkey refuses to recognise Cyprus's EEZ agreements, arguing that such arrangements violate Turkish continental shelf rights and ignore the interests of Turkish Cypriots (Yiallourides and Sözen 2025). This position has led to repeated confrontations, including Turkey's deployment of drilling vessels within Cyprus's claimed EEZ and naval interventions to prevent Cypriot exploration activities (see Henderson 2019).

The Turkey-Libya maritime agreement represents the doctrine's most controversial practical application (Stergiou 2022, 71). The memorandum of understanding with Libya claims maritime boundaries that cut through Greek-claimed waters south of Crete, effectively invalidating Greek and Egyptian maritime zones (ibid., 72). It also provides Turkey with a strategic foothold in the Mediterranean while breaking its regional isolation, though it has been widely condemned by the EU, Greece, and Egypt as legally invalid. Implementation of the doctrine has severely strained NATO cohesion and transatlantic relations. Its assertive maritime posture has led to direct confrontations between NATO allies, including a June 2020 incident between Turkish and French warships (Marghelis 2021, 18). These confrontations highlight what analysts describe as Turkey's challenge to NATO's collective defence coherence and its potential to undermine vital NATO-EU cooperation in the Mediterranean region (Conley and Ellehuus 2020).

The doctrine's regional implications extend beyond immediate Mediterranean concerns to encompass broader questions of international legal order. Turkey's rejection of UNCLOS and its preference for 'equitable principles' over established maritime law challenge the foundation of contemporary maritime governance (Stergiou 2022, 7). This position aligns Turkey with other revisionist powers while undermining the legal frameworks that have governed Mediterranean relations for decades.

The doctrine has established Turkey as a disruptive force in Eastern Mediterranean geopolitics, challenging established maritime arrangements while pursuing energy security and regional influence. Its implementation has created lasting tensions with Greece and Cyprus, strained NATO cohesion, and established new frameworks for Turkish assertiveness that appear likely to define regional dynamics for years to come. The doctrine's success in unifying Turkey's domestic political coalition around an as-

sertive nationalist agenda suggests its continued prominence in Turkish strategic thinking, even as its regional implications continue to generate significant international opposition and concern.

Research Design and Methodology

This study applies Discourse Theoretical Analysis (DTA), developed by Carpentier and De Cleen (2007). DTA was developed to operationalise DT by establishing a link between the conceptual framework of DT and the methodology of qualitative research. It does so primarily by using sensitising concepts, which provide 'a general sense of reference and guidance in approaching empirical instances' (Blumer 1986, 148), as methodological tools that guide empirical inquiry.

DTA, as a qualitative research method, employs a retroductive approach (Glynos and Howarth 2007), allowing for a dynamic and iterative movement between theory and empirical material. This approach emphasises the cross-fertilisation between the theoretical framework and the analytical process, in which neither precedes nor determines the other. To this end, DTA draws on sensitising concepts derived from DT and complementary theoretical perspectives to guide the analysis without constraining its interpretive openness. Within this study, 'discourse' operates as the central sensitising concept, supported by others such as 'nodal points,' 'articulation,' and 'antagonism,' as well as notions drawn from mediated nationalism and geopolitical imagination. These sensitising concepts initially orient data collection and preliminary coding, but are reflexively adjusted in dialogue with empirical insights. Accordingly, these concepts were developed in parallel with the empirical analysis, ensuring that theoretical reflection evolved alongside the examination of the material rather than being imposed upon it. This iterative process took shape through successive cycles of coding and categorisation, following Saldaña's (2016) approach, whereby theoretical insights gradually informed the structuring of empirical categories, leading to increasing levels of abstraction and conceptual refinement. This ensures a theoretically sensitive yet grounded approach to the empirical material, resisting reductionist applications of theory.

Since the analysis concerns a documentary film, DTA is further strengthened by multimodal analysis techniques that help examine the multiplici-

ty of communicative modes and the interactions among them (Kress 2010). The combination of multimodal analysis techniques with DTA allows for the investigation of communicative interactions between different modalities and how these contribute to the discursive construction of geopolitical frontiers and antagonisms.

The empirical corpus is composed of the 47-minute TRT documentary, *Mavi Vatan* (2020), offering a state-produced story of the *Mavi Vatan* doctrine, and 460 YouTube comments from the documentary's page, incorporating all comments to capture vernacular audience perspectives. Both the documentary and audience responses are treated as discursive sites. The analysis attends to how geopolitical antagonisms and frontiers are articulated officially, as well as how they are re-articulated, contested, or amplified in participatory digital forums.

Coding began with the identification of sensitising concepts from DT and border studies, as well as emergent themes from initial documentary viewing and audience comment sampling. Through sequential coding cycles, an analytical coding tree was developed, capturing both discursive logics and substantive themes (Saldaña 2013). Iterative analysis was maintained, ensuring continual cross-fertilisation between theoretical categories and empirical patterns. Where relevant, visual and audio elements were annotated with reference to their position in the documentary's narrative structure, allowing for integration of multimodal evidence into the broader DTA framework. This strategy ensures that both the construction and contestation of the doctrine are examined through a lens sensitive to the complexity of discourse and the multiplicity of communicative modes.

Analysis: Discursive Construction of Borders through *Mavi Vatan* Doctrine

The analysis identifies three nodal points that structure the *Mavi Vatan* discourse: *Vatan* [Homeland], *Adalet* [Justice], and *Güç* [Power]. Each of them operates through distinct discursive logics, while contributing to the overall hegemonic project of naturalising Turkey's maritime territorial claims. The analysis also indicates that the construction of the antagonistic Other as the constitutive outside further strengthens the hegemonic claims of this discourse.

Vatan [Homeland]: Sacralising Space

The concept of *Vatan* functions as the privileged signifier that transforms the contested maritime space into a sacred national territory. This nodal point operates through what can be termed territorial sacralisation; that is, the discursive transformation of geographical space into an embodied extension of national identity.

The documentary's opening sequence immediately establishes this central articulation through a seamless geographical transition: 'the mainland ends here, but from this point the blue homeland begins.' This utterance performs a crucial discursive operation, extending the boundaries of sacred national space beyond terrestrial limitations into maritime domains. Three discursive elements operationalise this nodal point: 1) temporal anchoring, 2) spatial seamlessness, and 3) corporeal embodiment.

In the analysed materials, the maritime claims are legitimised through deep historical time, with the 3,200-year-old Gelidonya/Kilidonia shipwreck serving to establish civilisational continuity: 'This place has been Turkish homeland for a thousand years.' This temporal depth naturalises contemporary territorial claims by inscribing them within a narrative of an eternal Turkish presence in the Eastern Mediterranean.

The documentary constructs maritime space as an organic extension of the terrestrial homeland through metaphors of continuity. For example, Yaycı's declaration that 'Our Blue Homeland borders are our national pact at sea' explicitly parallels maritime boundaries with the foundational territorial compact of the Turkish Republic.

The sea becomes literally incorporated into the national body through biological metaphors. The documentary's emphasis on *Mavi Vatan*'s multiple layers, for example, 'sea surface, underwater living nature, and underground riches beneath the seabed,' constructs maritime space as a living, breathing extension of the national organism.

The analysis of the YouTube comments indicates a successful hegemonic uptake of this nodal point through expressions of embodied attachment. Comments such as '[...] my paradise homeland, we will never allow this homeland to be divided' perform a metonymic operation through which the homeland is equated with paradise, thereby sacralising national territory and underscoring the inviolability of its borders. This chain of

equivalence not only naturalises the extension of homeland into maritime domains but also serves to mobilise collective investment in its defence as a moral imperative.

Similarly, the recurrent slogan 'Blue Homeland is our life' exemplifies how the sea is re-conceived as living flesh of the national body, fostering a somatic attachment that collapses the distinction between personal and national well-being. By declaring the blue homeland to be 'our life,' commenters enact what Laclau and Mouffe (2001) describe as the conversion of particular demands into empty signifiers. Here, for example, the homeland functions as an empty signifier that aggregates diverse affective investments, such as pride, fear, and longing, into a unified call for collective resilience.

Such utterances also function performatively. Each repetition not only expresses individual affection but also reiterates and reinforces the wider discursive formation, closing off alternative constructions of maritime borders. In this way, the YouTube comments indicate that homeland, far from remaining a static concept, is continually re-articulated into a lived, embodied horizon of expectation and duty, one that renders dissent virtually unthinkable within the parameters of the *Mavi Vatan* discourse.

Furthermore, the ubiquitous appearance of the patriotic formula 'How happy is the one who says I am Turkish' indicates the successful articulation of maritime claims within an essential national identity, transforming territorial disputes into questions of existential belonging. Initially coined by Atatürk to cement loyalty to the secular Turkish Republic, this formula resurfaces in YouTube comments as a shorthand affirmation of belonging that now extends to the sea.

Adalet [Justice]: Historical Rectification

The nodal point of *Adalet* functions as the linchpin that retroactively legitimises contemporary maritime claims by inscribing them within a narrative of historical redress. This nodal point constructs *Mavi Vatan* as the rectification of historical injustices through what can be termed restorative nationalism, committed to completing the nation's unfinished liberation. This discursive operation relies on a referential chain of equivalence that binds *Mavi Vatan*, anti-imperial resistance, and national liberation

into a single signifying bloc, linking contemporary maritime disputes to historical grievances, particularly the Treaty of Sèvres.

Erdoğan's declaration in the documentary serves as the key articulation establishing this equivalential chain: 'As we tore up and threw away Sèvres as a nation a century ago, today we will not bow to the Sèvres being imposed on our country in the Eastern Mediterranean.' This articulation constructs a chain of equivalence where the elements of *Mavi Vatan*, anti-Sèvres, historical justice, and national liberation operate as the rings. Furthermore, this explicit parallel between the tearing of the Treaty of Sèvres and current Eastern Mediterranean disputes activates the logic of historical revenge.

This complex formulation situates *Mavi Vatan* not simply as a geopolitical strategy, but as a continuation of the anti-imperial struggle that birthed the republic. By equating contemporary map impositions with Sèvres, the documentary constructs a temporal equivalence where past humiliation and present encroachment become morally indistinguishable, warranting the same resolute defiance.

The documentary extends this logic through proportionality discourse. The Meis/Kastellorizo Island vignette dramatises geographical injustice through a visceral cartographic demonstration. The 2-kilometre distance of the island to Turkey versus the 580-kilometre distance to Greece becomes a self-evident index of moral absurdity. This technique reifies spatial relationships as legal and ethical facts, foreclosing nuanced treaty interpretations in favour of a logic that equates proximity with rightful ownership, thereby rendering any opposition as both legally and morally illegitimate.

The analysed YouTube comments seem to amplify this nodal point through emotional incitement and the invocation of agency. Statements such as 'Turkey must be strong, otherwise no one will give it its rights' employ a modal logic that frames strength as a prerequisite for justice. This assertion transforms justice from a universal norm into a contingent achievement, dependent on collective will and capability. Moreover, the recurring metaphor of national awakening, such as 'Turks will not sleep or give up anymore,' invokes a phantasmatic logic wherein the Turkish nation transitions from a passive subject of history to an active agent of its destiny. This shift in temporal orientation, from sleep to vigilant resistance, consolidates collective identity around a shared mission of historical redress.

Comments that recall the Turkish War of Independence, such as, for example, 'The puppet prime minister of Greece [...] when they were thrown into the sea in Izmir [...]' extend the chain by linking Greece's contemporary diplomatic posturing to past military defeats. This retrospective articulation reaffirms the justice nodal point, but it also naturalises perpetual enmity, casting any Greek claim as an echo of a century-old betrayal.

Through these discursive moves, *Adalet* emerges as an empty signifier that aggregates diverse demands, such as territorial integrity, historical dignity, and energy security, into a unified call for redemptive action. In this way, this nodal point legitimises expansionist policy and galvanises popular mobilisation, ensuring that *Mavi Vatan* is perceived not as an aggressive gambit, but as the moral restoration of a nation's rightful heritage.

Güç [Power]: Independence and Great Power Status

The third nodal point transforms maritime disputes from territorial questions into issues of national survival, technological sovereignty, national power projection, and energy independence. This articulation fundamentally changes the terms of engagement, what might otherwise be a technical argument over maritime law becomes reframed as a struggle for existential autonomy and regional leadership. Thus, this nodal point operates through civilisational discourse, positioning Turkey's maritime claims within broader narratives of great power competition and technological advancement.

The documentary foregrounds *Güç* by binding energy independence with the desire for national resurgence. Yaycı's assertion in the documentary emphasises 'enough natural gas reserves to supply Turkey for 572 years' and elevates the extraction of maritime resources from routine economic activity to a symbolically charged act of national emancipation. Yaycı further argues that 'If we solve the energy problem, no one can stand in Turkey's way.' This actively positions the nation within a hierarchy of global powers, suggesting that technical mastery over nature and energy translates directly into geopolitical agency and respect.

This articulation elevates maritime disputes from legal-territorial questions to existential national imperatives. The documentary's systematic demonstration of Turkish maritime capabilities, through the images of

drilling ships, each presented as a national achievement largely independent of foreign intervention or expertise, functions as visual proof of technological sovereignty and power-projection capacity. These multimodal cues produce what could be called an 'affective regime,' wherein the spectacle of maritime technology serves both to demonstrate capability and to inspire confidence in the nation's trajectory towards energy autonomy.

The articulation of energy competition as a civilisational struggle appears in the declaration: 'This is the real reason for this struggle. This is an energy struggle.' Within such articulation, maritime conflict is not only about resources or law, but becomes a field where the superiority or survival of the Turkish nation is weighed against external threats, effectively recoding material interests as existential imperatives. Thus, it transforms technical disputes over EEZs into existential contests over civilisational hierarchy.

The analysed YouTube comments vividly internalise and reproduce the nodal point of *Güç* through formulas affirming maritime supremacy. For example, statements like '[…] whoever dominates the seas dominates the world,' enact a popular uptake of geopolitical doctrine, transforming strategic naval capacity into a lived sense of agency, pride, and historical destiny. The phrase 'whoever controls the water controls the land' condenses centuries of theorising about power and territory into an easily circulated aphorism, amplifying the hegemonic claims of *Mavi Vatan* discourse at the level of everyday identity.

The discovery of natural gas in the Black Sea receives especially enthusiastic treatment, functioning as affective proof of Turkey's ability to transcend dependency on Western energy markets and expertise. Praise for domestically engineered exploration and extraction technologies reflects a broader desire for decoupling from structural dependencies, resonating with postcolonial logics of self-reliance and resistance to external domination. These themes are not just decorative, but they perform the critical function of phantasmatic investment, projecting hopes, anxieties, and collective aspirations onto the *Mavi Vatan* doctrine. Through these mechanisms, the nodal point of *Güç* articulates economic aims, technological pride, and nationalist affect in a manner that mobilises support for assertive policies while simultaneously rendering any form of dissent as signs of weakness or betrayal of the national cause.

Thus, the articulation of *Güç* accomplishes a double move. It legitimises far-reaching territorial claims as necessary for national development, and it motivates public commitment to such claims by making power a matter of moral and emotional urgency. In the *Mavi Vatan* discourse, energy independence and military capacity are no longer future aspirations, but they are presented as unfolding realities, compelling the audience to see themselves as both actors and beneficiaries in the nation's ascent to regional and global prominence.

Others as the Constitutive Outsides

The efficacy of the three nodal points is amplified by their continual opposition to antagonistic others, which are strategically constructed as existential threats. In the documentary and its YouTube reception, antagonism is not merely incidental; it is methodically woven into the narrative to delineate clear boundaries between 'us' and 'them.' The analysis reveals three primary antagonistic positions: 1) Greece as an illegitimate usurper, 2) Western powers as neocolonial orchestrators, and 3) regional exclusion mechanisms.

The documentary routinely casts Greece as the principal antagonist, whose territorial claims are depicted as both historically baseless and geographically irrational. This is achieved by foregrounding facts such as the proximity of Meis/Kastellorizo Island to Turkey and its distance from Greece, illustrating the 'absurdity' of Greek claims. Such representations are coupled with references to historical episodes, such as the Treaty of Sèvres and Greek campaigns during the Turkish War of Independence, which frame Greek actions as part of a long-standing pattern of betrayal and encroachment. Through this logic, geographical anomalies become moral transgressions, and Greece is discursively positioned as an unnatural, external force violating the organic boundaries of the Turkish homeland.

The antagonism extends beyond Greece to encompass a broader array of Western actors, including the EU, the US, and international institutions. The documentary and YouTube comments often suggest that Western powers act as covert orchestrators, bolstering Greek claims and seeking to circumscribe Turkey's geopolitical agency. This is reinforced by references to policies, diplomatic initiatives, or military posturing seen as designed

to 'extract Turkish resources' or 'trap' Turkey in territorial confinement. Such narratives activate the historical memory of Western intervention during moments of Turkish vulnerability and recast contemporary energy competition as an extension of neocolonial rivalry and a civilisational confrontation in which Turkey must assert its autonomy against persistent schemes of domination.

Projects like the EMGF and the EastMed pipeline are not simply noted as technical or commercial initiatives. They are presented as deliberate strategies of exclusion. The documentary constructs these as regional alignments calculated specifically to leave Turkey out of lucrative energy cooperation and strategic decision making, bolstering the perception of an encirclement that threatens both national power and economic development. In YouTube comments, such exclusions are interpreted not only as diplomatic challenges but as existential manoeuvres meant to undermine Turkey's rightful place as a regional leader. This further consolidates public support for assertive policies and resistance to compromise.

Such antagonistic constructions serve a dual function: they generate a climate of external threat necessary for consolidating internal unity around the three nodal points, and they legitimise defensive or expansionist action as both natural and morally imperative. The continual invocation of antagonism thus closes the discursive frontier, rendering dissent suspect and alternative regional arrangements infeasible, and confirms the hegemonic claims of *Mavi Vatan* as an existential project defined by perpetual contestation with powerful others.

Conclusion

This article discusses how *Mavi Vatan* discursively constructs Turkey's maritime borders, where Turkey's maritime claims are rendered intelligible, legitimate, and affectively charged through the articulation of three nodal points: *Vatan* [Homeland], *Adalet* [Justice], and *Güç* [Power]. The analysis illustrates how these nodal points articulate national territory, historical grievance, and aspirations for technological and geopolitical agency, thereby transforming legal and technical questions of maritime sovereignty into existential matters of national identity and destiny. Through the discourse-theoretical analysis of the documentary and its reception

on YouTube, the study illustrates how the hegemonic claims of the *Mavi Vatan* doctrine stabilise and reinforce these nodal points. The result is not merely a discursive 'naturalisation' of Turkish claims, but also a performative investment that binds individual affect, collective memory, and state policy into a unified project of belonging and resistance. The construction of antagonistic others as the constitutive outsides, further strengthens this hegemonic articulation, closing the frontier of debate and rendering dissent within the public sphere increasingly more difficult.

The findings contribute to border studies and critical geopolitics by highlighting how contemporary border imaginaries rely on discursive formations, rather than mere 'facts' of geography. The way in which the legal and technical matters of maritime sovereignty are transformed into existential issues of national identity offers an analytical lens for understanding how nation-states construct borders as antagonistic frontiers to maintain hegemonic claims. Also, by discussing the communicative practices that underpin the doctrine, the article highlights the central role of media, both traditional and digital in this case, in performing, disseminating, and contesting border narratives.

By exploring the capacity of both institutional/traditional and digital media to disseminate and reinforce border discourses, this text provides a potential frame for examining other regional conflicts. This underscores the significant role of media in the formation of border imaginaries and provides a point of departure for future comparative analyses of the discursive construction of regional tensions.

This research also offers insights that extend beyond the Turkish case, suggesting implications for comparative or transnational analyses of border practices by positioning the mediatisation of the *Mavi Vatan* doctrine in relation to discourses of maritime nationalism and the evolving role of media in regional geopolitics. *Mavi Vatan* might serve as an illustrative instance of a globally intensifying tendency towards the territorialisation of maritime space.

However, the analysis also encounters important limits. Since the analysis was limited to specific media platforms such as the TRT documentary and YouTube comments, it may fall short of fully capturing the reflections across all social strata or the counter-hegemonic discourses that

may emerge on different platforms. Moreover, as DTA and the retroductive approach employed in the study require a continuous iterative movement between theoretical concepts and empirical data, the findings are shaped within the interpretive boundaries of the contextual and theoretical framework.

In sum, the analysis illustrates that borders are not merely inherited cartographic lines, but always-in-the-making discursive frontiers. These manifest as sites where struggles over meaning, identity, and sovereignty converge, from which new configurations of geopolitical possibility may yet emerge.

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Evgeny Romanovskiy[1]

Dagestan de-constructed: failed multiculturalism and internal borders in a borderland region

ABSTRACT: Dagestan, a borderland republic within the Russian Federation, presents a unique case study of how ethnic diversity can create internal fragmentation rather than unified multiculturalism. This study examines how the coexistence of over 30 officially recognised ethnic groups and 14 languages has paradoxically resulted in rigid internal boundaries that divide rather than unite society. Through qualitative fieldwork involving interviews and participant observation, this research reveals how Dagestan's diversity has created what I term 'failed multiculturalism' - where diversity becomes a source of division rather than strength. The findings demonstrate that ethnic diversity does not automatically lead to successful multicultural integration, but can produce fragmented societies where internal boundaries prove as divisive as international borders.

Keywords: Borderlands; Dagestan; Failed Multiculturalism; Internal Borders; Ethnic Boundaries; Identity Fragmentation

POVZETEK: Dagestan, obmejna republika znotraj Ruske federacije, predstavlja izjemen primer, kako lahko etnična raznolikost povzroči notranjo fragmentacijo namesto povezovalnega multikulturalizma. Raziskava analizira, kako sobivanje več kot tridesetih uradno priznanih etničnih skupin in štirinajstih jezikov paradoksalno vodi v oblikovanje togih notranjih meja. Na podlagi kvalitativnega terenskega raziskovanja ugotavljamo, da je raznolikost Dagestana oblikovala »neuspešni multikulturalizem« – sistem, v katerem raznolikost postane vir razdeljenosti namesto kohezije. Rezultati kažejo, da etnična raznolikost ne zagotavlja uspešne multikulturne integracije, temveč lahko vodi v razdrobljene družbe, kjer so notranje meje enako razdruževalne kot mednarodne.

Ključne besede: obmejna območja, Dagestan, neuspešni multikulturalizem, notranje meje, etnične meje, fragmentacija identitete

Izvirni znanstveni članek / *Original scientific article*

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Introduction

The Republic of Dagestan, situated at Russia's southern borderland with Azerbaijan and Georgia, represents one of Europe's most complex experiments in managing ethnic diversity within a single political unit. Home to over 30 officially recognised ethnic groups including Avars, Dargins, Kumyks, Lezgins, Laks, Tabasarans, Rutuls, Aguls, Tsakhurs, Nogais, Azerbaijanis, Chechens, and Russians, among others and 14[2] state languages, this North Caucasus republic exemplifies a fundamental paradox of contemporary multiculturalism: how extreme ethnic diversity can lead to societal fragmentation rather than harmonious coexistence. Unlike successful examples of multicultural integration found in Western democratic societies, Dagestan demonstrates what I conceptualise as 'failed multiculturalism'; a condition where ethnic diversity creates internal boundaries that fragment rather than enrich society.

The significance of Dagestan as a case study extends beyond its unique demographic composition. As Anderson (1991, 6) argued, nations are 'imagined communities' where members share a sense of communion despite never meeting most of their fellow citizens. In Dagestan's case, rather than creating one unified imagined community, the republic contains multiple, competing imagined communities separated by rigid ethnic boundaries. This fragmentation challenges fundamental assumptions about how diversity can be successfully managed in contemporary political systems.

The name 'Dagestan' itself, meaning 'land of mountains' in Turkic-Persian, emerged in the 16th century as a geographic rather than ethnic designation (Halbach and Isaeva 2015, 8) – a crucial distinction that highlights how territory became the primary unifying factor in this deeply divided society. This territorial rather than ethnic foundation illuminates a central challenge: the absence of a unifying ethnic or cultural core around which a coherent regional identity might coalesce.

This borderland status operates on multiple levels simultaneously. Dagestan serves as Russia's geographic frontier with the South Caucasus, a civilisational boundary between Orthodox Christianity and Islam, and

2 Official website of the Head of the Republic of Dagestan. Source: https://president.e-dag.ru/brief-reference/.

most significantly for my analysis, an internal space where ethnic groups maintain rigid boundaries despite centuries of coexistence. The republic thus functions as a laboratory for understanding how internal borders can be as divisive as international frontiers. In this article, I use the term 'bordered multiculturalism' to describe this configuration: a system in which ethnic boundaries are not merely recognised but systematically institutionalised in political, linguistic, religious, and economic fields. In the Dagestani case, bordered multiculturalism is the institutional foundation of what I conceptualise as 'failed multiculturalism': rather than enabling everyday cross-ethnic interaction and shared civic identification, diversity-protecting arrangements stabilise separation and make it difficult for a common regional identity to emerge. By institutionalisation, we mean the embedding of ethnic divisions into formal structures (such as quota systems in government, separate religious administrations, and ethnically-coded educational policies) as well as informal practices (endogamous marriage norms, ethnic hiring networks, and residential clustering) that together maintain separation as a routine feature of social organisation.

The theoretical implications of Dagestan's experience extend far beyond the North Caucasus context. As Kolosova et al. (2016) note, Dagestan is characterised as Russia's most unstable region, with problems of ethno-political tensions and territorial disputes including competing claims over land redistribution, historical boundaries between ethnic districts, and conflicts over pasture rights between highland and lowland communities as well as economic crises and social upheavals, making the management of its extreme ethnic diversity particularly challenging for both federal authorities seeking regional stability and local elites navigating inter-ethnic power balances. This study addresses a critical gap in both border studies and multiculturalism literature by examining how ethnic diversity in borderland regions can function as a mechanism of internal fragmentation rather than integration. I argue that Dagestan's experience demonstrates how contemporary practices of boundary-making within states can be as exclusionary as international border controls, creating hierarchies of belonging that structure everyday life and prevent the emergence of shared civic identity.

The primary research question guiding this investigation is: How does extreme ethnic diversity in borderland regions create internal boundaries

that fragment rather than unite society, and what are the implications for regional identity formation and social cohesion? Secondary questions explore: How do individuals navigate multiple, overlapping boundary systems in their daily lives? What factors enable the emergence of transcendent identities that might bridge ethnic divisions?

Theoretical Framework: Borderlands and Failed Multiculturalism

Understanding Dagestan's fragmented society requires engaging with theoretical developments that challenge conventional assumptions about ethnic diversity and social cohesion. This study introduces the concept of 'failed multiculturalism' to describe a specific configuration of diversity management where institutional mechanisms designed to protect ethnic groups produce rigid internal boundaries that fragment rather than integrate society. Unlike 'contested multiculturalism,' where groups debate the terms of integration while sharing civic space, or 'parallel multiculturalism,' where communities coexist with minimal interaction, failed multiculturalism describes a system where diversity-protecting institutions actively prevent the emergence of shared identity and cross-ethnic solidarity. The key distinction lies not in the presence of ethnic tension – common to many diverse societies – but in the systematic institutionalisation of separation across political, linguistic, religious, and economic domains simultaneously.

This conceptualisation builds upon critiques of liberal multiculturalism theory, particularly Kymlicka's (1989, 2007) assumption that institutional frameworks protecting group rights naturally lead to harmonious integration. The Dagestani case reveals how well-intentioned diversity management can transform difference into division when institutional arrangements reward ethnic particularism rather than cross-ethnic cooperation. Where Kymlicka envisions group rights as enabling minority participation in broader society, Dagestan demonstrates how such rights can instead create parallel societies with minimal meaningful interaction.

Anderson's (1991) theory of 'imagined communities' provides crucial analytical leverage for understanding why Dagestan has failed to develop unified regional identity. Anderson argues that nations are 'imagined' not because they are false, but because members maintain mental images of

communion with fellow-members they will never personally meet. Critically, Anderson identifies specific mechanisms that enable this imagining: the development of print-languages that create unified fields of communication, the circulation of newspapers and books that allow simultaneous consumption of shared narratives, and standardised education systems that transmit common historical consciousness.

Dagestan's linguistic landscape systematically undermines each of these mechanisms. With fourteen officially recognised languages belonging to multiple language families: Northeast Caucasian (Avar, Dargin, Lezgin, Lak, Tabasaran, Rutul, Tsakhur, Agul), Turkic (Kumyk, Nogai, Azerbaijani), and Indo-European (Russian, Tat), no single Dagestani print-language has emerged to create a unified communicative field. While Russian serves as lingua franca, it functions as an externally imposed medium rather than an organically developed shared language; as informants consistently noted, 'Russian is never considered as their own.' Each ethnic group maintains separate literary traditions, newspapers, and educational materials in native languages, creating what amounts to multiple parallel 'imagined communities' rather than one unified Dagestani consciousness. The absence of shared media circulation and the fragmentation of educational content along ethnic lines mean that the very mechanisms Anderson identified as constitutive of national imagination operate in Dagestan to reinforce ethnic particularity rather than regional unity.

Barth's (1998) seminal reconceptualisation of ethnicity proves equally essential for understanding Dagestan's internal boundaries. Barth's central insight was that ethnic groups are not defined by their cultural content: shared customs, languages, or beliefs, but by the social boundaries that groups maintain between themselves and others. These boundaries persist not despite interaction but through it: ethnic identity is constituted precisely in moments of contact where differences are marked and maintained. Crucially, Barth demonstrated that boundary maintenance requires continuous social work: practices of inclusion and exclusion, markers of belonging and otherness that must be reproduced across generations.

In Dagestan, these boundary-maintaining practices have become institutionalised through both formal and informal mechanisms. Formal mechanisms include the ethnic quota system in government that ensures

positions are distributed by ethnicity rather than merit, separate religious administrations for different ethnic groups, and educational policies that maintain native-language instruction in ethnically homogeneous areas. Informal mechanisms encompass endogamous marriage preferences that discourage interethnic unions, ethnic hiring networks that channel economic opportunities to co-ethnics, and residential patterns that maintain ethnic clustering even in urban settings. This institutionalisation transforms what Barth described as fluid, situational boundary-work into rigid, structural separation, creating boundaries that individuals cannot easily cross regardless of personal disposition.

The implications become clearer when examined through Gellner's (1983) analysis of nationalism's relationship to modernisation. Gellner argued that nationalism emerges when industrialisation creates demand for standardised, literate populations sharing common culture. In typical nation-building, this process produces one dominant national culture that absorbs or marginalises local particularities. Dagestan presents an anomalous case: rather than one nationalism emerging from modernisation, multiple competing nationalisms have developed simultaneously within a single political space. Avar nationalism emphasises demographic dominance and historical leadership in anti-colonial resistance; Dargin nationalism stresses cultural distinctiveness and economic success; Lezgin nationalism includes irredentist claims to 'Lezgistan' spanning the Azerbaijan border; Kumyk nationalism invokes historical khanates and territorial claims to lowland areas; Lak nationalism emphasises cultural sophistication and educational achievement. These competing nationalisms do not simply coexist but actively contest political resources, historical narratives, and territorial claims, creating what might be termed 'polyethnic nationalism': multiple nationalist projects operating within shared political space without any achieving hegemony.

Brubaker's (1996, 2004) concept of 'groupism,' which describes the tendency to treat ethnic groups as bounded, homogeneous entities with unified interests, further illuminates how institutional structures reify these divisions. Soviet nationality policy, which Martin (2001) documented as an 'affirmative action empire,' created tens of thousands of national territories, trained ethnic cadres, and financed national-language cultural

production. This policy treated ethnicity as an immutable characteristic recorded on identity documents and transmitted across generations. Slezkine (1994) termed this arrangement the Soviet 'communal apartment' model, where each group occupied its designated space within the larger structure. In Dagestan, this legacy persists through contemporary institutions that continue to treat ethnic groups as the fundamental units of political representation, resource allocation, and social organisation.

Contemporary border studies scholarship provides the final theoretical component for understanding how these dynamics operate spatially and temporally. Van Houtum (2005), Newman (2006), and Paasi (2005) demonstrate that borders are not merely territorial lines but social constructs continually reproduced through everyday practices that shape identity and belonging. Their concept of 'bordering,' understood as the ongoing processes through which boundaries are created, maintained, and given meaning, applies powerfully to Dagestan's internal divisions. Physical geography (mountain ranges separating ethnic territories), linguistic barriers (mutual unintelligibility between language families), religious divisions (parallel spiritual administrations), and economic disparities (ethnic networks controlling access to resources) create overlapping bordering processes that function as effectively as international frontiers. These internal borders produce experiences of exclusion and otherness typically associated with crossing national boundaries: they limit mobility, channel opportunity, and structure everyday social interaction along ethnic lines.

The theoretical synthesis offered here combines Anderson's mechanisms of national imagination, Barth's boundary-maintenance processes, Gellner's analysis of competing nationalisms, Brubaker's critique of groupism, and border studies' attention to everyday bordering practices. Together, these perspectives provide the analytical framework for examining how Dagestan's extreme diversity has produced fragmentation rather than integration. The concept of 'failed multiculturalism' thus describes not simply the absence of successful integration but a specific institutional configuration where diversity-protecting mechanisms systematically prevent the emergence of shared civic identity while maintaining stable, if separated, coexistence.

Methodology

This study employed a comprehensive qualitative research strategy conducted by a single researcher specifically designed to capture the complex ways internal boundaries shape everyday life in Dagestan's ethnically divided society. The fieldwork was conducted by a non-Dagestani researcher based outside the region. This outsider positionality simultaneously constrained and facilitated access: some interlocutors were initially cautious toward a researcher not embedded in local networks, yet the same distance often encouraged more reflective accounts of everyday boundary practices, as respondents felt they were speaking to someone outside local patronage structures. In line with standard ethical guidelines for research on sensitive topics, all participants were informed about the aims of the study, participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained prior to each interview. Identifying details have been removed or anonymised, and pseudonyms are used throughout to protect the confidentiality of interlocutors. The research draws on established traditions of ethnographic research while adapting methodological approaches to the sensitive political context of ethnic relations in the North Caucasus. The research design followed DeWalt et al.'s (1998) guidelines for participant observation in multicultural settings, emphasising the importance of researchers sharing everyday experiences of informants while maintaining sufficient analytical distance to identify patterns invisible to participants themselves. This approach proved particularly valuable for understanding how ethnic boundaries operate through subtle social practices, unspoken assumptions, and routine interactions that structure daily life in ways that participants may take for granted or find difficult to articulate explicitly.

The methodological strategy combined three interconnected approaches: ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Russian involving participant observation and informal interaction across three sites: the capital Makhachkala, the southern city of Derbent, and the highland district centre of Khunzakh; semi-structured interviews with twenty informants designed to elicit detailed accounts of boundary experiences; and document analysis examining official policies, media representations, and existing research on ethnic relations in Dagestan. This triangulation approach aimed to capture both the institutional frameworks that structure eth-

nic boundaries and the lived experiences of individuals navigating these boundaries in daily life. The combination of methods was essential for understanding discrepancies between official multiculturalism[3] rhetoric and actual practices of ethnic separation, revealing how formal policies of ethnic accommodation can produce informal practices of ethnic avoidance and separation.

Fieldwork was conducted over two intensive months (April–May 2021) during a period of relative stability in ethnic relations. However, this timing also meant the research occurred during intensifying public debates about tourist behaviour and dress codes, discussions that had gained particular prominence in Dagestani media and reflected broader tensions over cultural boundaries and external influences on local norms[4]. Sites were strategically selected to represent different patterns of ethnic settlement and boundary-making dynamics across Dagestan's diverse geographic and social landscape. The capital Makhachkala provided insights into how ethnic boundaries manifest in urban settings, particularly through the ethnic quota system in government institutions (Hall 2015), the linguistic hierarchies (Kaymazarov 2012), and the clash between traditional and modern (Bulatov and Seferbekov 2019). Observations in urban contexts revealed how ethnic boundaries manifest through seemingly neutral practices like shopping patterns, restaurant preferences, and residential clustering that create ethnic territories within officially integrated spaces.

Derbent, Dagestan's second-largest city and a UNESCO World Heritage site, provided insight into historical patterns of multi-ethnic coexistence, with its mixed population of Lezgins, Azerbaijanis, Tabasarans, Russians, and the remnants of the historically significant Mountain Jewish community. The highland district of Khunzakh, historically the centre of the

3 In Dagestan, the policy of preserving diversity is not called multiculturalism, but rather the 'friendship (less often – brotherhood) of peoples' that has been in place since Soviet times. Officially this term is referred as 'interethnic relations'. The Ministry of National Policy and Religious Affairs of the Republic of Dagestan is the main body responsible for managing interethnic and inter-religious relations. Source: https://minnacrd.ru/ministry/goals.

4 For instance, in the regional media of the Republic of Dagestan, the topic of 'tourist dress code' has become incredibly popular. The author of this article even participated as an invited guest on a local radio station, discussing acceptable behaviour and clothing for tourists arriving in Dagestan.

Avar Khanate and a symbolically important site for Avar identity, offered perspective on how ethnic homogeneity in mountain settlements shapes boundary maintenance differently than urban diversity.

Rural and semi-rural districts dominated by specific ethnic groups revealed different dynamics, showing how territorial concentration reinforces cultural boundaries through landscape, architecture, language use, and social organisation. Fieldwork in villages of Khunzakh district, predominantly Avar, allowed observation of how ethnic boundaries intersect with traditional social structures, religious practices, and economic activities in ways that differ significantly from urban patterns. The rural sites also provided insight into how younger generations (informants aged 18–35) negotiate ethnic identity differently than their elders, particularly regarding language use, educational aspirations, and attitudes toward interethnic marriage. This geographic diversity was essential for understanding the varied ways ethnic fragmentation manifests across different spatial contexts, from urban neighbourhoods where groups live in proximity but maintain separation to rural areas where territorial concentration creates more visible boundaries.

The sampling strategy required careful attention to Dagestan's complex ethnic composition while balancing representation with research feasibility and safety considerations. Twenty informants were selected through purposive and snowball sampling designed to ensure representation of Dagestan's ethnic diversity while capturing variation in age, gender, occupation, and geographic location. The sample included 5 Avars (representing the largest ethnic group at approximately 30% of the population), 4 Dargins (the second largest at roughly 17%), 3 Kumyks (approximately 14%), 3 Lezgins (roughly 13%), 2 Laks (approximately 5%), and 3 representatives of smaller ethnic groups including Tabasarans, Rutuls, and Azeris. This distribution roughly approximated demographic proportions, though the limited number of representatives from smaller ethnic groups (three informants across Tabasarans, Rutuls, and Azeris) constitutes a recognised limitation that restricts generalisability of findings regarding minority experiences within Dagestan's ethnic hierarchy.

Informants were recruited through multiple channels: personal contacts established during preliminary visits, snowball sampling from initial

participants, and institutional assistance from Dagestan State University, which helped identify potential informants across different faculties and departments. This multi-channel recruitment strategy aimed to reduce selection bias inherent in any single approach while navigating the practical challenges of conducting research on sensitive ethnic topics.

The sampling strategy aligned with established practices in ethnographic research on the North Caucasus, particularly following the methodological approaches used in recent studies of Dagestani society (Varshaver et al. 2022). Age distribution ranged from 22 to 67 years, capturing different generational perspectives on ethnic relations shaped by Soviet experiences, post-Soviet transitions, and contemporary globalisation pressures. Gender balance included 11 women and 9 men, reflecting both practical access considerations and the importance of understanding how ethnic boundaries intersect with gender roles and expectations that vary across ethnic groups. Occupational diversity encompassed teachers, healthcare workers, entrepreneurs, religious leaders, students, and retirees, providing insight into how professional roles and economic positions shape experiences of ethnic boundaries and access to cross-ethnic interaction.

Semi-structured interviews explored several interconnected themes designed to capture both explicit attitudes and implicit boundary practices. Questions addressed how respondents identify themselves, what it means to be a representative of a particular ethnic group or political community (Dagestani), whether respondents have friends of other religions or ethnicities, how important such friendships are to them, how included or excluded they perceive people of other groups to be from public life in the republic, and whether larger cities (Makhachkala, Derbent) blur or accentuate distinctions between groups. Discussions of ethnic quotas as mechanisms of inclusion versus exclusion illuminated how formal policies of representation translate into lived experiences of opportunity and discrimination. Exploration of language use patterns as boundary maintenance strategies revealed the complex ways multilingualism functions as both bridge and barrier in interethnic communication.

Religious practices and their relationship to intergroup relations proved particularly sensitive but crucial for understanding how shared Islamic faith intersects with ethnic particularism. Questions about discrimination

or privilege based on ethnicity required careful framing to encourage honest responses while maintaining trust and safety for informants. Finally, discussions of the relationship between ethnic and Dagestani identity revealed how individuals conceptualise belonging to both particular ethnic groups and the broader regional community, often exposing tensions between these levels of identification.

The interview guide was informed by previous research on nationalism and identity formation (Eriksen et al. 1993; Smith 1988) but adapted to capture the specific dynamics of Dagestan's multiethnic context and the particular challenges of researching ethnic relations in a politically sensitive environment. Interview duration ranged from 45 minutes to 2 hours, with longer conversations often providing the most valuable insights as informants became more comfortable discussing sensitive topics. All interviews were conducted in Russian, which served as lingua franca but may have influenced responses in subtle ways that reflected the linguistic hierarchies being studied.

Participant observation encompassed diverse settings over the two-month fieldwork period: religious observances including Friday prayers at mosques serving different ethnic communities; cultural events such as a prize-giving evening organised by a local radio station and charitable foundation; intellectual gatherings including a quiz club attracting educated urban youth; informal social occasions including traditional hospitality gatherings in private homes; and direct observation of tourist-local interactions at heritage sites in Derbent. The researcher also participated as an invited guest on a local radio programme discussing tourism and cultural norms, providing insight into media framings of identity debates. This range of settings enabled observation of how ethnic boundaries operate across formal and informal contexts, and how they may be reinforced or challenged through collective activities.

Data analysis followed an inductive approach influenced by grounded theory methodology, beginning with open coding to identify patterns in how informants described and experienced boundaries, followed by axial coding to explore relationships between different types of boundary practices, and finally selective coding focused on core theoretical insights about failed multiculturalism and internal bordering. Initial coding focused on

boundary-making practices across different domains (political, linguistic, religious, economic), while subsequent analysis examined how these practices connect to larger structures of power and exclusion that maintain ethnic fragmentation. The analysis was supplemented by examination of existing studies on Dagestani society, particularly recent ethnographic research (Varshaver et al. 2022; Bulatov and Seferbekov 2019), providing broader context for interpreting fieldwork findings and situating individual experiences within larger patterns of institutional boundary maintenance.

The Architecture of Internal Borders: How Diversity Creates Division

The contemporary fragmentation of Dagestani society cannot be understood without examining how Soviet nationality policies created the institutional architecture that continues to structure ethnic relations. The Soviet approach to managing diversity, which Martin (2001) termed the 'affirmative action empire,' fundamentally transformed fluid ethnic identities into fixed administrative categories with far-reaching consequences for contemporary Dagestan. The policy of korenizatsiya (indigenisation) implemented in the 1920s aimed to develop distinct ethnic national consciousness among non-Russian peoples by promoting Avar, Dargin, Lezgin, and other particular identities rather than any unified Dagestani consciousness, all while maintaining overall Soviet unity. In Dagestan, this meant creating separate cultural institutions, educational materials, and administrative structures for each recognised ethnic group. Unlike regions with one or two titular nationalities, Dagestan's extreme diversity led to a complex system where no single group could claim republican ownership, necessitating elaborate power-sharing arrangements that persist in modified form today.

The Soviet system treated ethnicity (recorded as 'nationality' [natsional'nost'] in official documents) as an immutable characteristic inscribed on birth certificates and internal passports, making ethnic identity 'an essential marker, which was, in contrast to traditional or Western models, virtually unchangeable.' This created rigid boundaries where more fluid identities might have existed. As Slezkine (1994, 414) observed, this system transformed ethnicity into the primary organising principle of the Soviet

'communal apartment.' In Dagestan, individuals inherited not just ethnic identity but also associated expectations about language use, cultural practice, and political loyalty.

Post-Soviet transformations have modified but not fundamentally altered these structures. The abolition of nationality entries in Russian passports after 1997 did not eliminate ethnic categories from social and political life in Dagestan. Instead, informal mechanisms emerged to maintain ethnic boundaries, from hiring practices that favour co-ethnics to marriage patterns that discourage interethnic unions. The formal system of ethnic quotas in government, while modified from Soviet practice, continues to ensure that political power remains distributed along ethnic lines rather than through competitive democratic processes.

Dagestan's ethnic quota system, formalised during the Soviet period in the 1920s–1930s as part of the korenizatsiya (indigenisation) policy and maintained in modified form after 1991, exemplifies how diversity management can create rigid boundaries rather than fluid integration. As documented by Hall (2015), this system ensures proportional representation of major ethnic groups in government institutions through both formal rules and informal understandings. Until 2006, the republic operated with a State Council comprising representatives of fourteen ethnic groups instead of a single president. This structure, while nominally integrative at the executive level, institutionalised ethnic categories as the primary basis for political representation rather than individual citizenship or programmatic platforms. This arrangement ensured that political competition occurred primarily along ethnic lines, with each group securing 'its' designated positions rather than competing for cross-ethnic coalitions.

The linguistic landscape of Dagestan creates profound communication barriers that reinforce ethnic boundaries. Despite official recognition of fourteen languages, Russian functions as the primary means of interethnic communication. As Kaymazarov (2012) notes, this creates a complex situation where 'Russians themselves are a minority' yet their language dominates public discourse. This linguistic hierarchy has practical consequences: native language speakers face systematic disadvantages in education and employment compared to those fluent in Russian, creating what amounts to a two-tier system of opportunity based on linguistic competence.

The educational sphere in Dagestan serves as a critical site where linguistic boundaries are institutionalised and reproduced across generations. While schools are not formally segregated by ethnicity, the geographic concentration of ethnic groups means that schools in predominantly Avar, Dargin, or Lezgin districts serve ethnically homogeneous student populations, with native-language instruction in early grades reinforcing ethnic-linguistic identity before transition to Russian-medium education. Parents face agonizing choices between preserving their children's connection to ancestral languages and ensuring access to Russian-language education that promises greater social mobility. This dilemma reflects deeper structural inequalities where educational success becomes contingent on linguistic assimilation.

The psychological toll of navigating multiple linguistic worlds manifests in what informants described as perpetual feelings of inauthenticity. Young Dagestanis report experiencing 'linguistic fragmentation,' never feeling fully comfortable in any single language space. As one informant expressed: 'When I speak Avar at home, I feel connected to my ancestors, but when I speak Russian at university, doors open, but something feels lost. I am never fully myself in either language' (female, Avar, 24 years). This constant code-switching creates cognitive and emotional burdens that extend beyond mere communication challenges. Educational institutions, rather than serving as spaces for cross-ethnic encounter and mutual understanding, often reinforce separation through informal practices. While not officially segregated, schools in ethnically homogeneous areas typically conduct instruction in local languages for early grades before transitioning to Russian, creating educational trajectories that correlate strongly with ethnic background. While the core curriculum follows federal Russian standards, supplementary materials on local history and culture vary by district, with each ethnic territory emphasising its own historical narratives, literary figures, and cultural heroes. This variation further reinforces particularistic rather than shared regional consciousness.

Religious practice in Dagestan, rather than serving as a unifying force among the 96% Muslim population, has become another site of ethnic boundary maintenance. As Matsuzato and Ibragimov (2005) document, unlike many Muslim regions where mosques are built by donors or the

state, in Dagestan, local religious communities (jaamats, traditionally corresponding to village settlements) build and manage mosques themselves through collective contributions, paying salaries to imams. This grassroots character of religious organisation has led to what Giuliano (2005) identifies as the establishment of 'parallel spiritual directorates along ethnic lines,' where each group maintains its own version of Islamic practice.

The fragmentation of religious authority became particularly evident in the post-Soviet period when leadership of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Dagestan (DUMD), the officially recognised Islamic authority established in 1944, became dominated by Avars, the republic's largest ethnic group. This perceived ethnic capture of religious authority prompted Kumyk, Dargin, and other communities to establish informal parallel structures and support alternative religious leaders, viewing the official DUMD as representing Avar rather than pan-Dagestani Islamic interests. This created a situation where Islam does not unite but rather 'makes every group enjoy their own version of Islam.' Religious leaders often combine spiritual authority with economic and judicial functions, managing local economies and resolving disputes through Sharia law, creating what amounts to parallel governance structures along ethnic lines.

Religious identity intersects with ethnicity in complex ways. While 96% of Dagestanis identify as Muslim, this shared faith does not translate into unified religious practice or identity. The case of religious minorities illustrates the boundaries of acceptable diversity. As documented in research on Protestantism in Dagestan by Khalidova (2018), 'in addition to the Russian Orthodox Church, which is accepted in conjunction with the Russians, other forms of Christian proselytism are informally prohibited in Dagestan, especially when it comes to the conversion of local nationalities to Christianity.'

Economic opportunities in Dagestan correlate strongly with ethnic identity, creating what Kolosova et al. (2016) describe as systematic barriers to economic mobility. Ethnicity has become 'a powerful political category determining access to administrative and economic resources,' leading to intense group competition. This economic stratification extends beyond formal employment into informal networks that provide crucial support for economic survival. The Dagestani diaspora in Moscow, for example, operates through

village-based networks that help with finding work, housing, and navigating bureaucratic challenges. These networks, while providing essential support for group members, simultaneously reinforce ethnic boundaries by limiting cross-ethnic economic cooperation and mobility (Varshaver et al. 2022).

The geographic distribution of ethnic groups across Dagestan creates territorial dimensions of economic exclusion that reinforce ethnic boundaries through spatial separation. Mountain villages remain predominantly mono-ethnic, with specific groups historically associated with particular territories and economic activities. These patterns, established over centuries and formalised during the Soviet period, continue to structure economic opportunities along ethnic-territorial lines.

Labor migration within Dagestan follows distinctly ethnic patterns, with members of mountain communities moving to lowland areas for seasonal work but maintaining strict ethnic networks that determine access to employment. Construction work in Makhachkala, for instance, often involves crews recruited entirely from specific villages, with foremen serving as ethnic brokers who control access to jobs. This system provides security and mutual support for workers while simultaneously excluding those outside the ethnic-territorial network.

The intersection of ethnicity and territory becomes particularly visible in disputes over land use and resource allocation. Traditional claims to 'ancestral lands' compete with modern development needs, creating conflicts that invariably take on ethnic dimensions. As documented in existing studies of post-Soviet Dagestan (Ware and Kisriev 2014; Kolosova et al. 2016), the redistribution of collective farm lands following the dissolution of Soviet kolkhozy became a flashpoint for ethnic competition, with various groups invoking historical precedents and traditional use rights to justify contemporary claims.

Identity Formation in a Fragmented Society: The Paradox of Unity and Division

The process of identity formation in Dagestan reveals fundamental tensions between local fragmentation and the potential for broader regional consciousness. As Shnirelman (2018) documents, 'scholars belonging to different ethnic groups were engaged in myth-making by developing

various historical theories, and at times even reverting to outright falsification of history, in order to underline the "remote past" of their ethnic community.' These competing historical narratives prevent the emergence of shared Dagestani consciousness by emphasising ethnic distinctiveness and territorial claims.

The Soviet legacy profoundly shapes contemporary identity dynamics. The USSR left a deep imprint on the formation of national consciousness among its constituent peoples; while ethnic communities linked together through language, folk culture, a common territory and religion had existed on what became the Soviet Union for centuries, it was largely thanks to Soviet nationalities policy that these ethnicities became 'coherent, articulate, and conscious nations' (Slezkine 1994, 414). This institutionalisation of ethnic difference created the 'communal apartment' model, where each group occupied its designated space within the larger political structure.

The construction of separate historical narratives by each ethnic group in Dagestan reveals how the past becomes a battlefield for contemporary political claims over territorial boundaries, resource allocation, and representation in government institutions. During the period of 'sovereignization' in the late 1980s and early 1990s, ethnic entrepreneurs engaged in what Shnirelman (2018) documents as systematic myth-making to establish historical precedence and territorial rights. These efforts went beyond academic disputes to shape popular consciousness and political mobilization.

The Lezgins, for example, promoted the concept of 'Lezgistan' as a historical entity artificially divided between Russia and Azerbaijan, demanding reunification and autonomy. This narrative drew on archaeological evidence, linguistic arguments, and selective historical interpretation to construct a vision of ancient Lezgin statehood that justified contemporary political demands. The movement gained particular momentum in the early 1990s when the Soviet collapse seemed to make border revisions possible. On the other side, Kumyk intellectuals simultaneously advanced claims to lowland territories, arguing that historical Kumyk khanates had been unjustly dissolved and their lands redistributed to mountain peoples during Soviet rule. These competing narratives created overlapping territorial claims that transformed academic debates about medieval history into contemporary political mobilisation, including public protests, peti-

tions to federal authorities, and periodic inter-ethnic tensions over land use in contested lowland areas. The Nogais, despite their small numbers, invoked their heritage as descendants of the Golden Horde to demand elevated political status and territorial recognition in the northern steppes.

The figure of Imam Shamil[5] occupies a particularly complex position in these competing narratives. While his nineteenth-century resistance to Russian conquest might serve as a unifying symbol for all Dagestanis, different groups claim particular relationships to his movement. Avars emphasise his ethnic background, while others highlight the multi-ethnic nature of his support base. The Soviet transformation of Shamil from 'reactionary feudalist' to 'anti-colonial hero' and his post-Soviet elevation to regional symbol illustrates how historical figures become contested resources in identity politics, with different groups emphasising aspects of the narrative that support their contemporary claims to prestige and political relevance.

While the preceding analysis has focused on how ethnic particularism fragments Dagestan internally, a striking paradox emerges when examining identity formation among Dagestanis living outside the republic. Research by Varshaver et al. (2022) reveals that Dagestanis in Moscow often experience strengthened pan-Dagestani identification when facing external discrimination. As one Moscow-based informant explained: 'Outside Dagestan, we become more "Dagestani" than we ever were at home. Our village and ethnic differences are nothing as when Russians see us all as just "Caucasians"' (male, Dargin, 31 years). This suggests that Dagestani identity emerges primarily through shared experiences of exclusion rather than internal cultural commonalities.

The diaspora experience illuminates how identity operates contextually. Within Dagestan, primary identification remains with one's ethnic group or village. As Varshaver et al. (2022, 45) observe, 'the strongest catalysts for ethno-social mobilisation in the republic is the opposition of Dagestanis

5 Imam Shamil was the leader of the Caucasian mountaineers and the North Caucasian national liberation resistance. In 1834, he was recognised as the imam of an illegitimate (from the point of view of Russia) theocratic state, the North Caucasian Imamate, in which he united the mountaineers of Western Dagestan and Eastern Chechnya.

with others (residents of Moscow, immigrants from neighbouring republics or tourists), while in normal times the identity markers are the community or village from which the respondents originate.'

Language functions as a fundamental identity marker that shapes daily social interaction by signalling ethnic belonging, educational background, and social aspirations in every conversation. Dagestanis must navigate what informants described as 'linguistic maps': knowing which language to use with whom, in what setting, and for what purpose. These maps shift according to social context: native languages signal ethnic solidarity and family intimacy; Russian marks education, professionalism, and inter-ethnic neutrality; while code-switching between them communicates complex social positioning. Fieldwork interviews revealed divergent attitudes toward Russian: some view it as an imposed colonial language that prevents mastery of native tongues, while others see it as essential for integration and mobility, describing it as 'a ticket to Moscow' for education and employment. Yet significantly, 'Russian is never considered as their own' language, maintaining its status as an external medium even while serving as the primary tool for interethnic communication.

The role of informal leaders in shaping identity reveals both possibilities and limitations for transcending ethnic boundaries. Sports figures, most notably mixed martial arts champion Khabib Nurmagomedov (an ethnic Avar with over 27 million Instagram followers), have achieved recognition that crosses ethnic lines within Dagestan. As one informant noted: 'Khabib is the pride of all Dagestan, not just Avars. His success shows the world our small Republic exist' (male, Lezgin, 28 years). Nurmagomedov's influence extends beyond sport: his public statements on social issues, meetings with political leaders, and philanthropic activities have given him informal political weight that transcends his athletic achievements, making him a rare figure capable of mobilising pan-Dagestani sentiment. Yet even such figures remain embedded within ethnic networks and expectations that limit their ability to forge truly unified regional identity.

Contemporary challenges to identity formation include conflicts over cultural boundaries, particularly visible in debates about the behaviour of Russian tourists from other regions who began visiting Dagestan in increasing numbers following the COVID-19 pandemic's restrictions on international

travel. The discourse about appropriate dress codes, with local voices demanding that female visitors cover their shoulders and knees and refrain from wearing swimwear outside designated beach areas, has become one of the most prominent public debates in recent years. Significantly, this debate functions as a rare mechanism of pan-Dagestani identity formation: diverse ethnic groups united in distinguishing 'us' (traditional, modest, respectful of local norms) from 'them' (secular Russian tourists perceived as disrespectful of local values), demonstrating how external others can catalyse collective identification that internal diversity otherwise prevents.

Challenges and Prospects

The implementation of ethnic diversity management in Dagestan reveals a fundamental paradox: mechanisms designed to protect diversity have created an archipelago of ethnic enclaves separated by invisible yet impermeable boundaries. This border paradox creates a situation where protective boundaries simultaneously preserve ethnic distinctiveness and prevent broader integration.

Returning to this study's central question of how extreme diversity creates internal boundaries that fragment society, economic inequality has emerged as perhaps the most intractable mechanism of boundary maintenance. The correlation between ethnicity and economic opportunity creates what Galtung (1969) termed 'structural violence,' referring to systematic exclusions that appear natural but result from institutional arrangements. This economic stratification transforms market relations into boundary reinforcement mechanisms, perpetuating cycles of inequality that make ethnic boundaries seem natural rather than constructed.

The Islamic revival in Dagestan, while potentially offering transcendent identity beyond ethnic divisions, instead creates new forms of boundary-making. Different ethnic groups compete to define 'authentic' Islam, creating what might be termed 'sacred borders' between interpretations and practices. This reflects what Ware and Kisriev (2014) identify as the challenge of negotiating between traditional Islamic practices and modern state requirements.

Despite these challenges, Dagestan's system has prevented large-scale ethnic conflict, as Gontscharowa (2004) notes. This suggests that separated

coexistence may be preferable to forced integration or violent assimilation, raising questions about whether stable boundaries might be more realistic than integrated multiculturalism.

The role of informal leaders, particularly religious figures and sports personalities, offers insights into alternative forms of identification. These figures sometimes transcend ethnic boundaries, suggesting possibilities for identity formation that bypass formal institutional divisions. However, as the research on Dagestani youth by Poliakov (2023) shows, even these alternatives operate within broader constraints of internal boundary maintenance.

Language policy remains one of the most complex aspects of implementing group rights in Dagestan. While Kaymazarov (2012) argues that Russian serves as a means of interethnic communication, it creates hierarchical relationships between Russian speakers who enjoy advantages in education and employment and native language speakers who face systematic disadvantages in social mobility. Many languages of the peoples of Dagestan are under threat of extinction (Agaev and Magomedov 1995). This is due to insufficient funding for language preservation programs, a lack of qualified teachers, and the dominance of the Russian language in the public sphere.

Technology offers both promise and peril for Dagestan's bordered society. While digital tools might preserve linguistic diversity and create new spaces for dialogue, current trajectories suggest that virtual spaces often reproduce offline divisions. A popular Dagestani blogger[6] with over 100,000 followers, attempting to be inclusive of his diverse audience, conducted a poll asking 'How many Muslims and how many Christians are among us?' While ostensibly aimed at understanding his audience to create more inclusive content, this very question reinforced religious boundaries by requiring followers to categorise themselves into distinct religious groups.

This example illustrates how even well-intentioned attempts at recognition can perpetuate the logic of separation that characterises Dagestan's 'failed multiculturalism', where diversity is managed through division rather than integration.

6 Habkins_rool. Source: Instagram.

Conclusion

This study of Dagestan reveals how extreme ethnic diversity within a borderland region can produce internal fragmentation rather than multicultural integration, demonstrating what I have termed 'failed multiculturalism' – a condition where mechanisms designed to manage diversity instead create and maintain rigid boundaries between groups. Returning to the central research question of how extreme ethnic diversity in a borderland region creates internal boundaries that fragment rather than unite society, the analysis has shown that political, linguistic, religious, and economic institutions in Dagestan consistently translate diversity into durable lines of separation. The first sub-question, concerning how individuals navigate multiple, overlapping boundary systems in their daily lives, was addressed through ethnographic evidence of code-switching, selective interaction, and context-dependent identification at home, in schools, in workplaces, and in migration settings. The second sub-question, regarding the conditions under which transcendent identities that might bridge ethnic divisions emerge, was tackled by examining diaspora experiences, the symbolic role of figures such as Khabib Nurmagomedov, and the politicisation of tourist debates, all of which suggest that pan-Dagestani identification crystallises primarily in moments of confrontation with external others rather than through positive projects of internal integration. The Dagestani case challenges fundamental assumptions about diversity management while offering crucial insights for understanding similar dynamics in other divided societies.

The research demonstrates that Dagestan's system of ethnic quotas, linguistic policies, and separate religious institutions has created what amounts to an archipelago of ethnic enclaves within a single political territory. Unlike successful multicultural societies where diversity enriches social life through cross-cultural exchange and hybrid identity formation, Dagestan's institutional arrangements have produced parallel societies that coexist without meaningful integration. The Soviet legacy of treating ethnicity as an immutable characteristic has been adapted rather than abandoned, creating contemporary structures that continue to emphasize difference over commonality.

The paradoxical emergence of pan-Dagestani identity primarily in diaspora contexts reveals that unity develops not from shared positive char-

acteristics but from shared experiences of exclusion and discrimination. Within Dagestan itself, identity remains firmly anchored to ethnic group and village affiliations, with broader regional consciousness emerging only when confronted with external others – whether Russian discrimination in Moscow, tourist intrusions, or neighboring territorial conflicts. This negative foundation for collective identity suggests fundamental limitations in building inclusive regional consciousness within existing institutional frameworks.

Language policy exemplifies the broader challenges of managing diversity in ways that protect minority rights while enabling social cohesion. The dominance of Russian as the language of interethnic communication, education, and economic opportunity creates systematic disadvantages for native language speakers while simultaneously being rejected as 'their own' language by most Dagestanis. This linguistic double bind – where neither full assimilation nor cultural preservation offers viable paths forward – reflects the broader impossibility of transcending ethnic boundaries within current structures.

The role of religion in Dagestan's fragmented society particularly challenges assumptions about the unifying potential of shared faith. Despite overwhelming Muslim majority, the ethnicization of Islamic practice through parallel religious institutions ensures that religion reinforces rather than bridges ethnic divisions. Each group's maintenance of distinct religious authorities, practices, and institutions transforms what might be a source of unity into another mechanism of boundary maintenance.

Economic stratification along ethnic lines perhaps most starkly reveals the human costs of failed multiculturalism. When access to employment, business opportunities, and economic resources depends primarily on ethnic networks rather than individual merit or market dynamics, the resulting inequality becomes both a consequence and cause of continued fragmentation. The correlation between ethnicity and economic opportunity makes ethnic boundaries appear natural and insurmountable, perpetuating cycles of exclusion that prevent both individual mobility and collective prosperity.

The implications of this research extend beyond the North Caucasus context to broader questions about diversity management in contemporary societies. Dagestan's experience warns against assuming that rec-

ognizing and protecting ethnic diversity automatically produces harmonious pluralism. Instead, it demonstrates how well-intentioned policies designed to prevent ethnic conflict through institutional accommodation can create permanent separation that may be as limiting as forced assimilation. The challenge lies not in choosing between diversity and unity but in developing mechanisms that protect cultural distinctiveness while enabling meaningful cross-ethnic cooperation and shared civic identity.

Future research should explore whether alternative models of diversity management might better serve societies like Dagestan. Rather than seeking to eliminate ethnic boundaries – which may be neither feasible nor desirable – policy innovations might focus on making boundaries more permeable and creating incentives for cooperation across ethnic lines. This might involve developing economic policies that reward cross-ethnic partnerships, educational approaches that maintain linguistic diversity while ensuring common civic competencies, and political structures that balance ethnic security with opportunities for broader coalition-building.

Ultimately, Dagestan exemplifies both the promise and peril of ethnic diversity in borderland regions. Its experience demonstrates that proximity alone does not create community, that institutional recognition of diversity can perpetuate rather than resolve fragmentation, and that the absence of violent conflict should not be mistaken for successful integration. As the world grapples with increasing diversity and the challenges of building inclusive societies, Dagestan stands as a crucial case study in understanding how internal borders can be as divisive as international frontiers, creating forms of exclusion and limitation that shape human possibilities in profound and lasting ways.

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Liminal Lives: Violence, Peace, and Urban Belonging in Calcutta, 1946–1992

ABSTRACT: This article examines communal violence in Calcutta between 1946 and 1992 through the analytical lens of liminality to explore how moments of crisis reshaped urban belonging, identity, and spatial relations. Rather than treating riots as episodic breakdowns of order, it conceptualizes them as threshold moments that suspended everyday norms and produced unstable configurations of community, territory, and citizenship. Beginning with the Great Calcutta Killings of 1946 and continuing through the disturbances of 1950 and 1964 to the violence of 1992, the study traces continuities in the forms, actors, and meanings of urban conflict. Drawing on archival reports, press accounts, and secondary scholarship, the article argues that communal violence was embedded in the city's social geography – its neighbourhoods, refugee flows, and labour patterns. Riots transformed familiar spaces such as neighbourhoods and religious sites into liminal zones where protection and threat coexisted. These episodes reveal the ambivalent roles of state agencies and local strongmen, alongside moments of inter-communal solidarity that complicate narratives of inevitable antagonism. By foregrounding experiential and spatial dimensions, the article demonstrates how recurring crises produced a fragile but persistent urban coexistence, where belonging is negotiated in the in-between spaces of memory and interaction.

Keywords: Liminality; Communal Violence; Urban Belonging; Partition; Neighbourhoods and Space; Postcolonial Urban History; Memory and Identity

POVZETEK: Članek preučuje nasilje med skupnostmi v Kalkuti v obdobju med letoma 1946 in 1992 ter z analitično uporabo koncepta liminalnosti raziskuje, kako trenutki krize preoblikujejo urbano pripadnost, identiteto in prostorske odnose. Namesto da izgrede obravnava kot epizodične zlome družbenega reda, jih konceptualizira kot trenutke, ki začasno suspendirajo vsakdanje norme in ustvarjajo nestabilne konfiguracije skupnosti, teritorija in državljanstva. Začenši z velikimi kalkuškimi poboji leta 1946, nemiri v letih 1950 in 1964 ter nasiljem leta 1992 študija sledi kontinuitetam oblik, akterjev in pomenov urbanih konfliktov. Na podlagi arhivskih poročil, časopisnih zapisov in sekundarne literature članek prikazuje, kako se nasilje med skupnostmi vgrajuje v družbeno geografijo mesta – v njegove četrti, begunske tokove in vzorce dela. Izgredi so domače prostore, kot so soseske in verska svetišča, preoblikovali v prostore liminalnosti, kjer zaščita in grožnja obstajata hkrati. Ti dogodki razkrivajo ambivalentne vloge državnih institucij in lokalnih veljakov, obenem pa tudi trenutke medskupnostne solidarnosti, ki zapletajo pripovedi o neizogibnem antagonizmu. S poudarkom na izkustvenih in prostor-

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skih razsežnostih članek pokaže, kako so ponavljajoče se krize ustvarile krhko, a trajno urbano sožitje, v katerem se pripadnost pogaja v vmesnih prostorih spomina in interakcije.

Ključne besede: liminalnost, medskupnostno nasilje, urbana pripadnost, delitev, soseske in prostor, postkolonialna urbana zgodovina, spomin in identiteta.

The Partition of India in 1947, on the eve of decolonization, remains unparalleled in scale and consequence. It affected so many people when it occurred, and has continued to affect countless lives ever since. The event was not a singular rupture, but a prolonged process, with a deep prehistory and a protracted aftermath. While the communal violence reached a deadly climax along the western border, it happened in waves in the east. It was episodic yet constant, oscillating between fragile coexistence and sudden breakdown. In this context, the present article explores the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, of past and present, of inside and outside, and of inclusion and exclusion. It focuses on the post-partition communal riots in Calcutta, how they were orchestrated, and how one can navigate the questions of complex and polymorphic identities in those fateful days. It also discusses the riot of 1992, which originated in an entirely different context, and asks how some complexities remain ephemeral to the central understanding of contending community relations in an urban setting.

In this context, the article argues that one of the best ways to understand these moments of violence is through the lens of liminality. Liminality, a concept borrowed from anthropology and ritual theory, refers to the stage of transition, ambiguity, and in-betweenness. When applied to urban communal violence, it allows us to see how riots do not simply rupture normalcy but produce threshold conditions where identities, spaces, and relationships are reconfigured. Riots reveal the instability of belonging; they mark the ways neighbours can become enemies, rumours can become truth, and a city can hover between solidarity and breakdown. Within this framework, the present article briefly touches upon major riots (1946, 1950, 1964, and 1992) that ruptured the urban fabric in the latter half of the twentieth century in Calcutta, and particularly explores the question of belonging within the matrix of communal violence. Calcutta's history of communal conflict reveals violence not as an aberration, but as a recurring liminal condition of urban belonging in modern South Asia.

Liminality and Urban Violence

Taking cues from van Gennep (1960) and Turner (1967) as part of the then 'process approach', the concept of Liminality here is identified as a condition of ambiguities and possibilities in which social norms are temporarily suspended, and new forms of identities can emerge (Andrews and Roberts 2012). It has twin possibilities: it can signal dissolution of order, as well as potential for transformation. If this theoretical premise is applied to the social landscape of post-colonial Calcutta, a city ravaged by riots, crisis of housing, refugee influx, unemployment, and social instabilities, it helps to understand the temporality and transience. As will be exhibited in the subsequent sections, this was also a period when the border between India and Pakistan was still in the making in psychological terms. Thus, walls, fences, and borders do not always lead to segregation and exclusion, but also produce liminality (regarding space, identity, culture, and experience), showing the complexity of the phenomenon. It seems like an oxymoron, but borders can unite different sides to develop new identities and cultures beyond any category or definition.

This must be read along with the battles of Liminality and transgression, which always existed at the margins of human existence. As this article specifically deals with two religious communities, the Hindus and Muslims, which underwent huge transformations in notions of us-hood and notions about the other during colonial modernity, liminality also helps to situate the precariousness of such shifting identities. This is more explicitly demonstrated during times of religious violence, which momentarily erases the thin balance of co-existence in the neighbourhoods. While neighbourhoods in a city is always marked by internal borders, riots activate the line of control between the contesting zones.

'Liminal' comes from the Latin 'limen' with plural 'limina' and means 'of, relating to, or situated at a sensory threshold: barely perceptible or capable of eliciting a response and second, of, relating to, or being an intermediate state, phase, or condition' (in-between, transitional) (Tanulku and Pekelsma 2024). Looking at the riots through the lens of liminality, the paper argues that such transgression stays on the borders, going nowhere and belonging nowhere. This is because, during violence, people have difficulty judging and punishing liminality. For example, a peace-loving per-

son can become violent in their own neighbourhood one day, and can also be among the peace-mongers the next. This points to the essential domain of the in-between space of potentials. Unlike the closed space given by its perceived limits, the liminal space or site of the limen is one of opening, unfolding, or becoming. It is a sort of terra incognita, even as it is occupied and transgressed. They are familiar yet unknown, they are secure, yet intimidating (Downey et al. 2016; Lamond and Ross 2020). Keeping the intersectionality of liminal existence, hardening of communal identities, and orchestration of riot violence, the paper traces the trajectory of communal conflict in Calcutta – beginning with the last major riot of colonial Calcutta in 1946, and concluding with the last major riot in post-colonial Calcutta in 1992. A recurrent key theme, then, lies around dissolution of order, where experience shapes communal consciousness, interprets judgements, and forms new meanings. Liminal situations can thus facilitate understanding of technologies shaping identities and institutions in larger social circles.

The Great Calcutta Killings: Partition before Partition in the City

The 1905 Partition of Bengal unfolded in a political moment when a fully consolidated Muslim political identity had not yet taken shape. The anti-partition mobilization was driven largely by *bhadralok*/elite Bengali Hindu efforts to preserve a linguistic and regional identity that was imagined as transcending religious divisions, expressed through the intertwined idioms of *atmashakti*, boycott, swadeshi activism, and strands of revolutionary politics (Sarkar 1973). By the early decades of the twentieth century, however, the terrain of politics underwent paradigmatic shifts. The after-effects of the Khilafat movement, the widening franchise, and the intensification of competitive mass mobilization contributed to a worsening communal climate (Chandra 2008; Das 1991; Roy 2018). While nineteenth-century middle-class cultural modernity had always been marked by latent caste and communal fractures (Joshi 2005, 2010; Chatterjee 1986, 1993), these fissures gradually hardened into more explicit and organized political identities by the 1930s and 1940s (Chatterji 2007; Bhattacharya 2014). Situating the late colonial moment within this longer trajectory

helps explain how earlier idioms of regional solidarity gave way to more polarized forms of political belonging that shaped the conditions of urban coexistence on the eve of Partition.

In Calcutta, riots gradually became more endemic since the end of the 19th century. Suranjan Das (1991) suggests a definite shift in the nature of communal violence in Bengal between 1905 and 1947. While the riots of the first three decades of the twentieth century demonstrated the complex coexistence of class and communal elements, the fusion of the communal with nationalist and class modes of consciousness in the 1940s culminated in relatively more organized and overtly communal riots. This was a liminal moment; collective violence no longer belonged fully to the idiom of class or colonial resistance, nor was it wholly sectarian. It hovered uneasily between these domains and contributed to the crystallization of communal antagonism. Yet, in early 1946, the city jubilantly protested against the trial of Indian National Army's prisoners, rose in solidarity with several anti-colonial upsurges, and it seemed that perhaps, communal peace was not far away. Ironically, despite promising amity between rival political groups and opposing communal parties in February 1946, not an iota of this mutual harmony and love was felt from the morning of 16th August 1946, when the city witnessed an unprecedented scale of communal violence. In the five days of frenzied madness – that has gone down in history as the 'Great Calcutta Killings' – an estimated 4,000 people were killed and another 10,000 were injured (Roy 2018; Batabyal 2005; Mukherjee 2015).

Also, while the participants in the earlier riots were mostly upcountry labourers taking out their anger against upper-class people, both European and Indian, the riots of later years gradually started involving middle-class men, not only non-Bengali but also Bengali. Till the beginning of the 1940s, whatever might have been the immediate trigger for an outbreak – music before a mosque or a firing from a Marwari house or an accidental killing of a Muslim boy – the collective violence, once it spread, came to be directed against symbols of class and colonial exploitation. By the 1940s, crowd violence no longer focused primarily on the richer and more influential sections of the two communities, but was instead directed at any manifestation of the rival community, such as religious centres, clubs, and schools. The riots also indicated a certain degree of planning beforehand

to carry out a uniform method of aggression, arson, and looting. The emphasis now was not on economic gain but on revenge and humiliation of the members of the rival community.

The riot began in the context of Direct Action Day on 16th August, a call given by the Muslim League, for demanding Pakistan, with all Muslim-majority provinces. The urban space of Calcutta was transformed into a land of anguish, with a prevailing sense of insecurity, confusion, and chaos. While a thriving underworld of anti-socials/*goondas* already had a prominent presence in Calcutta as a part of the Bengali political life, they acquired a new importance in the wake of the Second World War (Banerjee 2006). In the mid-1940s, American and British soldiers who left the city disposed of a large amount of weaponry and heavy armaments. These found their way into the arsenal of the *goonda*s. In 1946, during the August Killing in Calcutta, these weapons were widely used by the gangsters of both communities. Hence, here again, the *goonda* can be identified as a liminal figure: at once protector and predator; defender of the neighbourhood and agent of its destabilization. Neither fully criminal nor fully political, his violence was a conflict zone between legality and illegality, blurring the lines between civic defence and civic disorder. Interestingly, these *goondas* were also territorially divided. Extensive regions in Northern and Central Calcutta (Upper Circular Road, Amherst Street, Narkeldanga, Beliaghata, Bowbazar, Muchipara) were particularly infamous due to the fields of operation of these *goondas*. They also had more or less common ancestral lands. The criminals largely belonged to the strata of urban poor and upcountry migrants. But a transgression occurred with the traumatic events of 1946 as many new members entered the underworld. A considerable section hailed from upper-caste affluent families, some even had military connections. Gopal Mukherji (alias Gopal Pantha) in central Calcutta raised a private army called *Bharat Jatiya Bahini* to protect the Hindus, which was trained in explosives and firearms. The middle-class *bhadralok*/ elites like Dinabandhu Dutta, Santosh Pal, and Bhanu Bose joined the 'army' to seek revenge for their sufferings and humiliations by the Muslims. However, after the period of aggression receded, often the 'heroes' were viewed with contempt, and they had no other option except taking recourse to full-fledged involvement in the criminal world. Hence, they

belonged to the domain of inbetween-ness, in the critical and fluid junctures at the performative arena of power and culture.

It is also crucial to study the urban landscape, the site of violence, where riots unfold. In this regard, Nariaki Nakazato (2018) talks about the role of neighbourhoods or *para*. When the unprecedented rioting broke out in Calcutta, many citizens appeared to have fallen back upon the familiar social ties of *para* to render mutual help of various kind to one another. For example, the railway workers who lived in Narkeldanga bustee set up a united Hindu volunteer corps to prevent outsiders from entering their neighbourhood. In other places, local people constructed barricades to defend their '*para*'. On Ripon Street to the west of Park Circus, which was inhabited by a mixed population, Muslims built 'barricades with the help of Anglo-Indians on information of impending attacks by Sikhs' on the evening of 17th August. In north Calcutta, where a minority of Muslims lived in isolated small pockets, neighbourhood solidarity occasionally worked as an effective safeguard to protect them against attacks from Hindu intruders. Hence, while sometimes the neighbourhoods acted as an arsenal of violence, some exhibited discursive areas of liminalities: simultaneously protective thresholds and exclusionary borders. They turned everyday spaces of intimacy into battlegrounds where belonging and otherness were reified at the edges of make-shift barricades.

The Calcutta Disturbances had tremendous repercussions. Not only did they trigger a series of partition riots in East Bengal, Bihar, and other provinces, but they also made it almost impossible for both sides to come to a political compromise for the sake of preserving the unity of India. They generated a deep pessimism that even the euphoria of Independence was unable to heal. The mutual distrust that stemmed from the Calcutta Riots and Noakhali Riots led people to cluster into the 'safety' of their own communities, freezing identities into solid blocs. Thus, territorial separation began even before partition was announced. By August 1947, violence engulfed the western border of the sub-continent on a massive scale. Unlike Bengal, the large-scale communal carnage in the Western border led to an almost complete exodus of both communities, culminating in a near-exchange of population. According to official reports, casualty figures were much less in Calcutta.

The transition of India from colonial subservience to independence on 15th August, 1947, brought severe challenges, anxieties, confusion and conflicts with it. Partition created dispersed, disordered cities across South Asia. Urgency was felt about how best to recognize, accommodate, tolerate, and manage subnational diversity and provide support and mechanisms for managing effects of Partition. Several institutional arrangements based on legal and constitutional mechanisms tried to respond to ethnic and cultural diversities and protect and nurture individual rights, along with substantive provisions for minority rights. Also, the arrival of freedom appeared to different people differently from their own diverse vantage points, such as existing economic privileges, possession of cultural capital, religious beliefs, and caste identities. 'Partition cities' therefore, had multiple, changing structures. Some denizens emerged as winners in these battles over urban space. Others lost their footholds. (Chatterji 2023; Bandyopadhyay 2009; Roy, Sengupta and Bandyopadhyay 2024).

The Violence of 1950: Second Calcutta Killing

If 1946 was a Partition before Partition, then 1950 marked the aftershock. It was the first major riot of post-colonial Calcutta, shaped by refugee flows, contested rehabilitations, and deepening of the liminality of belonging.

According to a telegram sent to Atlee, the Premier of England, from the UK High Commission in Calcutta on 2nd February 1950, horrifying violence was unleashed in Khulna, Barisal and Rajshahi in East Bengal against the minority Hindu Bengalis. However, as per media reports, violence broke out in Dacca on Friday, 10th February, 1950. On 12th February, a crowd of Hindu passengers was attacked at the Karimtolla airport near Dacca by an armed mob and a large number of boarding passengers, including women and children, were killed or seriously wounded. Soon a host of reports of massacres flooded in from other parts of East Bengal such as Sylhet, Rajshahi, Barisal, Khulna, Tripura and Noakhali. While Indian newspapers focused on the atrocities of Hindus by Muslims in East Pakistan, Pakistani media negated them vigorously. *Pallibandhab*, a daily published from Rajshahi, reported how the Muslims were constantly victimized in West Bengal, especially in Murshidabad. Amidst these allegations and counter-allegations, full-scale anti-Muslim

riots started in Calcutta on 8th February, after a gap of nearly two years (Bandyopadhyay and Basu Ray Chaudhury 2022, 78). Detailed reports of the riots in Calcutta and the suburbs are difficult to come by, with the government gagging press reportage with prohibitory orders. Only the official briefings were to be reported daily, and no independent investigations were to be carried out. Thus, riots in post-colonial regime demonstrated a contested terrain of representation and accountability. Violence unfolded across a transnational spectrum of mutual accusation, where rumour and reportage blurred, and truth itself occupied a liminal space between competing sovereignties.

The government promulgated legal orders banning all processions and meetings. A curfew was imposed in certain sensitive pockets, and the military was summoned to patrol those areas, and soon even such measures seemed inadequate (Dominion Office Files at British Archives and West Bengal State Archive Files in India). The official reports documented endless events of stabbing, arson, murder, and indiscriminate looting of property and widespread destruction. As was evident from earlier riots, the zones surrounding Maniktala and Beliaghata police stations, the area bounded by Ultadanga Main Road on the north, Gas Street on the south, the railway bridge on the east and Upper Circular Road on the west, the Amherst Street police station, the area encompassing Keshub Sen Street on the north, Mirzapur Street on the south Upper Circular Road on the east, and Amherst Street on the west, remained most tense. The situation seemed to have improved by 11th February, and on 18th February, the curfew was lifted from all areas in Calcutta. But peace was short lived. Reports of stray violence in and around the city never ceased to come.

While streets of Calcutta and Howrah were in flames in parallel with extensive regions in East Bengal, it acted as a super active catalyst for mass migration: to and from East Pakistan to West Bengal and vice versa. Reports of organized attacks on trains bound for Calcutta and harassment of the refugees by East Bengal officials and semi-official agencies led to agitated response in the areas surrounding Sealdah station. Thus, the very act of travel, boarding a train or a steamer, echoed a tension of in-betweenness, where survival hung upon a thin balance. Again, migration patterns remained asymmetrical. While the Hindus had a majorly one-way flow

from East to the West Bengal, the Muslim exodus from West Bengal was not complete. Soon many came back. They represented the unsettling anxieties of Partition's aftermath. They were suspended between departure and return, between inclusion and exclusion. Fortnightly reports in April 1950 suggested various conflicting figures (between 25,000–50,000) regarding the intra-city migration of the displaced Muslims during the riot.

In fact, one of the most long-term consequences of the 1950 riots was jumbling up the existing setup in the city by obliterating the boundaries between the rich and the poor. The latter fled from their dinghy shanties, which were burnt down, to take shelter amongst their relatively affluent brethren. The state administration, too, acknowledged, 'There has been a concentration of evacuees in certain areas, particularly in Park Circus' (Census of India 1951). Additional important local factor was that the Hindu landlords in these partially developed but increasingly valuable areas used this opportunity to instigate the eviction of the minorities to enjoy undisturbed possession of the land under the Tikka Tenancy Act of 1949. Thus, the official police view regarding the riot was that, though the troubles were communal in origin, they were aggravated and protracted by hooliganism and goondaism masquerading as communalism (Ghosh 2018). The 1951 census data also showed, in some of the Muslim majority pockets, the vacuum was filled by the Hindu immigrants. During a survey on the social scene of Calcutta in the 1960s, it was noted in that the refugees had settled in large numbers mostly in the northern and northeastern wards, many of which were formally inhabited by Muslim labourers and artisans (Bose 1968, 14).

In this asymmetrical war, the minority's social and cultural rights over the cityscape were also transforming in many other ways. Increasingly, the Muslim graveyards and *waqf* property were often transformed into residential neighbourhoods by the Hindus. While such transformation was a constant and gradual process, the riots led to more violent and radical restructuring of the living spaces. According to a report created by the Muslim Rehabilitation and Welfare Association (1950), the Chief Secretaries' Conference between two Bengals on 20th November 1950 brought up a concern about the deplorable conditions of existing mosques in and around Calcutta after the recent violence. A large number of them had

been occupied by the Hindu refugees, whom even the police could not resist. Mosques and graveyards thus became liminal spaces, simultaneously shelters, battlegrounds, and symbols of dispossession.

Amidst these spatial transformations, the struggle over responsibility for the riots generated another layer of contestation, as both the Indian and Pakistani governments were busy to establish the perfect chronology of riots to justify and legitimize their roles respectively. The Congress leaders in Bengal put the onus on the restless spirit of the migrants, claiming they were desperate to stir violence due to their victimhood. The Premier Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy, the Congress leader, was eloquent about the incendiary role of organizations like the Hindu Mahasabha, being directly responsible. The Mahasabha General Secretary Ashutosh Lahiry spewed venom on the minorities in his speeches, and the Mahasabha Conference in December 1949 asked for the establishment of *Akhand* (undivided) *Hindustan* based on the culture and tradition of the land. Reliable sources mention a 'Commission for Protection of Minorities' in Calcutta, which was supposedly forming and training a civilian Hindu militia. Its founder J. Mitter, an immigrant from Khulna, about 55 years old, published a pamphlet called '*Now or Never*' in which he suggested the creation of a separate territory for the Hindu minorities in East Bengal. They had a sort of training camp in Beliaghata (where the first communal incident occurred in early February). There were 2000 volunteers, trained by Ex-Army Gurkhas. During the early post-colonial years the idea of turning neighbourhoods into militarized liminal zones therefore had popular acceptance.

Hence, the years after the riot of 1950 were a period of reshuffling of population, displacement of residences and establishment of fresh addresses. Religious festivities were moments of examining the strength of secular sovereign democracy. The Delhi Pact (1950), signed between Liaquat Ali Khan and Jawaharlal Nehru, possibly never had a chance of much success. Because Nehru's basic assumption – that migration would stop if overt communal violence could somehow be contained – was wrong as millions of refugees kept crossing the eastern and western borders.

In fact, fresh waves of migration began in full swing in the 1960s. There had been a number of reports of mass migration of Muslims from Assam

and Tripura to East Bengal, as well as huge groups of Garo, Christians and Buddhists who came to those hilly tracts after being persecuted from East Bengal. In such circumstances, the fresh trouble in Kashmir in December 1963 directly led to communal riots in January 1964 in both Bengals.

Riots of 1964: The Hazratbal Incident

The theft of a sacred relic of Prophet Mohammad from Hazratbal shrine in Srinagar on December 26, 1963 evoked considerable tension not only in Kashmir but all over India and Pakistan. While the Indian government was on the verge of restoring the relic, massive violence unleashed on East Pakistani Hindu Bengalis by the Muslims in early January (Bandyopadhyay and Basu Ray Chaudhury 2022, 243). Immediately, a fresh chain of migration began to West Bengal with stories of gruesome cruelty. In retaliation, riot erupted in Calcutta and in the border areas on 9th January 1964, and resulted in considerable number of casualty and property destruction. According to official records, the eastern border and Calcutta's Rajabazar, Beliaghata, Entally, Jadavpur, and Sonarpur witnessed mob clashes with the police. The frenzy finally subsided with the advent of army and long hours of curfew, which took a toll on normal city life. It was the usual story of chain reactions: starting in the early stages from religious fanaticism, never far below the surface, fermented by horrific accounts of happenings in Pakistan and India and then exploited by *goondas* and the hooligan elements.

While newspapers in West Bengal reported vivid details of atrocities on Hindu minorities in East Pakistan on 4th January, the newspapers of the same day also reported the government's success in restoring the sacred relic in Kashmir, leading to spontaneous celebration by Hindus-Muslims-Sikhs alike. But this bit of news could not stop the impending violence. This very moment proves that it is often unreasonable to find linear causality in communal violence. They do stem from particular triggers, but collective emotions, rumour, and political interests intersect to transform everyday coexistence into crisis. However, this time, more preparedness was demonstrated by the top leadership. The newspapers such as the *Jugantar* reported that the Home Minister G. L. Nanda called up an all-party conference including members from Calcutta Corporation, Lok

Sabha and Rajya Sabha to form three committees to ameliorate the riot condition: the peace committee, the vigilance committee and the aid and rehabilitation committee. Meanwhile, some leading opposition and trade union leaders decided to organize peace squads and met Chief Minister P. C. Sen promising to extend their service. Also, six Muslim leaders from West Bengal issued a statement condemning the oppression of the minority in East Pakistan and hoped that 'the people and government' there would immediately arrange to stop 'this communal orgy'. They assured their co-religionists in East Pakistan that the Muslims in West Bengal were completely safe and secure. Publicly, they confirmed their faith in the constitutional democracy and expressed their admiration for the 'Hindu brothers and sisters' who had stood by them.

Despite continued clashes in areas such as Muchipara, Watgunge, Ekbalpur, and Garden Reach the situation turned for the better and order in Calcutta was completely restored by 17th January. The transport sector, the shops and trade and commerce resumed again, but with the curfew hours, Calcutta was yet to achieve its normalcy. Out of a total of 54,055 Muslim refugees housed across 29 camps, 34,956 had safely returned to their homes by 22 January. Like the earlier events of violence, India proposed a high-level ministerial talk, hoping for positive and constructive measures essential for the creation of a favourable atmosphere to discuss Indo-Pakistan differences. India suggested that the meetings must take place in Calcutta or Dacca and not in Delhi or Rawalpindi, which were 'distant land' from the places of trouble. Such diplomatic gesture once again highlights liminal politics: the borders between the states were not merely a fixed demarcated line, but a proximate reality. Calcutta and Decca were more than cities, they were liminal venues where the immediacy of violence, migration, and negotiation converged.

Meanwhile, 16th January was a historic day for Calcutta, as the government and intellectuals called for a mass peace march for all citizens. The rally was to cover the riot-hit areas through S N Banerjee Road, Wellesley Street, Eliot Road, Lower Circular Road, Beniapukur Lane, Phulbagan, CIT Road, Moulali, Sealdah, Rajabazar, Keshab Sen Street, College Street, and would disperse at College Square. Notably, more than forty thousand people assembled at the meeting point, while many were waiting to join the

procession through its course with spontaneous slogans such as '*No more riots, we want peace*', or '*Hindu Musalman Bhai-Bhai*'! When the procession reached Janbazar and Wellesley Road, the Hindus stood by the Muslim residents and cried out slogans of solidarity, which reminded of the spirited celebrations on Independence Day. All major media houses and official information agencies captured the rally in detail. Thus the urban space, within few days, turned from a battle-field to a festival ground, from exclusionary barricades to inclusive processions.

The ideological battle to 'find' the truth behind the perpetrators of violence was, however still going on. An article in *Anandabazar Patrika* talked about social 'peculiarities of this metropolis where seeds of violence lie unnoticed in the shaded lanes and by-lanes and often behind neon lights. The seeds sprout in different forms now as a violent political demonstration and also as a communal riot.' Another daily, *Jugantar* (19/1/64), came out with a revealing report entitled 'Whose Hands Were Operational in the Riots?' in which, it stated that the non-Bengali Muslims had provoked the Bengali Muslims to take up arms. In February, the Working Committee of Bharatiya Jan Sangh in West Bengal directly accused the 'pro-Pakistani' Muslims for provoking the riots as huge Muslim mobs were noticed in areas like Garpar, Entally, Beniapukur, Park Circus, Metiabruz and Tiljala, raising slogans like 'Pakistan Zindabad' (*Hindusthan Standard* 6/2/64). The members of the Jan Sangh further alleged: 'The West Bengal government tried to play down the part of Muslims who had played their roles in riots, and their entire secular wrath was turned against the Hindus. Later, when the riots subsided, the Raj Bhaban was converted into a Langar-Khana where the Muslim sufferers were feted and feasted in royal style, while the Hindu sufferers were left to shift for themselves.'

The retrospective reports in *Jugatntar and Anandabazar Patrika* were no less provocative. They gave out personal stories of Hindu households facing onslaughts and braving inhuman cruelty in almost pictographic details. A few months later, Professor Sankhaninad Guha and Arabinda Datta, on 25th May, commented that growth of communalism in Pakistan leading to Hindu migration together with an 'ungovernable' Muslim minority in India, was responsible for all religious conflicts. Complete migration from East Bengal and a restriction on the 'geometric' rate of growth

of population among the minority were necessary steps to be taken by the government ('Secularism and Reality', *Hindustan Standard*, 24/5/64). On the other hand, the Congress expressed its opinion regarding the riot as simply a Pakistani creation and criticized the mentality of blaming any particular religious group. Thus, each version redrew the boundaries of 'us' and 'them,' showing that communal violence in Calcutta was as much discursive as it was physical.

It is true Calcutta did not experience riots of a similar scale of violence in the years following that of 1964. But sporadic localized clashes over such as immersion of Hindu idols in Muslim neighbourhoods managed to find its way. According to the official voices, such disturbances were purely communal and *not unusual* on such occasions. These episodes, dismissed as routine communal quarrel, revealed the city's lingering liminality. Everyday practices could at any moment tip over into violence, keeping coexistence suspended between fragile normalcy and sudden rupture.

Babri Riots of 1992: Beyond Hindu Nationalism

Almost three decades passed in Calcutta after the 1964 January Riots, without any major communal disturbances. While Bengal witnessed a continuous rule of Left Front government since 1977 with relative stability, the national political landscape was changing rapidly. By the 1980s, there was a renewed shift of the Hindu Right Wing agenda, especially led by the Bharatiya Janata Party, with tacit support from the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the RSS. It revolved around a controversial mosque in Ayodhya, a place traditionally believed to be the birthplace of Lord Rama. This mosque, by Mir Baqi, an associate of Mughal emperor Babur, was built at the site of a temple of Rama back in the sixteenth century, and is known as the Babri Mosque. The Hindu Right Wingers reinvigorated the issue in the 1980s, demanding its demolition, along with the mosques of Kashi and Mathura, where Hindu temples had also been 'victims' of Muslim fundamentalism. Finally, on December 6th, 1992, a large Hindu mob, famously known as '*karsevak*', destroyed the historic monument in Ayodhya, with obvious support from the BJP-ruled government in Uttar Pradesh. This restarted a bloody chain of riots in major parts of India, including Calcutta. However, the casualties and destruction were

on a much smaller scale here than in other Indian cities like Bombay or Delhi. Whereas the riots in earlier periods were fallout of Partition, and engaged cross-border migration, this time, it emerged majorly out of post-independence urgencies, through majoritarian Hindu activism, which was positioned in the wide domain of competitive populism. It implied a complex network between state power, electoral politics, popular mobilization, mass media, and collective emotionalism (Ludden 2005; Zavos 2000; Kanunga et al. 2020; Hansen 1999; Jaffrelot 2007). The new communalism of the 1980s is intricately woven into structural changes in India, which is driven by forces that circulate in the world economy and also hide in the private spaces of family life.

Apparently, Bengal enjoyed a different political climate around this time. The whole theatre of Ayodhya dispute and the manoeuvrers of the Hindu extremist wings were reported by the press in Calcutta in a rather distanced manner, and the police did not anticipate any local violence. As per media reports, The VHP members and the *karsevaks* were portrayed quite critically for assembling at Ayodhya in increasing numbers, defying court orders (*Ananda Bazar Patrika/ABP*, 3.12.92). However, when the news of demolition on 6th December reached Calcutta, minor feuds erupted in certain localities, especially around the port areas (*The Statesman*, 8.12.92). The ruling Left Front Government called emergency meetings. Both the Congress and the Left parties individually carried out peace marches across several localities. It was declared that, though public transport would be off, many other essential sectors and the media would be allowed to operate freely.

However, despite the strikes and the peace rallies, on 7th December, an 'orgy of violence' was unleashed at Lichu Bagan and Kashyap Para in Metiabruz. Houses in Mominpur and Garden Reach were ransacked, their inhabitants' belongings were looted and burnt and the police were nowhere to be seen. The police fought a pitched battle with the miscreants. Further in Park Street, at Rafi Ahmed Kidwai Road, public and police vehicles were attacked and bombs were hurled from the rooftops prompting the police to fire tear gas shells in retaliation. Curfew had to be imposed in Calcutta and the army was deployed (*ABP* 8/12/92). The political parties, religious leaders, and intelligentsia came out in numbers requesting to keep harmony and peace.

In Metiabruz and Garden Reach, the places of worship were under the *goondas*, so were the medical clinics (Report by *Nagarik Mancha* 1993). 852 arrests were made, with accusations such as arson, looting and rioting. What the reporters found appalling was the complete absence of political leaders in the riot-affected areas. By 9th December, when the city was regaining its balance, the situation in East Calcutta suddenly deteriorated from midnight onwards (*ABP* 10/12/92). The earlier decision to limit curfew hours was to be withdrawn as East and South Calcutta including Tiljala, Tangra, Entally, Beniapukur, Kareya and Taltala regions witnessed widespread looting and arson since 10pm. Finally, from 12th December onwards, violence was quelled and the city heaved a sigh of relief. Due to this four-day disturbance, at least 35,000 had been displaced and sought shelter in 13 camps (*ABP* 13/12/92)

Unlike the earlier riots, where the Partition led state borders became a site of liminal contestations, the 1992 violence was different. It emerged from long-standing psychological enmities between Hindus and Muslims, irreconcilable even after so many years. The demolition of Babri did not touch Calcutta spatially, stems of refugees did not arrive as it happened with Hazratbal incident, nevertheless it fractured the city through media transmission, rumour and political mobilization. Yet, resistance to violence and a determination to keep up the secular spirit were not lost completely. The Press reports diligently brought out a number of snippets where 'good senses' prevailed. For example, when a group of Muslim rioters assembled to demolish an old temple dedicated to Lord *Shiva* at Zakaria Street, the local Muslims resisted them spontaneously and saved the temple from destruction (*ABP* 9/12/92).

'The demolition of Babri Masjid has caused excruciating pain in the hearts of all Muslims but we should not cause pain to others as a consequence' – said Md. Nazim, the Imam of Nakhoda Mosque – 'What happened at Ayodhya was a shame. Yet all of us should work together for peace and help to cool down passions.' He appealed for communal harmony, for that is what Islam teaches.

Suranjan Das (2000) posits a comparison between the three cases of riots in Calcutta. Like in the 1964 outbreak, the emphasis of rioting in 1992 was not on physical assaults but on looting, arson, and destruction of proper-

ty. Molestation of women was not reported, and 'brutalization of human consciousness', which dominated the 1946 carnage and manifested in the recent post-Ayodhya outbreaks in Bombay (Maharashtra) and Surat (Gujarat), was not characteristic of the last Calcutta outbreak. It is equally revealing that the 'traditional' riot zone of Calcutta – Rajabazar, Khidirpur, Kalabagan, Zakaria Street, Keshab Sen Street, Chitpur, and Moulali remained outside the parameters of the 'unsettled zone' in 1992. Instead, the violence was concentrated in the city's south-west and eastern sectors comprising Metiabruz, Garden Reach, Park Circus, Tangra, Tapsia, Tiljala and Beniapukur slums. Who was behind this conspiracy is difficult to identify. But it appears that real estate 'promoters' played a crucial role in inflaming the riot, whose victims were mainly slum-dwellers. Their apparent aim was to clear the slums/*bustees* for construction projects, especially in the context of rising land prices since the 1980s.

The Left leaders also particularly targeted the Hindi and Urdu-speaking Muslims as the main perpetrators, while the Bengali Muslims had protected their Hindu Neighbours (*The Statesman 15/12/92).* Indeed, in tune with all preceding Calcutta riots, the upcountry Hindu and Muslim alike – were particularly restive in 1992. Das (2000) suggests these up-countrymen failed to integrate with the ethos of Calcutta. Discriminated as 'intruders', and denied opportunities for secure employment, the Muslims among them could find solace from *mullas* (Muslim religious preachers) and sought strength from strong kinship bonds, which only religious loyalty could provide.

Despite the repeated emphasis on not so communal character of the Babri riots, a communal distemper was certainly present during those turbulent days. Stories of desecration of places of worship or a likely attack on the police headquarters of Lalbazar, heaps of dead-bodies lying on the streets, and cutting of women's breasts were systematically circulated to excite sentiments of both communities. The police control room had a tough time managing the rumour-mongering. One journalist overheard a middle-aged man once he finished browsing through the newspaper at his neighbourhood *adda/*gossip, 'These newspapers don't write anything nowadays. They haven't even mentioned that Nakhoda Mosque had been demolished already!'

A fact-finding report by an NGO states that the Muslims faced victimization even by representatives of government officials. The police arrested many Muslims from Metiabruz; they were detained unlawfully for more than 90 hours before they were produced before the court. They were tortured in the lock-up and abused by the police. Curiously, in Badrtala Lions Club Area, when a temple was harmed, the local army constable raised funds and renovated it with chants of *Jai Siyaram*!

A riot changes the texture of the city in many ways. Apart from the mere calculations of causalities, the media reports can be an excellent source of understanding the city-life and its people. In the places where the brunt of violence was not directly felt, the citizens found it hard to suppress their excitement and curiosity once they saw the army trucks in their neighbourhoods. Many of them were curious about what it meant to be 'under curfew'. Hence, they came out of their homes and peeped through the street corners, only to be nabbed by the army officers. However, for those who were pavement-dwellers, curfew hours presented a great predicament. They did not have the warmth of a closed enclosure which they could call home. They were shifted by the police from one footpath to another; the march of the heavy army boots simply terrified them beyond limits (*The Statesman* 13/12/92). The meaning of curfew was different to the elite *bhadralok* as well. They lamented how the bustling city lost its playfulness during the curfew hours, especially during the day (*ABP* 12/12/92).

The situation was different in the localities where violence was felt terribly. In the temporary relief shelters, insecurities and anxieties among the victims were felt even after a week. Yet in those places too, life was becoming routinised. The reporters found how in the camps of Metiabruz, the men were trimming their hair and beard at the local barber's (*ABP* 13/12/92). Indrani Bagchi, a journalist in *The Statesman* (19/12/92), humorously described how the city reacted during the riot, and brought up lesser known anecdotes. For example, she wrote: 'On one of our visits there (Kalighat), we were hard put to believe that it was part of the same riot-torn city we all lived in. The prostitutes were at work; the policemen were peacefully munching *phuchkas* (local street food). The Goddess Kali was in her temple, and all was right with the world!'

Beyond Violence: Liminality, Memory, and the City

Incidents of unexpected solidarity, even at the level of sacrificing oneself to save others, were not altogether absent in moments of violence. Yet, these moments of human solidarity existed alongside immense suffering. Blaming British colonial policies for communal violence only externalized the responsibility. The deeper reality was that communal distrust was endemic, and few were ready to grapple with its embeddedness in postcolonial politics and quotidian life. Hindu refugees, instead of being treated as human beings, were often mobilized as propaganda material: senior officials inspected camps, blessed their inhabitants, and left them to misery. Shunted around like cattle in trucks, uprooted families were made to embody the failures of both states. And always, in these fragile spaces of survival, someone was present to incite violence, knowing that a hungry, uprooted man is most vulnerable to his worst impulses.

On the other hand, the Muslim minority in Calcutta bore the major brunt of direct, as well as systemic violence in post-colonial years. Muslim leaders were kept under surveillance, cast as potential 'fifth columnists,' a label that transformed citizenship into suspects. The commonsensical understanding of peacekeeping – where responsibility for restraint during communal tensions was placed on minority communities – was reflected in both bureaucratic and political responses. Despite limited electoral presence in Bengal, Hindu communal parties were active in the 1950s and 1960s, repeatedly inciting for complete exchange of population with the eastern border. Another recurrent aspect across the riots was the role of the *goondas* – the underclass of the city who had been the major 'fire-tenders' since the late colonial period. Also, the pockets where mobs assembled and rioted were typically Muslim-majority neighbourhoods. This pattern reveals how communal violence in Calcutta was always enmeshed with the city's spatial politics. It particularly targeted the weaker spots, the poorer Muslims, living at the margins, easy to evacuate, under the pretext of orchestrated violence.

Here, the lens of liminality help us see beyond mere causality. The riots unfolded in threshold spaces, such as the stations, refugee camps, curfewed streets, or contested neighbourhoods and mixed domicile – zones that were neither stable nor chaotic, but always in-between. Here, on

every occasion, violence acquired a strange duality. One day, the streets could become perpetual battlefields, on the other, spontaneous peace rallies could be organized in the same place. Similarly, the refugees too embodied liminality, their existence hovered in precarious journeys made to their 'promise-lands', and then between citizenship and statelessness.

The incidents show that each of these elements of prejudice, conflict and violence are inter-related, one leads to the other, and yet these three sociological expressions of inter-community relations have an autonomy of their own. Conflict is transformed into violence, if the sense of relative deprivation is high, legitimacy of the government is low, chances of communication are blocked, sense of insecurity is intense, beliefs and traditions sanction violence, and instruments of violence are readily available (Brass 2011). With repeated violence since 1947, Calcutta, thus, emerged in a new mould – a pot-pourri, where the social space came to be contoured along communal, ethnic and linguistic lines.

Hence, it is important to view violence not as an isolated act, or a series of isolated acts, but rather as a total social phenomenon. The antecedents, the enabling conditions, the cycle of violence that a violent act initiates or reinforces, the forms that it takes, the wide sections of society that it involves, the consequences that it has both near and far – all these must form part of the study of violence. There is violence involved in the unrelenting construction of enemies of the nation, and the concomitant denial of equal rights or respect to the latter. Seen from this perspective, the violence is unceasing, partly unconscious, and often disguised. What remains is not a linear history but a set of threshold moments—times when ordinary life trembled between intimacy and hostility, when neighbours became enemies, and when enemies occasionally turned protectors. Memory, however, is uneven and selective: despite archival evidence of recurring tensions, many residents retrospectively described their own neighbourhoods as having remained peaceful, displacing violence onto adjacent spaces – 'the bomb fell in the next *para*.' Such dissonances reveal how the afterlives of riots were inscribed not only in demographic patterns but also in the moral geography of the city, where certain neighbourhoods came to be imagined as unsafe, inhospitable, or perpetually vulnerable. Attend-

ing to these layered recollections underscores how communal violence reshaped Calcutta's spatial imagination, producing enduring cartographies of fear, distance, and negotiated coexistence.

Liminality thus weaves through the streets of Calcutta. The neighbourhoods are neither zones of safety nor of pure chaos, but in-between spaces where identities and actions are reversible, and undecidable. Violence in Calcutta arose in moments when the city itself became liminal – it was at once a home and a battlefield, a terrain of belonging and exclusion, a site where the promise of secular coexistence collided with the spectre of communal collapse.

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Maja Zadel[1]

Everyday Nationhood and the Border(scape): Slovenian Istria and Italian Media Consumption

ABSTRACT: Thie article presents the intersection of everyday nationhood (Fox and Miller Idriss 2008a) and borderland dynamics through the lens of media consumption in Slovenian Istria, a region bordering Italy and Croatia. Drawing on Fox and Miller-Idriss's (2008) framework of everyday nationhood and borderscapes theory (Brambilla 2014; dell'Agnese and Amilhat Szary 2015; Krichker 2019), the study investigates the lived everyday social reality at the border, especially regarding the evocation of nation while engaging with transborder cultural flows. The research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining a telephone survey (N=715) with in-depth (life-history) interviews (N=30) conducted among the inhabitants of Slovenian Istria. Findings reveal a dual phenomenon: while respondents nationally predominantly identify as Slovenian, they simultaneously acknowledge the region's transcultural character in relation to the proximity of the Italian border and the cultural and social life across it. Italian media, particularly television, widely consumed especially, during the late 20th century, has shaped Istrians sensibilities, providing shared cultural references and interpretive communities among peers. The study demonstrates that media consumption serves as a mundane yet a significant practice through which borderland inhabitants enact, negotiate, and sometimes subvert nationalism's (puristic) frameworks. Despite recognising cultural similarities with Italians, respondents maintain distinct national self-identifications, revealing persistent 'mental borders' alongside lived transculturality. The article contributes to border studies by illustrating how everyday practices – in the case presented, particularly media consumption – reveal the fluidity and complexity of borders as lived spaces, challenging the naturalised equation of 'national territory' with 'national culture' while acknowledging the enduring salience of national frameworks in borderland identities.

Keywords: Everyday Nationhood; Borderscapes; Media Consumption; TV Consumption; Slovenian Istria; National Belonging; Transculturality

POVZETEK: Članek obravnava vsakdanjo nacionalnost (Fox and Miller Idriss 2008a) v povezavi z dinamikami obmejnega območja skozi prizmo medijske potrošnje v slovenski Istri, območju ki meji na Italijo in Hrvaško. Študija, ki se opira na teoretični okvir vsakdanje narodnosti (ang. everyday nationhood) Fox in Miller-Idriss (2008) in mejnosti (angl. borderscapes) (Brambilla 2014; dell›Agnese and Amilhat Szary 2015; Krichker 2019), raziskuje vsakodnevno živeto družbeno realnost na meji, zlasti

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v povezavi z vzpostavljanjem nacije ob srečevanju s (čez)mejnostjo. Raziskava uporablja kombinirani kvalitativno-kvantitativno mešani pristop, ki združuje telefonsko anketo (N=715) s poglobljenimi (življenjskimi) intervjuji (N=30), izvedenimi med prebivalci Slovenske Istre. Ugotovitve razkrivajo dvojni pojav: čeprav se respondenti nacionalno večinoma opredeljujejo kot Slovenci, hkrati prepoznavajo transkulturni značaj območja v povezavi z bližino italijanske meje ter kulturnim in družbenim življenjem prek nje. Italijanski mediji, zlasti televizija, ki so jih spremljali predvsem konec 20. stoletja, so oblikovali posebne občutke in dovzetnost, saj so zagotavljali skupne kulturne reference in interpretativne skupnosti med vrstniki. Študija dokazuje, da medijska potrošnja služi kot vsakdanja, vendar pomembna praksa, s katero prebivalci obmejnega območja udejanjajo, pogajajo in včasih tudi subvertirajo (puristične) okvire nacionalizma. Kljub prepoznavanju kulturnih podobnosti z Italijani anketirani ohranjajo jasne razmejitve nacionalne samoidentifikacije, kar razkriva trdovratne »mentalne meje« v živeti transkulturnosti. Članek prispeva k študijam mejnosti s ponazoritvijo, kako vsakdanje prakse – v predstavljenem primeru zlasti medijska potrošnja – razkrivajo fluidnost in kompleksnost meja kot živih prostorov, s čimer izzivajo naturalizirano enačenje »nacionalnega ozemlja« z »nacionalno kulturo«, hkrati pa prikazujejo, kakšno »(vz)trajno« vlogo imajo nacionalni okviri v obmejnih identifikacijah.

Ključne besede: vsakdanja narodnost, mejni prostori, medijska potrošnja, gledanje televizije, Slovenska Istra, nacionalna pripadnost, transkulturnost

Introduction[2]

Borders are part of our everyday lives – whether we live near a (national) border or not. However, living 'at the fringes' of the nation, the border becomes engrained in people's everyday experiences. It presents a multilayered and complex process that encompass dealing with the dominant national discourse(s) that collide with people's (trans)borders encounters. These processes produce specific representations, narrations, imaginations, interpretations, and cultural negotiations related to the border and the lived social life in its vicinity (Brambilla 2014, 28; dell'Agnese and Amilhat Szary 2015, 7–8; Krichker 2019, 1226, 1233).

Therefore, even if borders are primarily thought of as barriers to national culture and belonging, the socio-cultural reality of borderland inhabitants is more complex. In relation to the vibrant social reality of the borderlands, the article will attempt to apply Fox and Miller Idriss's (2008a) concept of *everyday nationhood*. Everyday nationhood highlights that the nation is not just a top-down, elite project, but is enacted and embodied in mundane practices in everyday life of ordinary people. It

2 This article is published with a financial support of the Slovenian Re-search and Innovation Agency program Liminal Spaces: Areas of Cultural and Societal Cohabitation in the Age of Risk and Vulnerability (No P6-0279).

refers to the active, routine, and even unreflective ways people (re)produce, negotiate, and challenge the nation in their lives. Fox and Miller Idriss (2008a) analytically distinguish four modalities of how everyday nationhood is enacted, namely talking, choosing, performing, and consuming the nation. Following on Fox and Miller Idriss's (2008a) quest, the article applies everyday nationhood to the borderland of Slovenian Istria and their inhabitant's narrations and (re)interpretations of the nation and national belonging, the border and practices and products coming beyond the border and their salience in people's everyday life. How does the nation and the border become meaningful idioms in Istrians' everyday life, and how? How does the border and the life beyond the border become significant in peoples' lives? Does media consumption play a role – and how? The article will with the focus on Italian and Slovenian media consumption and Istrians' interpretations in reproducing, negotiating, and subverting the nation in relation to their experience in living near the Italian border. Italian media, especially television, were in the past, from in the second half of the 20th century, but more prominently at the turn of the century, consumed almost equivalently as Slovenian (Zadel 2020). And media consumption is not just a trivial mundane activity, but constitutes imaginaries and offers shared cultural experience that stems from media content and meaning-making in their consumption and re-creative uses (Gillespie 1995), which are in turn important for building a sense of community.

Theoretical Framework

The Constructivists Turn to the 'Everyday' in Border Studies

Towards the end of the 20th century, the dominant understanding and study of borders changed. The long-standing tradition, the one based on the Westphalian tradition, which conceived borders as territorial delineation of the state's sovereignty, where borders were understood as static lines on the maps (with the exception of major shifts of power, such as those brought about by wars), was challenged by contemporary processes, which firstly accentuated the feeling of 'debordering'. Namely, the late 20th and early 21st centuries witnessed processes of accelerated

globalisation, transnational flows and major geopolitical shifts – such as the Fall of the Berlin Wall and of the Iron curtain, and the perceived borderlessness due to the expansion of the European Union and the implementation of the Schengen Area (Peña 2021; Jurić Pahor 2003) – which was later again subjected to restrictions and border securitisation, as for example during Covid-19 lockdowns and the fear of unwanted migrations, to name just a few recent examples. These shifts in border management already speak of dynamic and contested processes challenging the view of borders as 'natural', static, given and objective features. The territoriality approach focuses almost exclusively on the national and international scales, privileging the state as the primary actor – and obscuring the agency of individuals and communities in the everyday (re) production of border spaces.

The traditional, 'Westphalian' framework coincided with the prevailing political principle of nationalism, which presupposes the correspondence of political and cultural unity, or rather, represents a theory of political legitimacy that presupposes or strives to match ethnic and political boundaries (Gellner 2008; see also Fox and Miller Idriss 2008a; Smith 1995; Welsch 1999. Consequently, we have learnt to think within its exclusionary frameworks, which are based on an understanding of culture as ethicised, externally bounded, and internally homogeneous (Welsch 1999). Culture (in the socio-anthropological term) is often defined precisely as ethnic, tribal or national culture; it is understood as the binding agent and essential substance of a particular people or nation, which distinguishes it from the cultures of other peoples or nations (Ní Éigeartaigh and Berg 2010). Culture is thus confined to a specific group bounded by group's borders, where the border contains the 'insurmountable cultural differences' of each group (Welsch 1999, 2001; Barth 1998; Šumi 2000; Kraidy 2005; Berg and Ní Éigeartaigh 2010). The cultures, in this understanding, are internally homogeneous on one hand, and bounded from others on the other (Welsch 1999, 2001).

Nevertheless, as Peña (2021) notes, the understanding of congruency of political and cultural unit presents a model of the world correctly only if 'the container does not leak' (Peña 2021, 774; see also Berg 2011). But already in 1990s, Wolfgang Welsch (among others) stressed that we have

learned to think in exclusionary terms and to widely understand the notion of culture as bordered ethnic(ised) or national(ised) – which clashed with the lived reality of ordinary people. The contemporary realities have made such leaks the norm rather than the exception – if it was ever the case, especially in border regions (Berg 2011; Misiejuk 2011; Billig 1995).

The lived reality of cultures 'leaking' across national borders exposed the inadequacy of viewing borders merely as fixed territorial limits. Consequently, the territoriality paradigm and its limitations prompted a significant conceptual shift in border studies as well, often referred to as the 'processual shift.' As Chiara Brambilla (2014) explains, this shift moved the focus from the border as a noun – a static line – to *bordering* as a verb – an active, social process. This transition has been catalysed by events that have demonstrated the fluidity of political boundaries. The integration of the European Union, for instance, offered an eloquent example of de-bordering, where internal EU borders were softened to facilitate the flow of people and goods, while external borders were simultaneously reinforced (Peña, 2021). This revealed that borders are not simply disappearing but are being redefined and relocated. The bordering perspective posits that borders are not pre-given entities but are continually enacted through socio-cultural and discursive practices. Epistemologically, the border becomes 'an active verb […] and a space of struggle where value rationality, meaning, symbols, and action shape our knowledge and spatial practices' (Peña 2021, 780). This perspective began to incorporate agency, recognising that borders are not only imposed from above by states, but are also negotiated, subverted, and transgressed by those who cross or live near them.

Furthermore, the epistemic and ontological turn in studying borders is evident also in a recent and critically engaged development in border studies, namely the concept of *borderscapes*. Borderscapes attempt to capture the immense complexity, fluidity, and multidimensionality of contemporary borders. It is a rejection of the idea of reality being a fixed border, but rather a conception of borders as something that is in a constant state of 'becoming'. Borderscapes as a concept 'brings the vitality of borders to our attention, revealing that the border is by no means a static line, but a mobile and relational space' (Brambilla 2014, 22). Borders are therefore not only set – or set once and for all – but also, and more importantly, lived.

This can be observed in the need for mechanisms to maintain the borders, which, in turn, is reflected in the everyday practices and narratives of the inhabitants of borderlands (Paasi 1999; Sedmak 2009; Prokkola 2009; Pušnik 2011; Zadel 2020). Borderlands demark an area of national periphery, yet, according to Anssi Paasi (1999), they are permeated with symbols of nationality that originate from the very heart of the nation.

However, a borderscape is also 'an area, shaped and reshaped by transnational flows, that goes beyond the modernist idea of clear-cut national territories' (dell'Agnese and Amilhat Szary 2015, 6). Borderscapes present a space where multiple narratives, experiences, and power dynamics intersect and clash. As Maruša Pušnik highlights, 'the ideological production of national identities is most easily observed at the margins of society or at fringes of dominant discourses, where they meet and collide with other dominant discourses' (Pušnik 2011, 12). Borderscapes thus make visible the hidden and silenced stories that are often erased by an almost omnipotent national ideology, as identities that differ from the pure national prototype are understood as 'impossible, immoral, or treasonous' (Verdery 1996; Pušnik 2011). Borderscapes give voices to the agencies of the borderlanders.

Nevertheless, if borderlands are areas of contact between at least two national discourses, which means they consequently also present themselves as a contact between two 'national' cultures,[3] they are areas of formation and consolidation of specific social identifications and belonging, of the lived experiences of borderland inhabitants with the 'nation' and with what 'lies beyond its border'. The border, reinforced by national ideology, becomes engrained in peoples' lives. Eeva Prokkola points out the importance of distinguishing between cultural borders and identity borders: national borders are not only a function of state policy, but 'they shape specific social relations and mythical narratives, due to which the border becomes a marker of identity' (Prokkola 2009, 22). As

3 The phrase 'national culture' is in quotation marks because following transculturation and borderscape theories, we do not live in a word with distinct and delineated 'national cultures' as would follow from the simplified and prevailing jigsaw puzzle world paradigm in which people predominately understand national cultures as distinct one from another. However, as Berg (2011) notes, 'not only in popular scientific discourses, people deal with "cultures" as if they are congruent with states/countries' (Berg 2011, 7).

I have pointed out elsewhere (Zadel 2020), it is important to distinguish between different aspects of identity. If Prokkola marks the distinction between identity and culture, I argue for a distinction between 'national' and 'cultural' identifications. In this sense, I consider culture, which is primarily understood within the frame of nationalism, e.i. a 'national culture' as contraposed to transcultural practices – and both presents as both important identity markers. Consequently, this would allow for an analytical distinction between national identification and cultural identification beyond national identification. People express both of them discursively and through their everyday cultural practices. The 'national' and the 'lived' 'cultural' are intrinsically related, sustaining one another, nevertheless, examined in accordance with the 'border-crossing' practices, they can represent different phenomena (see Zadel 2020).

Everyday Nationhood as an Analytical Framework for Researching Borderscapes

Resonating with the borderscape perspective – borders as 'lived' spaces and in a constant state of 'becoming' – studying nationalism in borderlands calls for a theoretical and methodological approach rooted in 'mundane' and the 'ordinary', since the macro-processes of globalization, bordering, and national ideology are ultimately grounded in the micro-practices of daily life. Borderlands are areas where macro-structures of the nation and the permeability of borders are mirrored in local contexts and the agency of individuals – the analysis of *bordering* must connect with the analysis of *belonging* and *identifications*. In order to systematically examine *how* people *belong* – to the nation, borderland, local community, how they enact, describe, embody, and even subvert the nation in their mundane routines – we turn to the framework of 'everyday nationhood' presented by Jon Fox and Cynthia Miller-Idriss (2008a). Their concept provides the framework for exploring discourses and practises with which individuals – whether in borderlands or in the heart of the nation – navigate, reproduce, or oppose the conception of the nation in their lives, presenting a methodological approach that makes the abstract nation a tangible part of our daily life.

As Fox and Miller Idriss (2008a) point out, the main goal of nationalism is to make a nation, which in turn means to make people national. However,

people are 'made national' by different state and nation-making processes the states employ in order to convey a sense of nationhood among the general, non-elite populations and/or are a consequence of specific historic circumstances: capitalism, industrialisation and centralised nationalised school systems based on national 'high' culture (Gellner 2008; Schlesinger 1987), censuses (Verdery 1990; 1996; Bauman (2013), decline of sacred authority and print capitalism (Anderson 2003). Even though states have a lot of power at their disposal, nationalism and the quest to 'make people national', cannot be successful without the (active) role of 'ordinary people':[4] 'The nation [...] is not simply the product of macro-structural forces; it is simultaneously the practical accomplishment of ordinary people engaging in routine activities' (Fox and Miller Idriss 2008a, 537). Fox and Miller Idriss (2008a, 537) follow Hobsbawm quest to analyse nationalism also from below to fully understand it: ordinary people must be included in the research on nationalism, as Hobsbawm puts it, as it is otherwise impossible to analyse the essence of national belonging and identifications and draw conclusions just from our assumptions (Hobsbawm 2007). In studying nationalism, we must acknowledge the mundane and everyday aspects of people's social lives: even though 'nationalism is "... constructed essentially from above, [it] ... cannot be understood unless also analysed from below, that is in terms of the assumptions, hopes, needs, longings and interests of ordinary people, which are not necessarily national and still less nationalist."' (Hobsbawm in Fox and Miller Idriss 2008a, 537). Fox and Miller-Idriss propose that the nation is banally 'accomplished', to borrow Billig's (1995) expression, through different ways of incorporating and giving meaning to the nation in everyday life.

For the purpose of this article, we'll follow the definition of 'making people national' as a process of identification and belonging, as well as the consequences, which are shown in the people's belief in the global order of nation-states as natural phenomena, where, consequently, a part of our

4 Smith criticised the Fox and Miller Idriss's notion of 'everyday nationhood' also on the ground of "undifferentiated 'ordinary people'" (2008, 565). Acknowledging this shortage, they responded by stressing their modest goal of drawing the 'attention to the paucity of research in the field of nationalism on the non-elite side' (Fox and Miller Idriss 2008b, 575).

social lives is defined in national terms, i.e. having a national identity understood as a natural and essential phenomena by the individuals themselves. To put it differently, if people do not identify in national terms, or oppose them, they have not been made national.

Since nationalism operates at borders as well, people 'are made national' also in borderlands. But borderlands present specific social realities: people are supposed to have a national identity, but at the same time they are clashing with national (and cultural) identities across the national border (Pušnik 2011; Šumi 2000). Nationalism assumes nations are culturally homogeneous, as well as bounded and delineated, one could say, protected from external cultural influences by the national border. But how do people feel, understand and act on the fringes of the nation, clashing with the border, or the nations and their presumed delineated cultures beyond borders? This brings us to the research questions: How are the tensions between the idea of nations as 'containers' and the life at a porous border lived and explained by ordinary people? Does the border and the reality beyond the border become significant in peoples' lives – and if, how?

Making People National

Fox and Miller Idriss's (2008a) propose studying everyday nationhood through employing four perspectives; ordinary people bring the nation to life by 1.) talking the nation; 2.) choosing the nation; 3.) performing the nation; and 4.) consuming the nation. ***Talking the nation*** is directing the attention to 'talking about the nation', i.e. to what people say about the nation, the terms they use, what it means to them, etc. However, this presents a research-led inquiry. Then again, the second part, 'talking with the nation', focuses on the spontaneous conversations that occur on the topic of the nation (if at all) (ibid., 538–540), which is focused on occurrences without the researcher and are therefore difficult to capture in research.

Performing the nation encompasses the ritual performances of everyday life. It focuses on the commemorations, ceremonies, as well as sport events and similar performances. Fox and Miller Idriss (2008a) argue that in these cases 'people are not just consumers of national meaning', but 'they are simultaneously their contingent producers' (ibid., 546).

Choosing the nation (making national choices and making choices national) centres the choices people make in regard to different options they have when our options are 'defined in national terms' (ibid., 542): from sending a child to a minority language school or kindergarten to marriage partners and friends. The examples listed may be dismissed as too mundane or as not actual choices or not contributing to a national belonging. As Fox and Miller Idriss explain, even though these choices are 'not necessarily national, can structure the trajectories of future choices in ways that reinforce nationhood as a salient idiom of belonging' (ibid.). Moreover, they emphasise that the 'nationally marked institutions' don't always 'make nationhood experimentally salient' (ibid., 543). Moreover, the act of choosing may be so engrained in our naturalised understanding of nationally-marked choices as, for example, choosing a male or female toilet – 'unreflective' and 'automatic' (ibid.). Nevertheless, it is a choice. And even more important is the fact of not reflecting on the choices means nationalism is successful in convincing us that it was not a choice, consequently naturalising a world of nations and national belongings.

Consuming the nation focuses on the choices people make – but as consumers. It stresses that people are not just uncritical consumers of the nation, but also 'creative producers' of the nation 'through everyday acts of consumption' (ibid., 550), which can also be linked to and reinforced by discursive acts. What does it mean to eat nationally marked food or watch nationally marked television content? Consuming the nation encompasses all products that are national or nationally consumed: media, school curricula, museums, food, music, etc. (ibid., 550–551). Food may be one of the aspects that builds an especially strong relationship with nationalism, which is even more compelling in contrast to curricula or museums, which are 'elite-curated', while food is ingrained in the very heart of everyday life – not to foster an essentialist framework, however, this is how people perceive and talk[5] about it (Ichijo, Johannes and Ranta 2019). Accordingly, food provides in our popular discourses the appeal to 'create

5 Fox and Miller Idriss presented four different modes of everyday nationhood function, which are analytical, but, of course, in everyday life they are interlinked and intermingle: we can talk about and argument on performing the nation, choosing national products or consuming it, for example.

cultural boundaries and distinctions, to differentiate through the creation of a culinary "self" and "other"' (ibid., 2) and thus provides 'a description of what is being considered as national' (ibid., 3).

Similarly, media consumption is widely understood as a leisure activity and consequently, in popular discourses, it is hardly linked to nationhood and nationalism. However, it is especially through such mundane practices that national sensitivities and belonging are imagined, re-created and negotiated. Media consumption and its use of content in everyday life thus becomes an important outlet in constructing national belonging (Anderson 2003; Billig 1995; Pušnik 2011; Ederson 2002; Skey 2011; Morley and Robins 2002; Gillespie 1995; Zadel 2020). Following Anderson's (2003) and Morley and Robins' (2002) insights, participating in a 'ritual', knowing that a lot of others – peers, co-nationals, etc. – are also participating in it, forms the basis for a shared experience (Morley and Robins 1995, 132), with the media providing shared content for the production of new shared meanings. Media, as well as other forms of consumption, form the basis for an imagined community (Anderson 2003; Vogrinec 2003). As Marie Gillespie stressed, (young) people talk about media content, which is an important recreational part of their interactions. A shared set of content, rituals, references, and meanings is important for building a sense of community, be it geographical, generational, ethnic/national, transcultural or other. In relation to national identifications, as Fox and Miller Idriss (2008a) stress, consuming national artefact may have different meanings for people, but it can articulate or reinforce their nationhood, national pride and belonging, as well as ways in which they are expressed. Moreover, '[c]onsumption constitutes, reinforces and communicates social membership: it makes "visible and stable the categories of culture"' (Douglas and Isherwood 1996 in Fox and Miller Idriss 2008a, 550).

Even though Fox and Miller Idriss' methodological suggestion of everyday nationhood stresses examples of minority choices and consumption, the nation and culture as a lived experience of performance, choices, consumption and discourse are important features of people's everyday lives even in borderlands. Studying nationhood on the margins of society, i.e. at the national borders, may be interesting as, on the one hand, as Pušnik (2011, 12) stresses, the ideological production of national identities is easiest to

find on the 'fringes of dominant discourses, where they meet and clash with other dominant discourses', while on the other hand, it may reveal specific aspects of belonging and identifications, as identities that differ from the pure national prototype are understood as 'impossible, immoral, or treasonous' (Verdery 1996; Pušnik 2011). Since the nation is constantly (re)produced and negotiated through people's mundane practices, Fox and Miller Idriss (2008a) offer a framework for reimagining borders not as distant peripheries, but as concentrated sites of everyday national performance and the possible clashes with the 'impossible' transcultural practices. In the following parts, the research conducted in the borderland of Slovenian Istria will present the responses of its inhabitants in relation to their understanding and relationship to the Slovenianness and Italianness across the border.

Methodology

The case study presented below was conducted as part of PhD research (Zadel 2022), carried out in Slovenian Istria, a border area in Southwest Slovenia that is bordering two nation-states: Italy on the Northwest and Croatia on the South. The study focused on national identifications and media consumption, especially in relation to Italian and Slovenian media among the inhabitants of Slovenian Istria, employing a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods.

First, a telephone survey was conducted in 2014 with a total of 715 respondents. The telephone survey used a stratified random sampling from the telephone directory, including people with a telephone number publicly available, which allowed for generalisations to the entire population of Slovenian Istria, and consequently the analysis of statistically significant correlations. It should be noted that this means the research included individuals from the dominant Slovenian population (85.4%), the 'autochthonous' Italian minority with special rights guaranteed by the Slovenian Constitution (1.4%) and other minorities, predominantly from the republics of the former Yugoslavia; Croatian (2.9%), Serbian (2.5%), Bosnian (1.1%), etc. The overall gender breakdown of the sample was as follows: 39.9% of male and 61.1% of female respondents. The age breakdown was: 7.3 % between the age of 15 and 25 years (first age group), 12.6 % between 26 and 36 years (second age group), 14.8% between 37 and 38 years (third

age group), 19.9% between 48 and 58 years (fourth age group) and 45.2% older than 58 years (fifth age group).

Secondly, participants in the telephone survey were asked if they also want to participate in the second part of the research, i.e. the interviews. From the people who were willing to participate, a selection was made according to age groups and gender, and according to the diverse Italian and Slovenian media consumption and national identification. The interviews partly used the life histories approach. They were conducted in 2015 with a total of 30 respondents (27 were collected by telephone survey, while three from the youngest groups were obtained otherwise). There were 18 female and 12 male interviewees. There were six interviewees in the first, second and third age group, five in the fourth age group, and seven in the fifth age group. The purpose of the life-stories type interviews was to gain a more complete and detailed insight into the portrayal of feelings and sensibilities, meaning-making, habits and motivations of the informants. The quotes from the interviews are thus especially useful for illustrating the discursive 'reasoning' as well as consumption and choices that constitute the everyday lives of inhabitants.

Consuming the National and Transborder Media in Slovenian Istria

The border becomes not just a physical infrastructure, but a discursive reality that is constantly 'talked into being' by those who live nearby. There are everyday discourses that may reinforce the salience of the border on the one hand and transcultural activities on the other. In Slovenian Istria, Mateja Sedmak (2009) noted that residents emphasised that their cultural practices were more similar to those of Italians across the border than to those of Slovenians from the central part of the country. On the other hand, Ana Kralj and Tanja Rener (2010) nevertheless stressed that inhabitants of Slovenian Istria see a marked distinction between Slovenians and Italians – 'mental' boundaries that could be understood in the context of 'insurmountable, fundamental differences', to use Barth's (1969) words, remain.

One of the insights of the case study reveals the dual phenomena, namely the prominent discursive and lived transculturality of Istria, alongside

the predominantly (mono)national self-identifications. The majority of respondents primarily identified as Slovenians, which was especially visible in the more elaborate responses in interviews. The connection to the state was mentioned in some cases:

I am Slovenian. Born in Slovenia and all. (Interviewee 6, f, 37 years)

Some also expressed their regional identification, but mainly in conjunction with emphasising that they are also proud Slovenians.

Well, I like to identify myself as a coming from the Litoral [laughing]. I don't know, I still think that we are very different from other Slovenians, which does not mean that I am not happy to be Slovenian. I am proud to be Slovenian. And I like my country and I'm happy to live here. […] I mean, there are bad and good qualities, but I like that we border Italy, that we're quite open, that... that we also have these Italian things. (Interviewee 18, f, 25 years)

While just a few, there were interviewees who stressed their transculturality and social construction of nationhood:

Hehe. I am Slovenian. A Contaminated Slovenian.

Contaminated with what?
With croationess and Italian[ess]... let's say contaminated by the neighbours. With much pleasure. Of course I can't deny my blood, DNA, but I do not give meaning to that … (Interviewee 8, f, 63 years)

The survey results reveal a strong recognition of Istria as a transcultural space. Using a five-point Likert scale, respondents assessed five statements on bordering and transcultural practices. A significant majority (73.9%) believe that proximity to the border has been shaping the local culture for centuries, and 62.8% agree that inhabitants have adopted specific characteristics from Italians. Notably, half of the respondents (strongly) agree that the lifestyle and mentality of Slovenians from Slovenian Istria align more closely with Italians than with Slovenians from mainland Slovenia. Despite this, nearly two-thirds (strongly) agree that attachment to the national milieu persists despite cross-border cultural flows.

Table 1: Transculturality in Slovenian Istria (responses in %)

	Living near the border has been changing the culture of the inhabitants for centuries	We are still tied to the Slovenian national milieu, even though we are watching (and following) the mass media from different cultural milieus	People living near the Italian border have some characteristics that they adopted from the Italians	Slovenian from Slovenian Istria are, according to their lifestyle and mentality, more similar to Italians than to Slovenians from main Slovenia	My childhood and youth would be very different without Italian TV programmes
Strongly disagree	3.5	1.8	4.9	8.4	26.8
Disagree	5.5	4.6	6.4	6.6	11.3
Neither agree nor disagree	15.8	26.7	26.0	31.3	17.5
Agree	31.3	33.2	35.8	30.4	19.1
Strongly agree	42.6	30.7	27.0	23.3	25.4
No answer	1.4	3.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

As illustrated by Fox and Miller Idriss's *Everyday Nationhood*, the salience of the nation, and, by extension, of the border is represented in different modalities, and consuming the nation through media is notable. Table 2 presents the survey results regarding media consumption among the inhabitants of the Slovenian Istria. The majority of respondents consume primarily Slovenian media (77,5% Newspaper, 50,5% Magazines, 79,9% Radio and 53,5% TV), but there is still a significant proportion of respondents who consume predominantly Italian media, especially Italian TV (14,6%) or equally frequent Slovenian and Italian TV (20,8%). The responses on respondents past consumption reveals the popularity of Italian media in the past. The consumption of television content is particularly notable, as consumption at the turn of the century was almost evenly divided between Slovenian and Italian television: 36,3% watched predominantly Slovenian television, 34,3% watched predominantly Italian television, and 23,6% watched both equally.

Table 2: Media consumption in Slovenian Istria (responses in %)

Type of media		Year	
		2014 (in %)	Appr. in 1999 (in %)
NEWSPAPERS	Slovenian	77,5	63,6
	Italian	1,6	3,2
	Equally frequent Slo&Ita	7,7	10,4
	Others	1,7	2,0
	I do not read newspapers	11,5	17,7
	No answer	0,0	3,0
MAGAZINES	Slovenian	50,5	55,8
	Italian	4,9	6,1
	Equally frequent Slo&Ita	6,0	12,0
	Others	3,0	2,4
	I do not read magazines	35,7	21,2
	No answer	0,0	2,5
RADIO	Slovenian	79,9	62,9
	Italian	3,4	7,1
	Equally frequent Slo&Ita	8,9	14,8
	Others	0,7	2,1
	I do not listen to radio	7,1	9,9
	No answer	0,0	3,2
TV	Slovenian	53,5	36,6
	Italian	14,6	34,3
	Equally frequent Slo&Ita	20,8	23,6
	Others	6,8	2,5
	I do not watch TV	3,6	1,1
	No answer	0,8	1,7

For a more detailed view, the respondents were asked to choose which television programme, film or series, one of Slovenian or Italian production, they would watch if they were broadcast at the same time.[6] Since unfamiliarity with both Slovenian and Italian programmes indicate a lack of interest in the genre, we excluded those who were unfamiliar with both programmes from the analysis. This leaves only those who chose either the first or the second

6 Since familiarity with the content significantly influences the choice, the answers 'I am not familiar with [the Slovenian production]' and 'I am not familiar with [the Italian production]' were also offered. The prerequisite for liking a programme is, first and foremost, familiarity with it (see Luthar 2012; Luthar and Kurdija 2011). Watching media content is an activity based on choosing what content to watch, but this is conditioned by emotional preferences – in other words, we choose what we like.

option, and those who are unfamiliar with only one of the options offered.

If the Slovenian and Italian programmes[7] included in the survey were broadcast at the same time, respondents would in most cases choose Slovenian programmes,[8] especially in the comedy series genre (*Naša mala klinika*: 76.8%), comedy sketch shows (*As ti tud not padu*: 76.4%), informative talk shows on current topics (Tarča: 75.8%) and talk and variety shows (*Na zdravje*: 71.3%). A larger proportion of respondents from Slovenian Istria would choose Italian programmes in the music competition shows (*Sanremo*: 55.8%) and hidden camera entertainment programmes (*Scherzi a parte*: 55%). Then again, in more than half of the cases, respondents would prefer to watch a Slovenian feature film, both older (*To so gadi*: 52.1%) and more contemporary (*V leru*: 50.9%).[9] Respondents were fairly evenly divided in their choice between the Slovenian and Italian reality shows *Big Brother*, with slightly more of them opting for the Italian *Grande Fratello* (48.2%) than the Slovenian version (45.2%).

Although most would prefer to watch a Slovenian programme, the fact that least one-fifth of respondents[10] would prefer to choose an Italian programme, film or series, is nevertheless quite telling. The Italian classic *Fanztozzi* was the first choice for almost half of the respondents, namely 45.2%. Almost half of the respondents, inhabitants of Slovenian Istria, are thus socialised in the same mediascape and feel familiar in the Italian popular culture. The choices, which were made out of convenience, as Italian programmes were dubbed while Slovenian subtitled, have more

7 The programmes in pairs were: 1.) *Big Brother* vs. *Grande fratello*, 2.) *Tarča* vs. *Porta a porta*, 3.) *Ema* vs. *Sanremo*, 4.) *To so gadi* vs. *Fantozzi*, 5.) *Skrita kamera* (s Francijem Kekom) vs. *Scherzi a parte*, 6. *Na zdravje* vs. *Uomini e donne*, 7.) *A si ti tud not padu* vs. *the Mai dire …* franchise, 8.) *V leru* vs. *Tre uomini e una gamba*, 9.) *Naša mala klinika* vs. *Casa Vianello*.

8 Corresponding to Morley and Robins' finding that if 'viewers [in Europe, author's note] have an alternative comparable entertainment offer in their own language, American programmes come second' (Morley and Robins 2002, 63).

9 The Italian programme is therefore the first choice more often for the minority of respondents, however, a lot of them have quite considerable percentage: *Fantozzi* (45.2 %), *Tre uomini e una gamba* (39.6 %), *Uomini e Donne di Maria de Filippi* (23.8 %) and *Porta a Porta* (20.5 %).

10 With the exception of the *Mai dire …* franchise, which is an age-specific genre and was chosen in 16.7 % of cases.

programmes and better quality as rated by the respondents,[11] influenced the socialisation process, the structure of feelings and imaginaries, impacted future experiences. One of the respondents explains that the Italian television content she watched as a child impacted her, giving her reference points with her peers in Istria:

> *We have this topic of conversation [cartoons that were broadcast on Italian channels, author's note], which can bring us together, and as I told you earlier, right, my future husband [current partner, author's note], and I, when we first met, we talked about these cartoons […], and that connects us. Because we have this common denominator in our childhood, you know.* (Interviewee 7, f, 33 years old)

Furthermore, even though the *Mai dire …* franchise was chosen only in 16.7% of cases, there is a statistically significant difference depending on the age of the respondents (sig.=0.001): among respondents who would rather watch the *Mai dire …* franchise, there are more people under 40 years of age (60.9%) than those over 40 years of age (39.1%), while among those who would choose *As ti tud not padu*, the ratio is reversed (41.1% aged up to 40 and 58.9% older than 40 would prefer to watch the Slovenian programme).

Thus, as already evident from Table 1, while the majority of respondents acknowledge the transcultural character of the region and perceive its inhabitants as more transcultural than their mainland co-nationals, they generally do not attribute a significant role to watching Italian television in childhood and adolescence. But, as further findings suggest, there was a significant difference between younger and older generations. The Italian TV programmes played a far more important (and statistically significant) role with the younger generations, as they were the ones who grew up with the Italian media contents, as in their childhood and youth, the Italian TV programmes became widely accessible and popular in Slovenian Istria. Many younger generations' informants thus stated they feel the

11 A good third (36.8%) believed that Slovenian TV programmes are worse than Italian ones, and only 16.7% believe that Slovenian programmes are better. They rate Slovenian programmes even worse in the past: 61% believe that 15 years ago they were worse than Italian programmes, and only 8.5 % believe that they were better (Zadel 2020, 2022).

Italian popular culture close to them, in some aspects even more so than Slovenian popular culture.

Similarly, Marie Gillespie (1995) argues that media content becomes part of the everyday lives of media consumers, and that television thus enabled a shared cultural experience (ibid., 58). Moreover, talking about media content, at the time of the research it was primarily television, is marked by a special form of pleasure; in addition to the pleasure of exchanging opinions with friends and others (ibid., 144), this could also include the pleasure of creating and maintaining (imaginary) communities and social networks. As Gillespie writes: 'Television discourse, although often understood as esoteric and trivial, is an important form of self-narrative and an extraordinary collective resource through which we negotiate identities' (ibid., 205). This was mirrored in some interviews:

> *Those legendary Italian films, like Fantozzi. […] Bud Spencer, we all watched anyway and we used those jokes among our peers […] Even now, we joke about Bad Spencer … with colleagues who are our peers. Or even Fantozzi, for example, these jokes remain, let's say from childhood, from youth, right.* (Interviewee 23, m, 33 years old)

As mentioned by younger informants, through 'recycling' or 're-creative consumption,' to borrow Gillespie's (1995) term, the content from Italian TV programmes has become part of their everyday life, 'slang' of individual groups of friends. As a 25-year-old interviewee says, this will probably stay with them for life:

> *I mean, my friends who watched it, every time we see each other, 'Ci sei, ce la fai?'*[12] *I mean, those are memories that will stay with me for the rest of my life. Zelig… and Mai [dire]…* (Interviewee 18, 25 years old)

In the everyday practices of informants, we also observe the intersection of cultural elements and content and the ways in which these have marked their experiences. Content from Italian media enabled some (especially

12 Literal translation: 'Are you there? Can you make it?', but the meaning corresponds to 'Do you understand?' This is from a famous sketch by Pino Campagna on the Italian comedy TV show *Zelig*, where he refers to interacting with his daughter and her slang.

younger) informants to form an 'imagined community,' to borrow Anderson's (2003) term, or 'interpretive communities,' to use Stanley Fish's (2012) term: following the Italian media, which was so widespread in a certain historical period, was a ritual in which individuals participated, knowing that most of their peers were also participating, which became the basis of a shared experience (Morley and Robins 1995, 132), with the media providing shared content for the creation of new shared meanings. As Marie Gillespie (1995) has also noted, young people – and probably others as well – talk about media content, which is an important recreational part of their interactions. Thus, popular culture, which manifests itself in everyday practices, represents the feelings of individuals and a part of their belonging. The border and the media beyond it played an important role in people's everyday belonging in Slovenian Istria. A belonging marked by the Italian border, which at the same time constructed an internal, invisible border within the nation: marking Istrians as 'insurmountably different' (Barth 1998; Welsch 1999, 2001; Šumi 2000) from the rest of Slovenians.

If the Italian TV content was rated as being of better quality than Slovenian content, especially in the past, as supported by the survey and the interviewees alike, there was a visible generational divide: the main audience was the generation younger than 40 years old, with some exceptions. This is also due to the fact that the range of children's and other programmes was more diverse, and films and series were (better) dubbed and not subtitled, as informants state. However, dubbing was still not the only advantage. the informants also point out the stylistic differences in television production and show hosting, which they found (and still find) more appealing than on Slovenian TV stations, pointing to a feeling of humorous and characterial proximity with the mediascape content from across the border.

We absolutely gave priority to the Italian media. Why? Because they were more dynamic, more, I would say, modern. (Interviewee 8, f, 63 years old)

What was interesting to you about this Italian manner?

I mean, let's say, this easygoingness that I still feel, unlike the Slovenian TV program, right. We [Slovenians, author's note] are very static. We are very similar to the Germans, right. Here we sit nicely, politely … while Italian television is,

I don't know, they are spontaneous, just the way they are. There is no, there is no rigidity, not in that program. […] this is probably the temperament and characteristic of the Italian viewer. Or: Italians are probably different from Slovenians, right. In other words, let's say that the people from Litoral [including Istria, author's note] are a little more different than central Slovenia, right. So, this matter is very close to us and Italian television. Also, the manner. (Interviewee 9, f, 48 years old)

It's really hard to generalise like that because of course we're a little more open here, right, compared to the rest of Slovenia, and that brings us a little closer to the Italians, no. […] So, I don't know, for sure there is an influence [from Italy author's note]. (Interviewee 2, m, 30 years old)

Illustrations from interviews on the cases of Italian and Slovenian media consumption show that the border is not merely a static line dividing two nation-states. It is a lived reality, which is better thought of as a strip of land along the border, an area of transborder cultural (co-)influence. The border presents a line between two nations, de-marking state sovereignty, but this does not mean that the border separates cultures as a lived way of life – no matter how hard we try to differentiate between 'national cultures'. The border, and what lies beyond it, becomes part of the lives of borderlands' inhabitants. It becomes ingrained in peoples' imaginaries, sensitivities, forming a structure of feeling, to borrow Williams's (1997) term. Slovenian Istria is thus congruent with borderscapes aspects as the dominant national discourses collide with people's transborder encounters, producing specific narrations, interpretations, and cultural negotiations related to the border and the lived social life in its vicinity (Brambilla 2014, 28; dell'Agnese and Amilhat Szary 2015, 7–8; Krichker 2019, 1226, 1233). The cases presented align with the complexity and fluidity (Brambilla 2014; dell'Agnese and Amilhat Szary 2015), questioning the 'traditional', binary system of the jigsaw puzzle world (Peña 2021). Nevertheless, we can agree with Billig (1995): the national framework indeed still matters. the national identity is 'far from being a thing of the past' but rather a 'persistent and adaptable construction' that coexists with supranational bodies like the European Union, and despite the globalisation processes (Jurič Pahor 2003, 10). Kraidy (2005, 43) warns us that discourses of hybridity,

by assuming a weak nation-state, inadvertently serve the interests of economic globalization.

The border is indeed reinforced by national ideology, as 'mental borders' (Kralj and Rener 2010) between Slovenians and Italians remain. This can be observed in the self-identification of the Instrians. Namely, the inhabitants of Slovenian Istria did not define themselves as Italians, but (mostly) as Slovenians and Istrians. The television consumption also predominantly shows Slovenian choices. However, at the same time, the practices of the inhabitants in their everyday (media) consumption enact the nation in specific narrations, negotiations as well as subversions of the puristic national prototype. They recognise the influence of the border on a way of life that is similar to the one across the border, mirrored to a significant extend also in media consumption. The participants' responses show a processual character – historical, generational, and influenced by globalising processes – of what constitutes living in a borderland, countering discourses of monocultural national belonging. The inhabitants thus challenge the understanding of nations as containers. Indeed, the inhabitants primarily see borders as porous, resulting in the inhabitants' views of their similarity to the Italians, who are across the border, rather than Slovenian living within the premisses of the same country. The reality from across the border becomes engrained in people's relations – which for some remains even decades after childhood and youth. For some, media content has become a meaningful idiom of reality for their everyday experiences, interpreting and imagining their lives. The border and national belonging in the borderland can thus challenge the naturalised equation 'national territory = national culture'.

Instead of a Conclusion

The article presented the application of Fox and Miller Idriss's (2008a) methodological framework to borderland inhabitants, their narrations, representations, interpretations and cultural negotiations, emphasising inhabitants' agency in constructing the meaning of the nation and the border(land), thus employing also a borderscapes lens. However, the article presented only one aspect of Fox and Miller Idriss's (ibid.) everyday nationhood, namely media consumption, from a specific historical period.

Slovenian Istria (and other borderlands) could also be analysed from other everyday national aspects: from other consumptions to the choosing, performing and talking the nation as well. It is also important to include a more contemporaneous local and global perspective, going beyond (just) the Italian border. In contemporary intensified global processes, the consumption of commercial (social) media has gained prominence – which has been observed for several decades and the (un)popularity of Italian media among Istrians. Moreover, the Italian border is not the only border, as Istria is delineated also by Croatian border. Including different external national borders, their socio-historic meaning among inhabitants, as well as 'inner borders' contracted through time, would bring interesting complexities to the analysis of everyday nationhood at the borderland of Slovenian Istria. The inclusion of these different aspects would bring additional important findings regarding the ways in which the concepts of the nation and border become meaningful idioms in people's lives.

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Zarja Rustja[1]

Prstni odtis med nadzorom in uporom: biometrija in avtonomija migracij v Evropski uniji

POVZETEK: Članek raziskuje vlogo prstnih odtisov v upravljanju migracij v Evropski uniji. Čeprav gre le za centimeter kože, ki se zdi univerzalen del človeškega telesa, prstni odtis (in njegov odvzem) v kontekstu migracij razkriva veliko širše pomene. Avtorica k obravnavani temi pristopi predvsem skozi prizmo avtonomije migracij ter pokaže dvojno naravo te biometrične tehnologije: na eni strani kot orodje nadzora, na drugi kot sredstvo njegove subverzije. V začetku je analizirano, kako se odvzem prstnih odtisov umešča v sodobne evropske migracijske politike, zlasti v okviru sistema Eurodac in Dublinske uredbe. S teoretskim okvirom avtonomije migracij avtorica pokaže, da ljudje na poti niso zgolj objekti upravljanja, temveč avtonomni posamezniki, ki v razpokah nadzornih režimov ustvarjajo prostor ustvarjalnosti, solidarnosti in izmikanja. Predstavljene so konkretne strategije odpora, ki so vezane na odvzem prstnih odtisov in vključujejo njihovo mutilacijo, zavračanje postopkov ali izkoriščanje pravnih vrzeli. Na podlagi teoretske analize in empiričnih uvidov članek prikaže relacijsko dinamiko med nadzorom in avtonomijo, v kateri se ta dva procesa nenehno vzajemno proizvajata.

Ključne besede: prstni odtisi, migracije, biometrija, nadzor, Eurodac, avtonomija migracij

Fingerprint Between Control and Resistance: Biometrics and the Autonomy of Migration in the European Union

ABSTRACT: This article examines the role of fingerprints in the governance of migration in the European Union. Although it represents only a centimeter of skin that appears to be a universal part of the human body, the fingerprint (and fingerprinting) reveals much broader meanings in the context of migration. The author approaches the topic through the analytical framework of the Autonomy of Migration, highlighting the dual nature of this biometric technology: on the one hand, as a tool of control, and on the other as a means of its subversion. The article first analyses how fingerprinting is embedded in contemporary European migration policies, particularly within the Eurodac system and the Dublin Regulation. Through the theoretical lens of the autonomy of migration, the author demonstrates

Izvirni znanstveni članek / *Original scientific article*

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that migrants are not merely objects of governance but autonomous actors who, within the cracks of control regimes, create spaces of creativity, solidarity, and evasion. Concrete strategies of resistance related to fingerprinting are presented, including fingertip mutilation, the refusal of procedures, and the exploitation of legal loopholes. Drawing on theoretical analysis and empirical insights, the article reveals a relational dynamic between control and autonomy, in which these two processes continuously and mutually produce one another.

Keywords: Fingerprints; Migration; Biometrics; Control; Eurodac; Autonomy of Migration

Uvod[2]

Ob omembi izraza »prstni odtis« se marsikomu utrnejo asociacije na kriminalne serije in filme, kjer ta unikatna telesna značilnost velikokrat predstavlja droben, a zanesljiv dokaz, ki naj bi neizpodbitno razkril identiteto storilca. Pogosto se misli nato usmerijo k odvzemu prstnih odtisov v namen izdelave novih biometričnih osebnih izkaznic. Le redko pa ob tej besedni zvezi pomislimo na migracije[3]. V migracijskih postopkih prstni odtis namreč ni le nevtralna biološka značilnost, temveč pogosto odločilen dejavnik, ki lahko določi potek in izid posameznikove življenjske poti. Za ljudi na poti ta centimetrski košček kože postane nekakšen ključ, od katerega je lahko odvisno, ali bosta posamezniku omogočena vstop v državo in posledično možnost vložitve prošnje za mednarodno zaščito ali pa bo zaprt v tranzitni center in celo nasilno deportiran. Čeprav se biometrične tehnologije in odvzem prstnih odtisov danes vse pogosteje uporabljajo na celotni populaciji, imajo za ljudi na poti popolnoma drugačen pomen in pogosto tudi bistveno hujše posledice.

2 Članek je nastal ob podpori dr. Barbare Gornik in prof. dr. Uršule Čebron Lipovec v okviru sodelovanja pri projektu Jean Monnet Modul Listina Evropske unije o temeljnih pravicah: antropološke perspektive, ki ga sofinancira Evropska unija.

3 Na tej točki bi rada opozorila, da se tukaj in v nadaljevanju tega prispevka z besedami, kot sta »migracije« in »migranti«, nanašam predvsem na migracije/migrante iz globalnega juga ter na t. i. iregularizirane migracije. Termin »iregularizirane« uporabljam zato, ker se v literaturi uveljavlja kot alternativa izrazom, kot sta »nezakonite« ali »ilegalne« migracije, ki stigmatizirajo ljudi in definirajo pojav le negativno, namesto da bi osvetlili procese, ki to ustvarjajo iregularnost. Uporaba pasivnega deležnika (iregulariziran) kot pridevnika namesto pridevniške oblike (iregularen) izpostavlja, da status migrantov ni naravno dan – nasprotno – je družbeno in politično proizveden. Ta izraz uveljavlja konstruktivistični pogled, po katerem so določene oblike mobilnosti namerno ustvarjene kot iregularne. S tem se raziskovalno težišče preusmeri na politike, pravne ureditve in mejne prakse, ki določene oblike konstruirajo kot nezaželene, kar je tesno povezano z varnostnizacijo in kriminalizacijo migracij (Hameršak 2022).

V evropskem prostoru je odvzem prstnih odtisov obvezna praksa za prosilce za azil in številne druge »kategorije« ljudi na poti.[4] Pri tem je sistem Eurodac – podatkovna zbirka Evropske unije (EU) za primerjavo prstnih odtisov prosilcev za azil – ključno orodje za shranjevanje in izmenjavo omenjenih odtisov med državami članicami. Namreč eden izmed prvih postopkov, ki sledijo vlogi prošnje za azil, je odvzem prstnih odtisov. Nato se ti primerjajo z drugimi digitaliziranimi prstnimi odtisi v centralni zbirki podatkov (Btihaj 2013a, 583). Namen tega postopka je ugotoviti, ali je posameznik že zaprosil za azil v drugi državi. V primeru, da se prstni odtisi prosilca za azil ujemajo s tistimi, ki so že shranjeni v osrednji zbirki podatkov, se osebo poskuša vrniti v državo, kjer je prvič zaprosila za azil, kar predstavlja temelj Dublinske uredbe. Izvajanje digitalnega odvzema prstnih odtisov se je razširilo tudi na področje iregulariziranega priseljevanja preko posebnega protokola, ki je bil kasneje vključen v glavno uredbo o Eurodacu. Ta sprememba je državam članicam omogočila, da beležijo, posredujejo in primerjajo prstne odtise oseb, ki so prečkale mejo na iregulariziran način (ibid.). Praksa odvzema prstnih odtisov tako ne služi le identifikaciji posameznikov, temveč je eden izmed osrednjih mehanizmov upravljanja in regulacije migracij v EU.

Čeprav je odvzem prstnih odtisov v evropskem migracijskem režimu sredstvo nadzora, njegov učinek ni popolnoma determiniran. S tem, ko se preko te tehnologije oblikujejo pogoji (in omejitve) gibanja, se hkrati ustvarja tudi prostor, znotraj katerega se ljudje na poti odzivajo in oblikujejo lastne strategije. Razumevanje vloge prstnega odtisa (in njegovega odvzema) v kontekstu migracij zahteva pogled, ki preseže logiko nadzora in prepozna tudi strategije subverzije in ustvarjanja prostora svobode znotraj strogo reguliranega sistema. Članek prstni odtis postavlja v središče analize avtonomije migracij (Moulier-Boutang in Garson 1984) ter pokaže,

4 V celotnem delu uporabljam izraz *ljudje na poti* kot krovni pojem, ki zajema različne skupine oseb, ki se gibljejo čez meje: nedokumentirani migranti (osebe, ki v državi živijo brez pravnega statusa), prosilci za mednarodno/subsidiarno zaščito, osebe s statusom begunca in osebe s subsidiarno zaščito (Čebron Lipovec in Pistotnik 2016, 186–187). Zavedam se, da med temi kategorijami obstajajo pomembne pravne in politične razlike (recimo v dostopu do zaščite in pravic), vendar izraz uporabljam zato, da se izognem ponavljajočemu se naštevanju vseh statusnih označb. Prav tako uporabljam termina *prosilci za azil* in *prosilci za mednarodno zaščito* kot sopomenki.

kako se ta ne oblikuje kljub nadzoru, ampak v razmerju do njega. Rezultati temeljijo na kvalitativni etnografski raziskavi, opravljeni v Trstu in Proseku marca 2023 ter v Ljubljani med januarjem in majem 2025. S tem prispevek poskuša odgovoriti na naslednja raziskovalna vprašanja: Kako se odvzem prstnih odtisov umešča v politične in varnostne diskurze, ki oblikujejo migracijske politike EU? Kako odvzem prstnih odtisov doživljajo posamezniki sami? Katere oblike avtonomije in »manevrskega prostora« si ljudje na poti izborijo v soočenju s temi praksami? In ne nazadnje spodbuja k razmisleku o tem, kako lahko en sam kvadratni centimeter kože postane ključ, ki vrata hkrati odpira in zapira.

Biometrične tehnologije in upravljanje migracij

Biometrija je izraz za tehnologijo merjenja, analiziranja in obdelave edinstvenih bioloških značilnosti, kot so prstni odtis, očesne mrežnice, šarenice, obrazni vzorci, geometrija rok in telesne vonjave. Primarno se uporablja za prepoznavanje in identifikacijo oseb ter za preverjanje oziroma potrjevanje, da je posameznik res tisti, za kogar se izdaja (Btihaj 2013a, 581). Zgodovinski razvoj tovrstnih tehnologij je dolg in kompleksen, a se v tem prispevku vanj ne bom poglabljala. Vendar je vseeno pomembno poudariti, da se je metoda uporabe prstnih odtisov v identifikacijske namene razvila v specifičnih zgodovinskih okoliščinah, pri čemer je služila predvsem interesom oblasti in njenemu upravljanju populacij. Že zgodnji biometrični sistemi so bili oblikovani z namenom razvrščanja, nadzorovanja in obvladovanja tistih teles, ki so bila šteta kot nevarna za družbeni red in državno blaginjo (glej Cole 2001; Maguire 2009). Obenem niso služili zgolj kot tehnični predhodniki sodobnim identifikacijskim metodam, marveč so tudi kulturno in politično zaznamovali njihov nadaljnji razvoj. Tehnološki napredek je omogočil širši prenos znanja, metodologij in oblik vladanja med različnimi državami, pri čemer ni šlo za preprosto prevzemanje oziroma kopiranje sistemov, temveč za njihovo prilagajanje novim političnim in geografskim kontekstom ter spreminjanje njihovih funkcij in pomenov (Spektor 2023, 18).

V Evropi se je uporaba biometrične tehnologije (na ravni države) širila nekoliko počasneje, a je kmalu pridobila pomembno vlogo pri nadzoru meja. Pospešen razvoj so dodatno spodbudili diskurzi o varnosti, ki so

se po terorističnih napadih 11. septembra 2001 še okrepili in prispevali k širjenju občutkov ogroženosti. Ti dogodki so sprožili zahteve po okrepljeni varnosti in preusmerili pozornost držav predvsem na zunanje grožnje (Olwig idr. 2020, 16). Glede na zgodovinsko vlogo biometričnih tehnologij pri nadzorovanju marginaliziranih in kriminaliziranih skupin ni presenetljivo, da je prav nadzor meja postal eno izmed prvih področij njihove sistematične uporabe v okviru evropskih držav (Lewkowicz 2021, 14). Biometrija je postala ključno orodje v oblikovanju odziva na domnevne zunanje grožnje, med katere so države umeščale tudi migracije, predvsem z globalnega juga. Hkrati se je njena uporaba razširila tudi znotraj EU, saj danes zajema vse prebivalce, od obvezne biometrične registracije v osebnih dokumentih do vsakodnevne rabe pri dostopu do različnih storitev.

Na začetku 21. stol. se je tako oblikoval eden izmed ključnih mehanizmov evropskega biometričnega nadzora migracij: sistem Eurodac, ki skupaj z Dublinsko uredbo predstavlja temeljni mehanizem za identifikacijo in razporejanje prosilcev za azil znotraj EU. Slednja si je že v devetdesetih letih prejšnjega stoletja prizadevala vzpostaviti skupni evropski azilni sistem, katerega osrednji element je bil učinkovit mehanizem za določitev pristojne države članice (Hubman 2017, 6). To je bilo doseženo z uvedbo Dublinskega sistema,[5] ki določa, da je lahko le ena država članica v celoti pristojna in odgovorna za posamezno prošnjo za azil; to je prva država, v katero pridejo ljudje na poti in zaprosijo za azil. To pomeni, da v primeru zavrnitve prošnje s strani države članice prosilec nima možnosti, da bi za azil zaprosil še v kateri drugi državi EU. S tem naj bi Dublinska uredba dosegla dva cilja: preprečevala naj bi t. i. »nakupovanje azila«, torej vlaganje več prošenj v različnih državah članicah, hkrati pa naj bi preprečila tudi medsebojno prelaganje odgovornosti za obravnavo prosilcev med državami (Btihaj 2013a, 582). Doseg teh dveh ciljev pa naj bi sočasno omogočil učinkovit dostop prosilcev do mednarodne zaščite (Hubman 2017, 8).

Pri tem se je pojavil problem t. i. sekundarnih premikov prosilcev za azil, ki naj bi z namernim prikrivanjem identitete onemogočali prenos odgovornosti med državami članicami. Ugotovljeno je bilo namreč, da je več

5 Dublinska uredba oz. Uredba št. 604/2013.

kot 80 % prosilcev za azil ob prihodu v državo trdilo, da so izgubili osebne dokumente, zaradi česar jih niso mogli zanesljivo identificirati (Aus 2006, 3). Kot odgovor na ta problem so države članice vzpostavile obsežne podatkovne baze, kot so Schengenski informacijski sistem (SIS II), Vizumski informacijski sistem (VIS) in sistem Eurodac (Kogovšek Šalamon 2017, 252). Tovrstni sistemi so predstavljeni kot tehnologija, ki omogoča hitro in zanesljivo primerjavo edinstvenih telesnih značilnosti posameznikov (kot so prstni odtisi, obraz ali šarenica). Prav Eurodac je bil prvi sistem, ki je biometrično identifikacijo uporabil na ravni več držav, torej znotraj politične skupnosti, kot je EU (Aus 2006, 2). Njegova implementacija naj bi omogočila učinkovitejše preverjanje identitete in s tem lažje izvajanje določb Dublinske uredbe (ibid., 3).

Biometrija je tako postala del širše transformacije migracijskih politik, v katerih ne deluje kot golo orodje identifikacije, temveč kot instrument upravljanja mobilnosti in nadzora nad (določenimi) posamezniki.

Tovrstno preobrazbo je mogoče natančneje razumeti s pomočjo koncepta banoptikona, ki ga je razvil Didier Bigo (2006), predvsem zato, ker opozarja na selektivno logiko režimov nadzora. Pojem »ban«, ki ga je Giorgio Agamben (1998) prevzel od Jeana-Luca Nancyja (1983), združuje dve ideji: izključitev iz skupnosti in označenost s suvereno oblastjo. Agamben ta pojem uporablja predvsem za opis, kako oblast določi, kdo je znotraj in kdo zunaj pravnega reda. Bigo pozornost preusmeri drugam. Zanima ga, kako se izključevanje ne izvaja več kot enkratna odločitev od zgoraj, temveč poteka z vsakdanjimi in rutinskimi praksami varnostnih organov, preko baz podatkov, mejnih postopkov, preverjanja dokumentov (ter prstnih odtisov) in podobnih birokratskih ukrepov, ki selektivno odločajo, kdo sodi »noter« in kdo ostaja zunaj. Banoptikon se torej osredotoča na nadzor manjšine. Glavni namen je, da prepoznajo tiste, ki bi jim moral biti onemogočen dostop, ki jih je treba pridržati ali izgnati z ozemlja. S tem se izpostavi razlika med nezaželenimi in drugimi prebivalci, ki imajo (domnevno) neomejen dostop do gibanja in bivanja na določenem ozemlju (MacDonald in Hunter 2019, 151).

Ni presenetljivo, da je Bigo banoptično logiko umestil prav na področje migracij. Nezaželeni »drugi« postanejo migranti, begunci in prosilci za azil, dodatno pa so preko varnostnizacijskega diskurza označeni še kot domnevna grožnja. S tem postanejo tarča selektivnega nadzora, ta nadzor

pa se izvaja predvsem preko biometričnih tehnologij in sistemov, kot je Eurodac. Slednji omogočajo povezovanje baz, podatkovno »rudarjenje« in profiliranje. Podatki se zbirajo, razvrščajo in razporejajo, kar vodi v t. i. banoptično sortiranje, klasifikacijo, kdo mora biti nadzorovan (Btihaj 2013b, 73) in kaznovan. Odvzem prstnih odtisov in njihova umeščenost v sisteme, kot je Eurodac, za zdaj še ni univerzalna praksa, saj zadeva le določene skupine ljudi. Gre za klasičen primer banoptične selekcije, pri čemer se nadzor izvaja nad manjšino, medtem ko večina prebivalstva ostaja zunaj tovrstnih praks. To pa nas vrne k vprašanju, ali je sploh mogoče, da bi sistemi, kot je Eurodac, ki naj bi v teoriji delovali v prid prosilcem za mednarodno zaščito, to funkcijo dejansko opravljali, če pa že v svoji osnovi temeljijo na logiki izključevanja, nadzora in ločevanja med »nami« in »njimi«.

Analitični okvir: razmerje med avtonomijo migracij in nadzorom

Čeprav so razni nadzorni sistemi pogosto predstavljeni kot glavni dejavniki, ki oblikujejo gibanje ljudi na poti, je v resnici ta odnos veliko bolj kompleksen. Kot ugotavlja Lewkowicz (2021, 125), odvzem prstnih odtisov pri ljudeh na poti hkrati vzbuja strah in upanje; kot past na eni strani in priložnost na drugi. Pri tem je omembe vredno tudi dejstvo, da se v določenih (predvsem humanitarnih) diskurzih ljudi na poti pogosto predstavlja kot nemočne žrtve politik meja in nadzora (Hess 2017, 89), ki jih je treba »rešiti«. Takšna podoba pa utrjuje razmerje med »tistim, ki pomaga«, in »tistim, ki potrebuje pomoč« (ibid., 92), ter spregleda sposobnost posameznikov in skupin, da aktivno vplivajo na svoje življenje in pot. Avtonomija migracij temu pogledu nasprotuje. Migrante, begunce in prosilce za azil vidi kot akterje, ne kot pasivne objekte. Koncept – na katerega je vplival predvsem avtonomistični marksizem (Bojadžijev 2009, 135) – izhaja iz prizadevanj, da migracije razumemo kot pojav z lastno dinamiko, ki ga ni mogoče zreducirati na zgolj odziv na zunanje pogoje in nadzor (Papadopoulos in Tsianos 2013: 185). Kot pravita Papadopoulos in Tsianos (ibid., 178), gre za uveljavljanje človeškega delovanja (*agency*)[6] od spodaj, za pra-

6 Termin *agency* se nanaša na zmožnosti delovanja oziroma sposobnosti posameznikov in skupin, da aktivno vplivajo na okoliščine, v katerih se znajdejo.

kse in strategije, s katerimi ljudje na poti sooblikujejo realnost, v kateri pristanejo. De Genova, Garelli in Tazzioli (2018, 259) pri tem opozarjajo, da termin *agency* pogosto ostaja ujet v okvire metodološkega individualizma. To označuje liberalno paradigmo, ki ljudi na poti vidi kot izolirane, svobodne in suverene posameznike, ki sprejemajo neodvisne odločitve (ibid., 241), kar neustrezno zreducira kompleksnost migracij na raven posameznikovega preračunavanja (ibid., 260). V skladu s tem tudi Bojadžijev (2009, 134) poudarja, da migracije »niso projekt posameznikov, temveč so prej proces, sloneč na transnacionalnih mrežah in globalnem gibanju«.

Pristop avtonomije migracij torej omogoča, da migracije in mobilnost razumemo kot družbena (in politična) gibanja, hkrati pa deluje tudi kot analitični okvir oziroma pogled, ki migracije opazuje skozi oči samega procesa mobilnosti (Mezzarda 2011, 121). Začetnik izraza »avtonomija migracij« Moulier-Boutang je poudaril, da so migracije avtonomen pojav, ki ni zgolj posledica državnih politik, in se kaže tako pri priseljevanju kot izseljevanju (po Hameršak idr. 2015, 16). Gre za politično, transformativno in družbeno prakso, s katero ljudje aktivno oblikujejo pogoje svojega življenja (Hess 2017, 94). V tem pogledu migracija označuje stalne premike in preoblikovanje življenjskih poti, pogojev in priložnosti ljudi. Papadopoulos in Tsianos (2007, 2) poudarjata, da ne gre samo za to, da posameznik en kraj zapusti in se naseli v drugem, temveč gre za proces ustvarjanja in preoblikovanja lastnega življenja v svetu. V perspektivi avtonomije se migracij ne obravnava kot le odziv na zunanje okoliščine, kot so vojna, revščina in drugi politični ali ekonomski pritiski (Papadopoulos in Tsianos 2013, 184). Povedano drugače, pojem avtonomije pomeni predvsem neodvisnost migracij od klasičnih razlag, ki temeljijo na dejavnikih odboja in privlačnosti (*push-pull*), racionalnih preračunavanj dobičkov in izgub, prisile, trga dela ali nadzora nad migracijami (Hameršak idr. 2025, 16). V vsakem okolju se kažejo drugače, spreminjajo svojo obliko, povezujejo nepričakovane udeležence in preoblikujejo same mehanizme nadzora, ki jih skušajo zamejiti (Papadopoulos in Tsianos 2007, 3). Gre za »ustvarjanje sveta« (*world-making*), saj v pogledu tega pristopa migracije niso le preselitev; so proces, ki neizogibno preobraža družbeni prostor (ibid., 2).

Ta perspektiva se navezuje na koncept, ki ga je Asef Bayat poimenoval »družbena ne-gibanja« (*nonmovements*): gre za »množične, neformalno

povezane in pogosto nevidne prakse, ki nimajo ene ideologije ali vodstva« (Hess 2017, 88), a imajo potencial, da lahko dolgoročno povzročijo pomembne spremembe (ibid., 89). Takšne oblike delovanja niso videti politične v klasičnem, tradicionalnem pomenu, a so politične v smislu, da spreminjajo pogoje življenja in dostopa do pravic (Papadopoulos in Tsianos 2013, 188). Ljudje na poti prečkajo meje ter jih s svojimi vsakodnevnimi dejanji tudi sooblikujejo in preoblikujejo (Hess 2017, 90): lahko bi rekli, da v tem smislu migracije »ustvarjajo svet« (*world-making*) in obenem tudi soustvarjajo in premikajo meje.

Na tej točki se je smiselno ustaviti pri povezavi med avtonomijo in nadzorom. Namreč nadzor je odgovor na avtonomijo in ne nasprotno (Čebron Lipovec in Zorn 2016, 61), zato migracij ne moremo raziskovati samo kot posledico nadzora (Hameršak idr. 2025, 16). Kljub temu ta dva pojma nista popolnoma neodvisna drug od drugega, temveč se medsebojno prepletata in dopolnjujeta. Ljudje na poti namreč pogosto naletijo na (nasilne) ovire (razne oblike detencij, deportacij, kriminalizacij in varnostnizacij). Tovrstne ovire lahko gibanje nadzirajo in ga ustavijo (Papadopoulos in Tsianos 2013, 184). Kljub soočanju z ostrimi oblikami nadzora je bistveno, da se migracije nanj ne odzivajo pasivno, ampak aktivno ustvarjajo nove realnosti, ki ljudem na poti omogočajo uveljavljanje lastnih oblik mobilnosti onkraj in proti obstoječemu nadzoru (ibid.). Kot ugotavlja Metcalfe (2022, 52), avtonomija migracij pomeni predvsem gibanje, ki ga ni možno popolnoma nadzorovati in obvladovati: vedno obstaja nekakšen prostor med poskusi nadzora in prizadevanji, da se temu nadzoru izogne. Gre torej za relacijski pojem. Migracijsko gibanje sproži odziv pristojnih organov v obliki nadzora, ta nadzor pa nato spodbuja odzive ljudi na poti v obliki strategij, preko katerih poskušajo obiti nadzor, kar znova izzove novo obliko nadzora. Tako se oblikuje začaran krog med avtonomijo migracij in nadzorom, v katerem se nenehno sooblikujeta oba procesa.

Metodologija

Pri raziskovanju pomena in vloge prstnih odtisov v sodobnih migracijskih politikah sem izhajala iz pristopa, ki združuje terensko delo in analizo strokovne literature. Tak način dela mi je omogočil, da sem temo obravnavala tako s teoretskimi koncepti kot z vsakdanjimi izkušnjami ljudi, ki so

neposredno vključeni v obravnavane procese. Terensko delo je temeljilo na opazovanju z udeležbo ter opravljanju neformalnih pogovorov in polstrukturiranih intervjujev. Slednje je bilo ključno za razumevanje, kako se biometrične prakse, kot je odvzem prstnih odtisov, prepletajo z osebnimi zgodbami in življenjskimi okoliščinami posameznikov, ter prepoznavanje globine obravnavanega pojava, ki jo uradni politični dokumenti in razprave pogosto spregledajo.

Zametki raziskave izhajajo iz terenskega dela, ki smo ga marca 2023 v sklopu predmeta antropologija migracij in v okviru projekta ERIM[7] opravljali v Trstu in njegovem zaledju. Ob dveh priložnostih sem obiskala begunski zbirni center na Proseku (it. *Prosecco*), v katerem sem opravljala pogovore s prosilci za azil ter spremljala sestanek, na katerem so novo prispelim razlagali pravne postopke. Januarja 2025 sem raziskavo nadgradila z nadaljnjim terenskim delom, osredotočenim na zbiranje izkušenj in perspektiv posameznikov, ki so bili podvrženi postopku odvzema prstnih odtisov. V sklopu obvezne 30-urne prakse na Oddelku za etnologijo in kulturno antropologijo Filozofske fakultete v Ljubljani sem začela sodelovati z Rdečim križem Slovenije (RKS), enoto v Ljubljani. Njihova vloga na področju migracij je humanitarne narave: izvajajo programe pomoči in zagovorništva, kar zajema tudi nudenje osnovnih življenjskih potrebščin, informiranje o pravnih postopkih in integracijskih možnostih ter orientacijo v lokalnem okolju. V okviru prakse sem med uradnimi urami sodelovala pri sprejemu obiskovalcev, vodenju osnovnih evidenc in posredovanju informacij, pomagala pri razdeljevanju potrebščin ter nudila podporo pri integracijskih izzivih (učenje jezika, pomoč pri pisanju življenjepisov ipd.).

7 Raziskovalni projekt *Evropski režim iregulariziranih migracij na periferiji EU: od etnografije do pojmovnika* (ERIM) (2020–2024) dokumentira in analizira režim iregulariziranih migracij v transnacionalnem prostoru Hrvaške in sosednjih držav na podlagi multilokalnega etnografskega terenskega dela. Projekt razume migracijski režim kot dinamično polje raznolikih praks in interakcij ter preko pojmovnika, raziskav in publikacij prispeva k boljšemu razumevanju protislovij in potencialov iregulariziranih migracij (ERIM 2025). V sklopu tega projekta smo sodelovali pri ustvarjanju pojmovnika e-ERIM. Slednji združuje kratka besedila, ki obravnavajo teoretske in metodološke pojme, pomembne akterje, kraje, predmete, dogodke in izraze iz vsakdanjega življenja, povezane z evropskim režimom iregulariziranih migracij na jugovzhodnem robu EU. Njegov namen je kritično osvetliti koncepte, ki so empirično in teoretsko utemeljeni in izhajajo iz aktualnega režima omejevanja in kriminaliziranja gibanja migrantov na območju Srbije, Bosne in Hercegovine, Hrvaške in Slovenije (e-ERIM 2025).

Po končanih urah prakse, ki sem jih opravila v januarju, sem tam kot prostovoljka ostala vse do maja. Ta čas mi je omogočil reden stik z ljudmi na poti in vzpostavljanje odnosov, ki so temeljili na medsebojni podpori. Na ta način sem spoznala ljudi, ki so mi zaupali svoje izkušnje z odvzemom prstnih odtisov.

Na osnovi številnih neformalnih pogovorov sem raziskavo nadgradila še s petimi polstrukturiranimi intervjuji. Štirje od teh so potekali v živo, en pa preko video klica na platformi Viber, saj dotični sogovornik trenutno prebiva v tujini. Zaradi občutljivosti teme intervjujev nisem snemala. Podatke, ki so se mi zdeli pomembni, sem si med intervjuji pisala v beležko. Intervjuji so potekali v angleškem jeziku. Okvirni vprašalnik, ki sem ga pripravila, sem s pomočjo prevajalnika DeepL prevedla v arabščino. Večina sogovornikov angleščine ni govorila tekoče, pri čemer je prišel v pomoč moj prevedeni vprašalnik. Druge jezikovne nejasnosti smo premostili z uporabo Google Translate. Vsi sogovorniki so bili moškega spola, stari 30 do 45 let. Prihajali so iz različnih držav: Pascal iz Burundija, Rayan iz Maroka ter Sami, Malik in Adam iz Alžirije. Samo Pascal je imel status begunca, drugi so bili v času pogovorov prosilci za mednarodno zaščito. Vsa navedena imena sogovornikov so psevdonimi, uporabljeni z namenom zagotavljanja njihove anonimnosti in varovanja zaupnosti.

Zbrane podatke sem analizirala s pomočjo osnovnega tematskega kodiranja. Pri tem sem uporabila barvno označevanje zapiskov iz neformalnih pogovorov in polstrukturiranih intervjujev. Na ta način sem oblikovala tematske skupine (npr. nasilje na mejah, odvzem prstnih odtisov, omembe Eurodaca, prakse upora ipd.), ki so se ponavljale v pripovedih različnih sogovornikov. Iz teh skupin so se nato izoblikovale širše analitične kategorije, ki so mi služile kot osnova za interpretacijo empiričnega gradiva in njegovo povezovanje s teoretskim okvirom. Čeprav zbrano gradivo obsega širši nabor izkušenj, sem se v delu osredotočila na izseke, ki so bili najtesneje povezani z raziskovalnimi vprašanji.

Že ob prvem terenskem delu (v Trstu in zaledju) sem se soočila z metodološko dilemo: raziskovalci kot zunanji opazovalci za kratek čas vstopamo v življenje ljudi, zberemo podatke in se nato umaknemo, s čimer se pogosto prekinejo vzpostavljeni odnosi. Ta občutek enosmernega jemanja informacij sem poskušala preseči z vzpostavitvijo modela obojestranske

izmenjave in podpore. Tako sem v interakcijah s sogovorniki prispevala na različne načine: pomagala sem jim z učenjem jezika, pisanjem življenjepisov ali iskanjem informacij, povezanih z azilnimi postopki in vsakdanjimi potrebami. Sogovorniki so mi na drugi strani zaupali svoje izkušnje in poglede, kar je ustvarilo osnovo za bolj uravnotežen odnos, ki ga razumem kot obliko kolaborativne etnografije (*collaborative ethnography*) (glej Lassier 2005) in hkrati kot del angažirane antropologije (*engaged anthropology*) (glej Low in Merry 2010). Ta pristop se je izkazal kot dragocen pri vzpostavljanju zaupanja, grajenju trajnejših odnosov in predvsem pri boljšem razumevanju situacij z različnih perspektiv.

Rezultati

Prstni odtis skozi logiko (ne)varnosti in nadzora

Uporabo biometričnih tehnologij v kontekstu nadzora in upravljanja migracij lahko razumemo kot posledico varnostnizacijskih diskurzov, hkrati pa kot orodje, preko katerega se tovrstni diskurzi še dodatno utrjujejo. Vzpostavitev centraliziranih zbirk podatkov, kot je Eurodac, ki beleži prstne odtise prosilcev za azil in iregulariziranih oseb, je eden izmed tistih izrednih ukrepov, sprejetih v času, ko so bile migracije vse bolj obravnavane z varnostno logiko. Telesa ljudi na poti s tem postanejo objekt nadzora. Ta način izvajanja nadzora (uporaba naprednih nadzornih tehnologij) pa nadalje ustvarja vtis, da so prosilci za azil obravnavani kot morebitna grožnja. Ukrepi, ki so bili nekoč značilni za boj proti kriminalu, konkretno odvzemanje prstnih odtisov, se tako danes rutinsko uporabljajo tudi v azilnih in migracijskih postopkih (Sadik in Kaya 2020, 148).

Eurodac in podobne centralizirane zbirke podatkov (SIS, VIS ipd.) so določeni raziskovalci (med njimi Aus 2006) označili kot »rešitve, ki čakajo na probleme«. To izhaja iz dejstva, da so bile tovrstne tehnologije oblikovane v devetdesetih letih prejšnjega stoletja kot rešitve na še neopredeljene grožnje. Te rešitve pa so predstavljale policijsko sodelovanje in okrepljen nadzor (Sadik in Kaya 2020, 152). Btihaj (2013b) to označi kot nekakšno vejo varnostnizacijske teorije in jo poimenuje z izrazom upravljanje tveganja (*risk management*). Slednje temelji na obravnavi določenega pojava kot potencialne grožnje, kar se realizira v stalnem razvrščanju, profiliranju

in nadzoru posameznikov glede na stopnjo domnevne nevarnosti (Btihaj 2013b, 112). In prav v tem najdejo svoje mesto sistemi, kot je Eurodac, in prakse, kot je odvzemanje prstnih odtisov. Čeprav je bil prvotni namen sistema Eurodac zbiranje prstnih odtisov z namenom ugotavljanja, katera država je pristojna za obravnavo prošnje za azil, je bil kasneje omogočen dostop do njega tudi organom pregona, ki so začeli podatke uporabljati kot orodje za preiskovanje kriminala, terorizma in iregulariziranih migracij (Sadik in Kaya 2020, 151).

Ta premik se odraža tudi v tem, kako ljudje, ki so jim odvzeti prstni odtisi, doživljajo ta postopek. Med pogovori, ki sem jih opravila z ljudmi, ki so jim bili odvzeti prstni odtisi, sem jih povprašala tudi o tem, zakaj mislijo, da so bili primorani iti skozi ta postopek in kako so se ob tem počutili. Adam je tako dejal: »Počutil sem se kot terorist,«[8] Sami pa: »Verjetno so jih vzeli zato, da če naredim kakšen zločin, bodo vedeli, da sem bil jaz.«[9] Rayan je ta postopek sprva zavrnil z besedami: »Nisem zločinec, ne bi smel biti tukaj,«[10] s čimer je izrazil odpor do prakse, ki ga je že vnaprej postavila v pozicijo osumljenca. Posebej zgovoren je bil tudi Pascal, ki je povedal, da so mu policisti med postopkom kar sami govorili, da je terorist. Na vprašanje, zakaj misli, da so mu odvzeli prstne odtise, je odgovoril: »Mogoče zaradi nadzora,«[11] in dodal: »Prstni odtisi so za policijo, ne za azil.«[12] Te izjave razkrivajo, da ljudje na poti, s katerimi sem se pogovarjala, prakse biometrične identifikacije (predvsem odvzemanje prstnih odtisov) ne doživljajo kot nevtralno orodje za postopke, povezane s pridobivanjem azila, temveč kot mehanizem, ki jih že ob prihodu umešča v okvir sumničenja, nadzora in povezuje s kriminalom.

Uporaba biometričnih tehnologij se je torej razširila na funkcijo preiskovalnega in obveščevalnega orodja, ki zbira čim več podatkov in hkrati nudi dostop do teh podatkov dodatnim organom (pregona). Tudi če ljudje na poti niso neposredno označeni kot grožnja notranji varnosti, se njihovo

8 Original: »I felt like a terrorist.«

9 Original: »They probably took them so if I do a crime, they know it was me.«

10 Original: »I'm not a criminal, I shouldn't be here.«

11 Original: »Maybe for control.«

12 Original: »Fingerprints are for police, not for asylum.«

obravnavanje s pomočjo tehnologij, ki so sicer namenjene boju proti terorizmu in čezmejnemu kriminalu, vseeno šteje za varnostnizacijsko prakso (Sadik in Kaya 2020, 153). Diskurz varnostnizacije torej ustvarja potrebo po tovrstnih tehnologijah, ki nato utrjujejo ta diskurz in ga prevajajo v prakso.

Ta praksa se ne izvaja na ravni posameznih držav, temveč je vpeta v širši sistem evropskega biometričnega nadzora. Eurodac, kot osrednja baza prstnih odtisov, združuje več kot 32 držav in deluje na vseh ravneh upravljanja. Ob tem je očitno, da se področji migracijskega in kriminalnega nadzora zbližujeta – proces, ki ga Kogovšek Šalamon (2017) poimenuje krimigracija –, saj so baze podatkov medsebojno vse bolj povezane, kar ustvarja konkretne posledice za ljudi, katerih podatki so vključeni vanje (Amelung 2021, 154). Eurodac povezuje prošnje za azil s sumom kriminala na več načinov: z opuščanjem načela namenskosti zbiranja podatkov, z vse večjo količino osebnih podatkov, ki so povezani s kazenskimi postopki, in z razširjenim dostopom organov pregona do teh baz. Tako se krepi povezovanje kategorij, v katere umeščajo prosilce za azil, s kategorijami ilegaliziranosti in kriminala (ibid., 166). Pri tem je denimo pomembno omeniti, da so bili prstni odtisi prosilcev za azil na Nizozemskem dolga leta shranjeni v isti bazi podatkov kot prstni odtisi osumljencev kaznivih dejanj, brez jasno vzpostavljene pravne ali tehnične ločnice med njima. Posledično so se ti podatki lahko uporabljali tudi v kazenskih preiskavah. Že samo dejstvo, da so ti podatki dosegljivi in vključeni v iskalni postopek, pa lahko povzroči, da je posameznik obravnavan kot potencialni osumljenec (Btihaj 2013b, 51). Opaziti je torej, da se je uveljavil način upravljanja migracij, ki že same mehanizme migracijske kontrole preobraža v orodja kriminalizacije (Amelung 2021, 166). V tem kontekstu se kriminalizacija migracij ne izvaja samo z zakonodajo, ampak tudi s konkretnimi tehnološkimi praksami, ki prispevajo predvsem k »vidnosti« ljudi na poti. Po besedah Bigoja (2002, 81) »dati obraz kriminalu pomeni dati obraz migrantu«; v kontekstu biometričnih praks pa kriminalu damo prstni odtis (oziroma ga odvzamemo) in ga s tem umestimo v nadzorni režim. Odvzem prstnih odtisov je pri tem postal popolnoma običajna in normalizirana praksa v obravnavi ljudi na poti. Pri tem ni pomembno, kaj je nekdo storil, temveč zgolj, kdo je: človek z napačnim potnim listom (ali brez njega), rojen v napačnih okoliščinah ali pod napačno oblastjo (Btihaj 2013b, 51).

Strategije izmikanja in subverzije: reapropriacija prstnega odtisa

Kot odgovor na nadzorne mehanizme, s katerimi se srečujejo, ljudje na poti neprestano razvijajo domiselne pristope k izogibanju oviram, zankam in nevarnostim, ki jih tovrstni mehanizmi povzročajo. Milharčič Hladnik (2016, 40) je slednje opisala z izrazom »nadzor nad nadzorom«, saj gre za način nadzora nad lastnim življenjem, s katerim se zoperstavijo obstoječim režimom upravljanja. V tem kontekstu pristop avtonomije migracije razume tudi kot organiziranje vsakdanjega življenja na način, ki omogoča svobodo gibanja. Papadopoulos in Tsianos (2013, 191) sta to organizacijsko strukturo, ki vključuje izmenjavo informacij, nasvetov, taktik preživetja, skrivanja pred policijo, izogibanja nasilju in pomoč pri prečkanju mej (Čebron Lipovec in Zorn 2016, 62), poimenovala skupno-v-gibanju (*mobile commons*). Avtorja sta v okviru tega koncepta izpostavila pet glavnih kategorij praks, s katerimi ljudje na poti vzdržujejo mobilnost in preživetje. Mednje sodi znanje o mobilnosti, ki vključuje informacije o poteh, mejah, zavetiščih, policijskem nadzoru in strategijah izogibanja. To znanje se širi po komunikacijski infrastrukturi, ki sloni na osebnih stikih, digitalnih platformah, tehnologiji GPS in alternativnih bazah podatkov. Pomemben del predstavljajo tudi neformalne ekonomije, kot so iskanje zdravniške pomoči ali odvetnika, kratkotrajna dela, pošiljanje denarja, pridobivanje dokumentov in navigacija po tihotapskih mrežah. V skupno-v-gibanju sta avtorja umestila še skupnosti, ki gradijo zavezništva med lokalnimi skupinami, organizacijami in družbenimi gibanji, ter politiko skrbi, ki se kaže predvsem z mrežami medsebojne pomoči, čustvene podpore in skrbi za druge brez pričakovanja povračila (Papadopoulos in Tsianos 2013, 191–192).

Tovrstne prakse se jasno artikulirajo v zbranih pripovedih sogovornikov o lastnih izkušnjah na poti. Adam mi je denimo pripovedoval, da je med postopkom za azil ob vprašanju o državi, iz katere prihaja, navedel Libijo namesto Alžirije, saj je vedel, da obstaja večja verjetnost priznanja zaščite za ljudi iz držav, v katerih poteka vojna. Podobno je tudi Malik opisal, da je pri enem izmed več poskusov prečkanja hrvaške meje potoval skupaj z žensko, čeprav se prej nista poznala, saj je slišal, da imajo družine več možnosti za uspešen prehod. S takšnimi in podobnimi izkušnjami se je bilo mogoče srečati tudi v vsakdanjih interakcijah med ljudmi na poti. V času, ki sem ga preživela na RKS, sem opazila, da so si posamezniki pogos-

to izmenjevali informacije in priporočila ter si pomagali s tolmačenjem, čeprav se med seboj niso poznali. Na ta način sem tudi spoznala Rayana, ki je to neformalno mreženje dvignil na še višjo raven in prevzel aktivistično vlogo. Redno je obveščal (oziroma se vsaj trudil za to) javnost o razmerah v azilnem domu, aktivno sodeloval pri lastnem azilnem postopku in se zavestno vključeval v strategije, ki bi lahko oslabile učinke njegove Dublinske uredbe. Sam je vzpostavljal stike z organizacijami in poznavalci področja migracij, zbiral dokumentacijo, ki bi mu koristila v postopku in nenehno iskal načine za dosego svojega cilja. Opisane prakse nazorno kažejo, da ljudje na poti niso pasivni objekti nadzora, temveč aktivni subjekti, ki z različnimi strategijami sooblikujejo potek svojega življenja in mobilnosti. Te strategije pa gredo dlje od vsakdanjih oblik izmikanja »pravilom« ter segajo tudi do tistih najstrožjih nadzornih mehanizmov, med katerimi izstopa odvzem prstnih odtisov.

Že med prvim terenskim delom v Trstu in Proseku je bilo govora o strategijah izogibanja identifikaciji. Sogovorniki so namreč slišali, da si nekateri ljudje, katerih prstni odtis je že v sistemu, v strahu pred deportacijo namerno poškodujejo blazinice prstov. Načini, kako to narediti, so različni, večinoma pa naj bi šlo za zažiganje, brušenje, zarezovanje ali polivanje konic prstov s kislino. Čeprav jih je veliko pripovedovalo o tovrstnih primerih, pa je le eden to videl tudi sam. Povedal mi je, da si je njegov prijatelj zažgal blazinico na enem izmed prstov. Dodal je, da mu to ni pomagalo, saj so mu vzeli odtis cele roke in ga identificirali na podlagi tega.

O podobnih primerih pišejo tudi drugi raziskovalci in raziskovalke. Med njimi Aus (2006) opisuje primere prosilcev za azil na Švedskem, kjer so tovrstne prakse izvajali že v prvem letu delovanja Eurodaca. Aus ob tem navaja člana švedskega odbora za migracije, ki je poročal o »brazgotinah od rezanja z noži in britvicami ali celih prstnih odtisih, ki so popolnoma uničeni zaradi uporabe kisline ali kakšnega drugega izdelka« (2006, 13). Na sorodne prakse opozarja tudi Lewkowicz (2021), ki je to strategijo raziskal veliko podrobneje. V svojem delu opiše širši nabor tehnik, ki segajo od neposredne telesne samopohabe do bolj prefinjenih kratkotrajnih posegov. Med svojim terenskim delom je tako zasledil govor o metodi t. i. kemičnega pranja (*chemical wash)*, ki je med ljudmi na poti in tihotapci, s katerimi sodelujejo, znana pod imenom »pranje rib«. Gre za postopek,

ki na blazinici ne pusti vidnih sprememb, prstni odtis pa je kljub temu neberljiv (Lewkowicz 2021, 136). Podobno deluje tudi tehnika z uporabo lepila, ki se nato zažge, da se spremeni površina kože na prstih (ibid., 138). Avtor te postopke naslovi z izrazom »lomljenje prstnih odtisov« (*breaking the fingerprints*), pri čemer ugotavlja, da gre za razširjen termin med ljudmi na poti, ki označuje različne načine, kako prekiniti povezavo med prstnim odtisom in njegovim digitalnim zapisom v bazi Eurodac. To ni nujno telesno poškodovanje, temveč spada med druge strategije, ki preprečijo ujemanje med obstoječim biometričnim zapisom v sistemu in osebo, ki ga je dala (ibid., 141). Pri tem navede tri postopke: spreobrnjenje v drugo veroizpoved (npr. v krščanstvo, kar lahko spremeni obravnavo prošnje za azil), začasen »umik iz sistema« (dokler prstni odtis ni več izsledljiv[13]) in pravno izpodbijanje dublinske deportacije (ibid., 142–145).

Takšno izogibanje deportaciji sem zasledila tudi med opravljanjem terenskega dela v Trstu in Proseku. Posamezniki in skupine, dejavni pri nudenju pomoči in svetovanju ljudem na poti, so pogosto svetovali, da se v primeru registriranega prstnega odtisa, denimo v Avstriji, odpravijo čim bolj na jug Italije. Tam je zaradi razlik v upravnih postopkih na področju azila v različnih regijah države manjša verjetnost deportacije, pri čemer je jug znan po počasnejšem izvajanju in večji verjetnosti, da se postopki zavlečejo.

Prav tako sem pri svojem terenskem delu v Sloveniji zasledila tudi govor o strategiji izpodbijanja Dublinske uredbe. Gre za pravni postopek, pri katerem je treba dokazati posebne okoliščine, ki upravičijo drugačno obravnavo posameznika in preprečijo deportacijo v prvotno državo, v kateri je posameznik zaprosil za azil. V Sloveniji je to aktualno predvsem pri vračanju ljudi na Hrvaško, proti kateremu že vrsto let potekajo protesti. Med osrednjimi pobudniki tovrstnih prizadevanj je Ambasada Rog, ki je maja 2025 izdala novo številko glasila *Tukaj smo!*, v katerem so zbrana pričevanja prosilcev za azil o njihovih izkušnjah s hrvaško policijo pri mejnih postopkih. Kot ugotavljajo v Ambasadi Rog (2025), gre za »mehanizem sistematičnega pretepanja, ropanja, mučenja in ustrahovanja prosilcev za azil, ki

13 Gre za »rok trajanja« hrambe podatkov: osemnajst mesecev pri iregulariziranem prehodu meje ali deset let pri prosilcih za azil (Lewkowicz 2021, 143).

se največkrat konča z ilegalnim izgonom v BiH«. Takšne okoliščine lahko predstavljajo ključne argumente pri pravnem izpodbijanju deportacije oziroma pri poskusih »izničenja« prstnega odtisa v sistemu. Vendar morajo biti te razmere ustrezno dokazljive, da jih organi obravnavajo kot relevantne posebne okoliščine. Takšen primer je Pascal, ki je bil na hrvaški meji izpostavljen fizičnemu nasilju in drugim oblikam nehumanega ravnanja, kar je pri njem pustilo trajne fizične in psihične posledice. Ko so ga skušali vrniti na Hrvaško, se je pritožil in prav na podlagi teh okoliščin mu je uspelo preprečiti deportacijo. Podoben pristop uporablja tudi Rayan, ki ima v sistemu Eurodac registriran prstni odtis iz Španije. Kar se pri njem lahko uporabi kot posebna okoliščina, je to, da je pozitiven na HIV, v Španiji pa mu niso omogočili dostopa do nujno potrebnih zdravil. Po prihodu v Slovenijo je tako sprožil postopek, v katerem poskuša dokazati, da bi bila njegova vrnitev v Španijo življenjsko ogrožajoča, saj bi lahko brez ustrezne terapije bolezen napredovala s potencialno smrtnimi posledicami.

Poleg strategij, usmerjenih v vplivanje na že obstoječe prstne odtise v bazi Eurodac in na njihove posledice (npr. deportacijo), obstajajo tudi pristopi, ki jih lahko razumemo kot preventivne. Lewkowicz (2021, 145–146) ugotavlja, da ljudje na poti ne stremijo vedno k popolni nevidnosti v sistemu. Včasih zavestno ohranijo možnost prepoznavnosti, ko jim to prinaša določene koristi, denimo pri dostopu do zaščite ali storitev na lokalni ravni. Slednje potrjuje tudi Metcalfe (2021, 48), ki opozarja, da prstni odtisi ljudem na poti včasih ne predstavljajo omejitve, temveč jih v določenih primerih dojemajo tudi kot priložnost za pridobitev začasne varnosti, zmanjšanje policijskega delovanja in celo ohranjanje svobode gibanja. Strategije tako pogosto združujejo odpor in sodelovanje, odvisno od trenutnih razmer, tveganja, osebnih ciljev in političnih razmerij med državami (ibid.).

O podobni izkušnji mi je povedal tudi Sami. Slednjemu se je uspelo »izmuzniti« odvzemu prstnega odtisa v sedmih državah, ki jih je prečkal na poti do Slovenije. Ob prihodu je prstni odtis naposled le »dal«, saj si želi ostati tukaj. Ta primer dobro ilustrira preventivno strategijo, oblikovano na podlagi osebnega cilja in želje po bivanju v določeni državi. Zaradi informiranosti o določbah Dublinske uredbe je vedel, da mora biti Slovenija prva država, kjer bo oddal prstne odtise, če želi imeti čim večjo možnost, da tu ostane. Slednje pa poudari še en pomemben vidik skupnega-v-giba-

nju po definiciji Papadopoulos in Tsianos (2013), in sicer kategoriji znanje o mobilnosti in komunikacijska infrastruktura. Tovrstni preventivni in odzivni ukrepi namreč v veliki meri temeljijo na informiranosti ljudi o raznih postopkih, kar omogočajo različni kanali, preko katerih so tovrstne informacije distribuirane. To vključuje izmenjavo osebnih izkušenj, govoric in nasvetov tretjih oseb. V kontekstu strategij, povezanih s prstnimi odtisi, je Lewkowicz (2021, 143–144) prišel do zanimivega odkritja. Ugotovil je namreč, da na platformi YouTube obstajajo posnetki, ki nazorno prikažejo, kako »prelisičiti« preverjanje prstnih odtisov.[14] Takšno kroženje informacij pogosto služi izrazito praktičnemu cilju: prilagoditi se spremembam v režimu nadzora in izbrati trenutek ali način postopka, ki posamezniku v dani situaciji prinaša največ možnosti.

Takšna razpršenost in dostopnost informacij temelji tudi na natančnem poznavanju tehničnega delovanja, tako Dublinske uredbe kot tudi sistema Eurodac. Poleg tega, da se med ljudmi na poti pogosto omenja »trajanje« prstnih odtisov (prej omenjenih deset let za prosilce za azil in osemnajst mesecev za nedokumentirane priseljence), obstajajo tudi razlike v dojemanju »moči« prstnih odtisov. Pri tem se pojavi zanimiv uvid: ljudje na poti ustvarjajo lastne kategorične razlike med odtisi. Tako razlikujejo med velikimi/močnimi in majhnimi/šibkimi odtisi (Metcalfe 2022, 55). Te štiri kategorije so umeščene v štiri postopke, pri katerih so vzeti prstni odtisi. Od močnih/velikih do šibkih/majhnih si po mnenju ljudi na poti sledijo: »osebna izkaznica prebivalca, pridobljena po priznanem statusu begunca; negativna odločitev o prošnji za azil; zgolj izkaznica prosilca za azil; odsotnost izkaznice za azil, a zabeleženi policijski ali prstni odtisi, odvzeti s črnilom« (ibid.). Avtorica prav tako ugotavlja, da so prstni odtisi, vzeti s strani policije po postopku z uporabo črnila, obravnavani kot šibkejši kot tisti, ki so vzeti s pomočjo laserja (ibid.). To je zato, ker odtisi s črnilom veljajo za manj zanesljive in potrebujejo več časa, da so vneseni v bazo Eurodac, kar odpira možnost, da oseba pride v drugo državo in tam zaprosi za azil, preden so odtisi iz prve države vidni v sistemu. Razlika je tudi v sami

14 Posnetki vsebujejo predvsem priporočila, ki združujejo pravne informacije, osebne izkušnje, govorice in razne analize aktualnih meddržavnih politik (Lewkowicz 2021, 143).

tehnološki komponenti, saj so odtisi, vzeti z laserjem, bolj natančni, tisti, vzeti s črnilom, pa so zaradi količine črnila ali pritiska lahko slabše razvidni (ibid., 58). Da bi ohranili »šibkost« odtisov, nekateri uporabljajo domiselne prakse, kot so delna registracija (npr. oddaja le konic prstov brez celotne dlani), izogibanje nadaljnjim postopkom, ki bi »okrepili« odtis, ali celo namerno pridobivanje negativne odločbe o azilu v določeni državi, da bi se izognili podelitvi statusa in s tem »najmočnejšemu« odtisu (ibid., 56–57). Prav v tovrstnih praksah se najbolj kaže avtonomija migracij. Kljub nadzoru si ljudje na poti sami določajo omejitve glede na svoje vrednote in cilje, namesto da bi se popolnoma podredili pravilom sistema (ibid., 61).

Zaključne misli

Prstni odtis, na videz drobna in univerzalna telesna značilnost, ki se zdi samoumevna in nevtralna, se izkaže za nekaj veliko večjega, kot sprva kaže. Ta centimetrski telesni označevalec, strukturiran iz brazd in grebenov, v kontekstu migracij deluje kot stičišče tehnologij nadzora, političnih diskurzov in osebnih izkušenj ljudi na poti.

V članku sem izhajala iz vprašanja, kakšen pomen ima odvzem prstnega odtisa v sodobnih migracijskih politikah EU. Pri obravnavi sem se osredotočila na dvosmerno dinamiko: upravljalne mehanizme in odzive posameznikov, ki se jim zoperstavljajo. S teoretskim okvirom avtonomije migracij pokažem, da ljudje na poti niso zgolj objekt nadzora, temveč avtonomni posamezniki, ki v razpokah nadzornih režimov ustvarjajo prostor ustvarjalnosti, solidarnosti in izmikanja. Predstavim konkretne strategije odpora, ki so vezane na odvzem prstnih odtisov in vključujejo njihovo mutilacijo, zavračanje postopkov ali izkoriščanje pravnih vrzeli. S tem ponazorim, da nadzor nikoli ni vsemogočen in enosmeren. Razpoke in nedoslednosti v njem, skupaj z nepredvidljivimi odločitvami ljudi, ustvarjajo prostor, v katerem migranti, begunci in prosilci za azil preoblikujejo pomen in učinke prstnega odtisa ter ga iz orodja nadzora spreminjajo v sredstvo za dosego lastnih ciljev.

Čeprav se članek osredotoča predvsem na razmerje med (biometričnim) nadzorom in uporom, s poudarkom na avtonomiji migracij, ostaja en pomemben vidik nenaslovljen: vprašanje, kaj prstni odtis sploh predstavlja kot podatek in kakšni pomeni so mu dodeljeni s strani različnih praks

in kontekstov. Slednje je pomembno tako za antropološko razumevanje migracij kot tudi za kritično refleksijo evropskih politik, ki se pogosto predstavljajo kot nevtralne tehnične rešitve, a imajo izrazite politične in družbene posledice. Razni raziskovalci namreč poudarjajo, da t. i. »migracijski podatki« niso objektivni, temveč »krhki in spremenljivi konstrukti, prepojeni s političnimi, institucionalnimi in komercialnimi interesi« (Scheel idr. 2019, 583). Način, kako se ti podatki zbirajo, urejajo in uporabljajo, aktivno prispeva k temu, kako migracije razumemo in obravnavamo; kot pojav, ki ga je treba upravljati (Amelung 2021, 157). Ena izmed ključnih podatkovnih praks, ki dodatno podžiga vzpostavitev figure »krimigranta«, je gradnja klasifikacijskih shem znotraj biometričnih baz podatkov (kot je Eurodac). To omogoča razvrščanje ljudi na poti glede na vrsto zbranih podatkov, kar neposredno vpliva na njihovo (ne)dostopnost do zaščite, pravic in postopkov vračanja. Vzpostavitev določenega »tipa podatka« služi kot podlaga za vzpostavitev »tipa migranta« (prosilec za azil, begunec, iregulariziran priseljenec ipd.). Ta klasifikacijska logika pa lahko deluje tudi v nasprotni smeri. Ko podatke pregledujejo varnostni organi, se razlike med temi »tipi« zameglijo in vsi postanejo potencialni osumljenci (ibid.). To je potrdil tudi Sami, ko sva se pogovarjala o njegovem življenju v azilnem domu. Spregovoril je o tem, kako ves čas čuti nadzor ter da ga policija in varnostniki nenehno zaustavljajo. Zameglitev »tipov« je opazil tudi sam, kar je povedal z besedami: »Mešajo ljudi v domu. V domu smo vsi enaki. Vsi smo slabi.«[15]

Pomemben vidik je tudi, kako se biometrični podatki razlagajo, obdelujejo in primerjajo. Med državami se načini sicer razlikujejo, a pomembno vplivajo na to, kako se ljudi na poti obravnava znotraj sistema. Namesto da bi bili razumljeni in predstavljeni kot posamezniki z določenimi pravicami, se jih obravnava kot potencialno nevarnost, kot figure, ki ne sodijo v državljansko skupnost (Amelung 2021, 158). To kaže na širši problem biometričnih tehnologij: posameznika zreducirajo na eno telesno sled in ustvarijo enodimenzionalno podobo človeka, ki ne odraža njegove zgodbe, izkušenj in okoliščin. Gre za poenostavljeno obliko identifikacije, ki

15 Original: »*They mix people in the camp. In the camp we are all the same. We are all bad.*«

ustvarja razkorak med posameznikovo kompleksno identiteto in načinom, kako se ga obravnava v sistemu (Metcalfe 2022, 55). Prav to je lepo ubesedil Pascal, ki je o prstnih odtisih in Eurodacu povedal naslednje: »Ne zanimajo jih tvoje težave in osebno življenje, zanima jih samo politika. Preverijo samo podatke v sistemu – tvoja zgodba jih ne zanima.«[16]

Ta razsežnost biometričnega nadzora je ključna za celovitejše razumevanje upravljanja migracij preko tovrstnih tehnologij ter protipraks in odzivov, ki vzniknejo iz takšnih režimov.

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16 Original: »They don't care about your issues and personal life, they only care about politics. They only check information in the system – they don't care about your story.«

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Ana Ješe Perković[1]

Transnacionalni družbeni prostori potomcev Bosanskih priseljencev v Sloveniji

POVZETEK: Članek povzema temo transnacionalnih družbenih prostorov, obravnavano v raziskavi dejavnosti potomcev priseljencev. V tej kvalitativni raziskavi smo izvedli intervjuje s potomci priseljenske skupnosti iz Bosne in Hercegovine v Sloveniji, s katerimi smo raziskali, kako ohranjajo transnacionalne vezi s širšo sorodstveno mrežo ter kako izkoriščajo prednosti teh omrežij. S pomočjo odlomkov iz intervjujev predstavljamo mehanizem recipročnosti, vključenost potomcev v institucionalno, organizacijsko in poslovno sodelovanje znotraj širše transnacionalne mreže ter načine komuniciranja s transnacionalno sorodstveno skupino.

Ključne besede: transnacionalni družbeni prostori, priseljenci, potomci, Bosna in Hercegovina, Slovenija

ABSTRACT: The article explores the concept of transnational social spaces through a study of the activities and lived experiences of the descendants of immigrants. In this qualitative research, we conducted interviews with descendants of the immigrant community from Bosnia and Herzegovina in Slovenia, through which we explored how they maintain transnational ties with their extended kinship network and how they take advantage of the benefits of these networks. With the help of excerpts from the interviews, we present the mechanism of reciprocity, the involvement of descendants in institutional, organizational, and business cooperation within the broader transnational network, as well as the ways of communicating with the transnational kinship group.

Keywords: Transnational Social Spaces; Immigrants; Descendants; Bosnia and Herzegovina; Slovenia

Izvirni znanstveni članek / *Original scientific article*

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Uvod[2]

Politične entitete na Balkanu so ljudi združevale in razdruževale, meje so se pogosto spreminjale, zato se je lahko status »prebivalca« zelo hitro spremenil v »priseljenca«. Vzorci mobilnosti so se oblikovali že med notranjimi migracijami v Jugoslaviji. V šestdesetih in sedemdesetih letih prejšnjega stoletja je prišlo do množičnega priseljevanja iz Bosne in Hercegovine (BiH) v Slovenijo, zlasti v razvijajoča se industrijska središča (Malačič 2008). Z življenjem v pluri-lokalnih prostorih med Slovenijo in BiH so ti notranji priseljenci tlakovali pot dejavnostim, ki so pozneje postale transnacionalne.

Leta 1991 je Slovenija razglasila neodvisnost in z novimi nacionalnimi mejami se je spremenila tudi terminologija. Notranji priseljenci so postali mednarodni migranti, njihove mentalne predstave pa so se morale prilagoditi novim politikam pripadnosti, državljanstva in meja. Sorodstvene skupine so dobile transnacionalni značaj, ki je danes zaradi novih komunikacijskih tehnologij še izrazitejši.

Priseljenci imajo običajno neposredno osebno izkušnjo življenja v državi izvora, njihova komunikacija z domovino pa pogosto odraža globoko in intimno razumevanje tamkajšnjih razmer. Nasprotno pa imajo njihovi potomci omejeno ali nobene neposredne osebne izkušnje življenja v domovini svojih staršev. Njihova povezanost z državo izvora je pogosto posredovana in oblikovana skozi izkušnje ter pripovedi njihovih priseljenih prednikov. Kljub temu potomci uporabljajo omrežje »transnacionalne sorodstvene skupine« (Faist 2000), da dostopajo do socialnega in ekonomskega kapitala.

V naši kvalitativni raziskavi smo izvedli intervjuje s potomci priseljenske skupnosti iz Bosne in Hercegovine v Sloveniji. Cilj naše raziskave je bil ugotoviti, kakšno povezanost ohranjajo potomci priseljencev s širšo mrežo sorodnikov in prijateljev iz Bosne in Hercegovine, s širšo mrežo migrantov ter ali sodelujejo preko institucij in organizacij. Proučevali

2 Ta raziskava je bila izvedena v okviru raziskovalnega programa »Problemi avtonomije in identitet v času globalizacije« (P6-0194, 2019–2024), ki ga financira Javna agencija za znanstvenoraziskovalno in inovacijsko dejavnost Republike Slovenije (ARIS).

Članek je bil prvotno objavljen v angleškem jeziku v reviji Razprave in gradiva decembra 2024. Za objavo v reviji Monitor ISH je bil preveden v slovenski jezik in prirejen.

smo, kako potomci migrantov sodelujejo pri ustvarjanju transnacionalnih družbenih prostorov.

Uporabili smo kvalitativno metodo polstrukturiranih intervjujev. Z izseki iz teh intervjujev predstavljamo »mehanizem recipročnosti« (Faist 2000), vključenost potomcev v institucionalno, organizacijsko in poslovno sodelovanje s sorodstvenimi skupinami ter načine komunikacije na daljavo. S tem prispevkom želimo prispevati k raziskovanju transnacionalnih družbenih prostorov potomcev priseljencev, s poudarkom na potomcih iz Bosne in Hercegovine v Sloveniji.

Teoretski okvir in pregled literature

V prvem delu tega poglavja predstavljamo glavne koncepte in teoretski okvir, ki smo jih uporabili v naši raziskavi ter pri interpretaciji rezultatov. Osrednji konceptualni okvir smo zasnovali na delu Thomasa Faista (2000), ki velja za enega glavnih teoretikov koncepta transnacionalnih družbenih prostorov. V drugem delu poglavja podajamo kratek pregled slovenskih akademskih raziskav, povezanih z migracijami iz nekdanje Jugoslavije v Slovenijo.

S pojavom študij globalizacije se je razvila teorija transnacionalnih migracij in transnacionalizma, ki uvaja koncept transnacionalnih družbenih prostorov. Temelji na teoriji mrežnih migracij in sistemski teoriji migracij (Kurekova 2010, 5–6). Dolgo časa je vladalo prepričanje, da je ohranjanje stikov z lastno skupnostjo v državi izvora ovira za priseljence v državi priselitve, saj naj bi oviralo njihovo integracijo v priseljensko družbo. V tistem času so migracijske vzorce dojemali kot imigracija – prilagoditev – integracija, torej kot gibanje med dvema stabilnima skupnostma (Morokvasić 2008, 8). Vendar se je s teorijami transnacionalizma začela oblikovati nova perspektiva, ki te vezi dojema kot dragocene, saj omogočajo izmenjave, družbene inovacije in transformacijo (ibid.). Sprva so se teoretiki soočali s težavo poimenovanja tega pojava. Basch et al. (1994, 8) so transnacionalizem opredelili kot:

> proces, preko katerega priseljenci ustvarjajo in ohranjajo večplastne družbene odnose, ki povezujejo družbe izvora in naselitve. Te procese imenujemo transnacionalizem, da poudarimo, kako številni priseljenci danes gradijo družbena polja, ki presegajo geografske, kulturne in politične meje […]. Ključni element […] je množica vpletenosti, ki jih

transmigranti ohranjajo tako v izvorni kot v priselitveni družbi. Še vedno iščemo jezik, s katerim bi opisali te družbene položaje.

Leta 1996 je Manuel Castells zapisal, »ker naša družba doživlja strukturne transformacije, je razumljivo predpostaviti, da se trenutno pojavljajo nove prostorske oblike in procesi« (1996, 410). Koncept transnacionalnih družbenih prostorov naslavlja prav te transformacije. Basch et al. (1994) trdijo, da se transnacionalni družbeni prostori ustvarjajo skozi družbena omrežja in odnose, ki segajo prek nacionalnih meja. Poudarjajo, da teh prostorov ne oblikujejo zgolj migracije, temveč tudi zgodovinski, ekonomski in politični dejavniki. Thomas Faist (2000, 191) opredeli transnacionalne družbene prostore kot »kombinacije vezi, položajev v omrežjih in organizacij, ki presegajo meje več držav«.[3] Te prostore je mogoče vzdrževati na različne načine – s tehnologijo, potovanji ali kulturno izmenjavo.

Faist (2000, 195) identificira tri glavne mehanizme, ki spodbujajo transnacionalizacijo: a) recipročnost v majhnih skupinah, b) izmenjava v krogotokih in c) solidarnost v skupnostih. Na podlagi teh mehanizmov razvrsti transnacionalne družbene prostore v tri tipe: a) transnacionalne sorodstvene skupine, b) transnacionalni krogotoki in c) transnacionalne skupnosti[4] (ibid.). Transnacionalni družbeni prostori lahko priseljencem in njihovim potomcem nudijo občutek pripadnosti in identitete ter priložnosti za družbeno in kulturno izmenjavo in sodelovanje. »Ti prostori označujejo dinamične družbene procese, ne statične predstave vezi in položajev« (ibid., 191).

Danes večina raziskav o migracijah opozarja na pomen kontinuitete migracijske izkušnje. Božić in Kuti (2016) ugotavljata, da migrantske mreže v nekdanji Jugoslaviji dolgo niso bile v središču pozornosti družboslovja – raziskave so se osredotočale predvsem na migracijske tokove in težave

3 Faist (1998) je začel razvijati teoretski okvir na podlagi študije primera Turkov, ki so živeli v Nemčiji in bili dejavni na gospodarskem, političnem ali kulturnem področju v Turčiji.

4 V teoretskem okviru transnacionalnih družbenih prostorov Faist (2000, 195–196) definira diaspore kot transnacionalne skupnosti, ki predstavljajo tretjo raven povezanosti med »mednarodnimi selivci (angl. *movers*) in tistimi, ki ostanejo (angl. *stayers*)«. Te skupnosti so povezane »z gostimi in močnimi družbenimi ter simbolnimi vezmi skozi čas in prostor«. Ključni pogoj za diasporo je, »da se skupnosti brez prostorske bližine povežejo prek recipročnosti in solidarnosti ter dosežejo visoko stopnjo družbene kohezije in skupen repertoar simbolnih ter kolektivnih reprezentacij«. (ibid.) »Diaspore lahko imenujemo transnacionalne skupnosti le, če člani razvijejo tudi pomembne družbene in simbolne vezi z državo sprejemnico« (ibid., 197).

postsocialističnega prehoda. V zadnjih letih pa so različni avtorji (Ćudić et al. 2023; Savić-Bojanić in Jevtić 2022; Dimova in Wolff 2015; Babić 2013) proučevali migracijske procese in migrante iz Bosne in Hercegovine. Emirhafizović et al. (2013) na primer obravnavajo migracije iz BiH v različne države – od ZDA, Norveške, Švice, Nemčije, Avstrije do Slovenije.

Slovenski raziskovalni prostor prav tako ponuja nabor raziskav o bosanskih migrantih. Raziskave o bosanskih priseljencih in njihovih potomcih v Sloveniji vključujejo študijo Silve Mežnarić (1986) *Bosanci: A kuda idu Slovenci nedeljom*, ki je bila prva celostna raziskava bosanskih, takrat še notranjih priseljencev. Intervjuvala je Bosance v Sloveniji in proučevala njihove navade v vsakdanjem življenju. V letih 2000–2001 sta Dekleva in Razpotnik (2013) izvedla raziskavo o mladih potomcih migrantov iz nekdanje Jugoslavije v Sloveniji, s poudarkom na delinkvenci in nasilju. Druga študija se je osredotočila na demografski vidik migracij v Slovenijo: *Učinki priseljevanja v Slovenijo po drugi svetovni vojni* (Josipovič in Serafin 2006). Mateja Sedmak (2018) se je v svojem članku posvetila mladim potomkam priseljencev iz nekdanje Jugoslavije, njihovi identiteti in kritiki poenostavljenega razumevanja kulturne asimilacije. Cukut Krilić (2009) je v monografiji *Spol in migracija* podrobno pregledala literaturo o ženskih migracijah v Sloveniji, med drugim pa omenja tudi raziskave Špele Kalčić o oblačilnih praksah bošnjaških moških in žensk v Sloveniji ter raziskavi Natalije Vrečer (2007) in Hazemine Đonlić (2003) o izkušnjah prisilnih migrantov iz BiH. Barbara Gornik (2020) obravnava otroku prijazen pristop k integraciji otrok migrantov in razpravlja o načelih takega pristopa v oblikovanju politik. Zorana Medarić (2024) pa se loteva vprašanja vključevanja priseljenskih otrok (tudi iz BiH) preko rabe jezika v slovenskih šolah. Pričujoči članek zapolnjuje vrzel in prispeva k razvoju raziskovalnega polja o transnacionalnih družbenih prostorih priseljencev.

Spreminjanje meja: od notranjih do mednarodnih migracij

Za umestitev naše raziskave v širši kontekst je treba na kratko predstaviti zgodovino notranjih migracij v Jugoslaviji. Del te zgodovine so bili starši naših sogovornikov, kar je prispevalo k današnji povezanosti njihovih otrok s širšim migrantskim omrežjem.

Delovne migracije v Slovenijo so bile tradicionalno najštevilnejše iz Bosne in Hercegovine, pri čemer sta bili najštevilnejši dve etnični skupnosti:

Bošnjaki in bosanski Srbi. Čeprav sta bili ozemlji Bosne in Hercegovine ter Slovenije pod isto oblastjo že od konca 19. stoletja, ko je BiH prešla pod Avstro-Ogrsko, je do večjega priliva bosanskih priseljencev v Slovenijo prišlo šele po drugi svetovni vojni. Komunistično vodstvo je ugotovilo, da dela prebivalstva ni mogoče vključiti na trg dela, zato so odprli državne meje za več sto tisoč migrantov (Božić in Kuti 2016, 415). Migracije delavcev iz Jugoslavije v druge evropske države so sprožile obsežnejše preseljevanje znotraj Jugoslavije. Gospodarski razvoj je močno vplival tako na notranje kot zunanje migracije, pa tudi na oblikovanje pluri-lokalnih družbenih prostorov znotraj in onkraj meja Jugoslavije (ibid., 412).

Migracijski tokovi znotraj Jugoslavije so bili intenzivni, saj je država omogočala prosto gibanje delavcev, ki so bili usmerjeni v različne dele države glede na stopnjo razvitosti posamezne republike (Malačič 2008, 46). Delavci iz Slovenije, ki so odšli v Nemčijo, so za seboj pustili prazna delovna mesta, medtem ko je močna industrializacija Slovenije ustvarila potrebo po novi delovni sili, ki je večinoma prihajala iz manj razvitih podeželskih območij po Jugoslaviji. Tok migracij v Slovenijo je bil predvsem posledica industrijskega gospodarskega razvoja, ki je bil najintenzivnejši v sedemdesetih in osemdesetih letih 20. stoletja (Kržišnik Bukić 2010, 502). Za potrebe nekvalificirane ali polkvalificirane delovne sile v industrijskih središčih Slovenije (kot npr. Jesenice in Velenje) so v Slovenijo prihajali delavci s svojimi družinami. Najštevilnejši so bili delavci iz Bosne in Hercegovine, med njimi največ Bošnjakov in Srbov (ibid.). Upravne meje med republikami Jugoslavije niso predstavljale »ovire za razvoj večplastnih in prepletenih družbenih vezi ter pluri-lokalnih omrežij« (Božić in Kuti 2016, 412). »Komunistična partija je spodbujala vezi med različnimi etničnimi skupinami in vzpostavljala družbene vezi med mladimi iz vseh republik na podlagi ideologije 'bratstva in enotnosti'. Družbeni prostori so se čez meje republik oblikovali zlasti med pripadniki iste etnične skupine. […] Ti prostori so bili in deloma še vedno so vzdržljiva omrežja izmenjave in podpore, ne glede na državne meje« (ibid.).

Razpad Jugoslavije leta 1991 je povzročil nastanek novih mednarodnih meja ter nove politike pripadnosti in izključevanja. Nova politična realnost je notranje priseljence postavila v nov položaj – postali so transnacionalni migranti in niso več imeli državljanstva države, v kateri so prebi-

vali. Z novimi nacionalnimi mejami se je spremenila tudi terminologija, a vzorci so ostali podobni. »Nove« manjšine so začele ustanavljati društva in nevladne organizacije, da bi se organizirale in institucionalizirale svoja omrežja (Medvešek et al. 2023, 218).

Etnične skupine iz nekdanje Jugoslavije v Sloveniji še niso priznane kot avtohtone narodne manjšine. Kržišnik Bukić (2014, 151) jih poimenuje kot »neustavne narodne manjšine«. Te skupnosti si prizadevajo za priznanje, vendar je slovenska država doslej naredila le majhen korak v tej smeri. Leta 2011 je Državni zbor sprejel Deklaracijo RS o položaju narodnih skupnosti pripadnikov narodov nekdanje SFRJ v Republiki Sloveniji. Šele leta 2024 pa je Državni zbor potrdil Zakon o uresničevanju kulturnih pravic pripadnikov narodnih skupnosti narodov nekdanje Socialistične federativne republike Jugoslavije v Republiki Sloveniji, ki predvideva tudi finančno podporo društvom in kulturnim organizacijam teh skupnosti v Sloveniji.[5]

Najbolj vidna oblika uradno organizirane in priznane skupnosti je verska. Bošnjaki in Srbi so registrirali svoje verske skupnosti (muslimansko in pravoslavno), v okviru katerih se organizirajo kot skupnost, ohranjajo transnacionalne vezi z domovino in migrantskimi skupnostmi po svetu ter prejemajo finančno podporo slovenske države, a nimajo političnega vpliva.

Metodologija

V naši raziskavi se osredotočamo na potomce priseljencev iz Bosne in Hercegovine, ki živijo v Sloveniji, t. i. drugo generacijo. Cilj raziskave je bil razumeti naravo njihove povezanosti s »prostorsko mobilnimi in nemobilnimi osebami« (Faist 2000, 192) znotraj širših migrantskih mrež, ali sodelujejo s širšo sorodstveno skupino ali celo v transnacionalnih krogotokih

5 Tretji člen tega zakona pravi: »(1) Kulturne pravice pripadnikov narodov nekdanje SFRJ v RS obsegajo pravico do ohranjanja in razvoja identitete, pravico do gojenja kulture, pravico do ohranjanja kulturne dediščine na ozemlju Republike Slovenije, pravico do ohranjanja lastne kulturne in družbene zgodovine, pravico do uporabe maternega jezika in pisave, pravico do ustvarjanja in razširjanja medijskih programskih vsebin, pravico do lastnega založništva in druge kulturne pravice ter se uresničujejo s projekti pripadnikov narodov nekdanje SFRJ v RS. (2) Kulturne pravice iz prejšnjega odstavka se zagotavljajo z namenom ohranjanja in razvoja narodnostne identitete pripadnikov narodov nekdanje SFRJ v RS ter utrjevanja zavesti vseh drugih prebivalcev Republike Slovenije o njihovi prisotnosti in delovanju v družbi, zagotavljanja njihove enakopravne vključenosti v družbi, spodbujanja medkulturnega dialoga, ohranjanja strpnosti ter razvijanja sožitja vseh prebivalcev Republike Slovenije.« (PISRS)

na gospodarskem, kulturnem ali družbenem področju ter ugotoviti, ali ti potomci sodelujejo pri oblikovanju transnacionalnih družbenih prostorov.

Uporabili smo kvalitativno raziskovalno metodo z uporabo polstrukturiranih intervjujev. Pripravljena vprašanja so služila kot osnovna struktura pogovorov, njihov vrstni red in poudarke pa smo prilagajali glede na odgovore sogovornikov. Intervjuji so bili izvedeni v letih 2020 in 2021. Zaradi omejitev, povezanih s covid-19, je bilo osem intervjujev izvedenih osebno, vsak pa je trajal dve uri ali več, medtem ko so bili štirje izvedeni prek spleta (Zoom) in so bili krajši, saj je bilo zaradi pomanjkanja osebnega stika vzdušje manj sproščeno, odgovori pa bolj jedrnati. Intervjuvancem je bila zagotovljena anonimnosti. V intervjujih niso bili zbrani osebni podatki. Za zagotovitev anonimnosti smo našim sogovornikom v nadaljnji analizi dodelili izmišljena imena. Udeleženci so bili obveščeni o namenu raziskave, prostovoljni udeležbi, pravici do odstopa ter zaupnosti. Vsi intervjuji so bili izvedeni v slovenščini, zvočno posneti, prepisani in varno shranjeni.

Čeprav je vzorec sogovornikov majhen, smo stremeli k notranji heterogenosti. Uporabili smo metodo snežne kepe za iskanje sogovornikov iz Bosne in Hercegovine, pri čemer smo začeli z osebnimi stiki, ki so privedli do dodatnih udeležencev. Poleg tega smo se udeležili dogodka, ki sta ga organizirala Zveza zvez kulturnih društev narodov in narodnosti nekdanje Jugoslavije v Sloveniji (ExYumco) in časopis Dnevnik, kjer so bili prisotni predstavniki srbskih in bošnjaških društev, kar nam je omogočilo nadaljnje kontakte za intervjuje.[6] Sogovorniki se razlikujejo po spolu, starosti, izobrazbi, etničnem poreklu (bosanski Srbi in Bošnjaki) ter veri (pravoslavni, muslimani, ateisti). Najmlajši sogovornik je bil star 32 let, najstarejši 57 let, povprečna starost pa je bila 41,5 leta. Med dvanajstimi sogovorniki je bilo devet žensk in trije moški. Upoštevali smo tudi geografsko raznolikost znotraj Slovenije in izbrali sogovornike iz Ljubljane, Jesenic, Velenja in Mengša; prva tri mesta so bila glavni industrijski centri že od 60.

6 Zavedamo se, da je bosanska identiteta večplastna in zajema več etničnih identitet. Kljub temu smo se odločili opraviti intervjuje s predstavniki dveh etničnih skupin: Bošnjaki in bosanskimi Srbi. Eden od razlogov za to odločitev je dejstvo, da so po uradnih podatkih Statističnega urada Republike Slovenije (SURS) priseljenci iz Bosne in Hercegovine obravnavani kot enotna skupina, zaradi česar iz podatkov ni mogoče razbrati njihove etnične pripadnosti.

let prejšnjega stoletja, kamor se je priselilo največ priseljencev iz BiH. Vsi sogovorniki so potomci ekonomskih priseljencev iz Bosne in Hercegovine, ki so v Slovenijo prišli med letoma 1960 in 1990 v času Jugoslavije. Osredotočili smo se na potomce ekonomskih priseljencev zaradi primerljivosti, analizo beguncev iz vojne v 90. letih pa smo pustili za prihodnje raziskave. Čeprav sogovorniki ne predstavljajo enotne generacije zaradi časovnega razpona med njimi, so si njihovi starši delili enako ekonomsko motivacijo za selitev v Slovenijo: boljše življenje.

Pri analizi intervjujev smo se oprli na metodo »tematske analize« (Maguier in Delahunt, 2017), s pomočjo smo identificirali vzorce oziroma teme znotraj kvalitativnih podatkov. Tematska analiza je metoda in ne metodologija, kar pomeni, da ni vezana na nobeno partikularno epistemološko ali teoretsko perspektivo. Cilj tematske analize je prepoznati teme, tj. vzorce v podatkih, ki so pomembni ali zanimivi, ter te teme uporabiti za obravnavo raziskovalnega vprašanja (ibid.). Pri naši analizi podatkov smo identificirali tri glavne teme, ki so se pojavljale ter ponavljale pri vseh naših intervjujih: 1. Recipročnost: socialna in ekonomska podpora, 2. Institucionalno sodelovanje preko kulturnih društev, 3. Komunikacija in sodobna tehnologija. S pomočjo teh tem smo raziskovali ustvarjanje in ohranjanje transnacionalnih družbenih prostorov pri bosanskih potomcih.

Transnacionalni družbeni prostori in potomci bosanskih priseljencev

Glede na močno priseljensko tradicijo, politične okoliščine in dejstvo, da so Bosanci danes največja skupina priseljencev v Sloveniji, smo predpostavljali, da Bosanci v Sloveniji ustvarjajo in ohranjajo transnacionalne družbene prostore s pripadniki iste skupine na različnih lokacijah. Vendar pa moramo upoštevati, da iz Bosne in Hercegovine izhaja več različnih etničnih skupin in da se transnacionalni družbeni prostori oblikujejo znotraj posameznih etničnih skupin. V naših intervjujih smo se osredotočili na potomce različnih etničnih skupin iz Bosne, predvsem Bošnjakov in Srbov.[7] Ugotovili smo, da ohranjajo vezi s transnacionalno sorodstveno

7 Naš vzorec intervjuvancev je premajhen, da bi lahko primerjali prakse Bošnjakov in bosanskih Srbov. Čeprav večjih razlik v delovanju nismo zaznali.

skupino in širšim migrantskim omrežjem. Večina sodeluje v socialnih in kulturnih dejavnostih, kot je članstvo v kulturnih in športnih društvih, povezanih z Bosno in Hercegovino. Le redki sodelujejo v gospodarskih dejavnostih, predvsem z nudenjem pomoči tistim, ki želijo priti v Slovenijo in najti zaposlitev. Nihče izmed naših sogovornikov ni politično aktiven v Bosni in Hercegovini, vendar pa preko kulturnih društev sodelujejo v političnem diskurzu v Sloveniji, predvsem z zagovarjanjem večjih pravic za etnične skupine iz nekdanje Jugoslavije (Kržišnik Bukić 2014).

Recipročnost: socialna in ekonomska podpora

Glavni razlog za selitev Bosancev v Slovenijo v času Jugoslavije so bile predvsem gospodarske koristi. Poleg izboljšanja lastnega življenja in življenja svojih otrok so finančno pomagali tudi družini, ki je ostala v Bosni in Hercegovini (prostorsko nemobilnim osebam). Prisotna je bila »družbena izmenjava v obliki medsebojnih obveznosti in pričakovanj akterjev« (Faist 2000, 192). Recipročnost kot družbena norma se je izvajala in ostaja prisotna tudi pri potomcih v Sloveniji. Potomci pomagajo članom svoje mreže, zlasti kadar ti želijo migrirati v Slovenijo, obenem pa imajo tudi sami koristi od te mreže, na primer informacije pri iskanju novih delavcev, poslovnih priložnosti v Bosni in Hercegovini ali pri ohranjanju svoje kulture v Sloveniji.

Naši sogovorniki so posebej izpostavili obdobje po razpadu Jugoslavije, v času vojne v Bosni in Hercegovini, ko se je komunikacija z mrežo Bosancev močno okrepila. Migrantske skupnosti v Sloveniji so takrat nudile ogromno pomoč beguncem in gostile številne družinske člane in prijatelje. Amila se spominja: »Ko je bila vojna, sem imela tukaj begunce. Joj, koliko jih je bilo!«

Pomoč skupnostim v Bosni in Hercegovini se nadaljuje še danes, v različnih oblikah – od finančne do socialne. Večina sogovornikov je omenila pomoč pri pridobivanju delovnih dovoljenj in druge dokumentacije za stalno prebivanje. Solidarnost z novimi priseljenci v Slovenijo je velika, kot pravi Samir: »Dosti pomagamo, ne poznajo vseh zakonov, zato jim razložimo, moraš to narediti pa tko. Recimo v podjetju, kjer jaz delam, jih je iz moje vasi sigurno prišlo enih pet, ki sem jih jaz vse zaposlil. Vsi so prišli iz Bosne. Delali so preko Študenta in se vpisali v šolo.«

Leila se spominja, kako je pomagala priseljencem iz Bosne: »Deset let sem delala v podjetju, ki je potrebovalo delavce. Pripravili smo vso dokumentacijo. Pomagali smo sorodnikom, znancem in naprej. Povezali smo se z Zavodom za zaposlovanje iz Bosne in poslali so tiste, ki so bili pripravljeni delati.«

To je bil poslovni pristop podjetja, kjer je delala Leila, vendar je najprej pomagala sorodstvu in jim ponudila delo v Sloveniji. Šele ko je izčrpala vse osebne stike, se je podjetje obrnilo na Zavod za zaposlovanje v BiH.

Samir pomaga tudi s pošiljanjem denarja v BiH:

> »Pomagamo [stricu], ima dva otroka. Stric je vojni invalid. Ne more delati, ima ženo in dva otroka. Mali hodi dol v šolo, je tudi odličen učenec, gre v medicinsko šolo. Jaz in bratranec, ki je iz Grosuplja, mu vsak mesec pošljeva po 100 EUR, da ima za stroške. Ker vem, da stric ne zmore, ima premajhen penzion – 300 mark, to je 150 EUR, tako da ga mi šolamo in mu pomagamo, da konča to šolo, ker mu gre dobro.«

Institucionalizirana solidarnost se odvija preko organizacij v Sloveniji in Bosni in Hercegovini. Asja je novim priseljencem iz BiH pomagala preko društva, ki ga je soustanovila v Velenju:

> V društvu smo imeli zelo velike cilje tudi glede pomoči ekonomskim emigrantov iz Bosne. Takrat je bila Slovenija še v zlati dobi, ko je ekonomsko cvetela, zaposlovanje je bilo na vrhuncu. Takrat je ogromno teh delavcev emigrantov začelo v Sloveniji delati. Smo pa pri tem videli tudi razna izkoriščanja, npr. pri izpolnjevanju vizumov, ki so kar naenkrat »koštali«. Takrat so bili še aktualni vizumi, na podlagi katerih so izdajali delovna dovoljenja. Zdaj je to postalo enotno. […] Mi v društvu smo se odločili, da naredimo mini biro delavnico, na kateri bi vse te ljudi naučili, da sami izpolnjujejo formularje, da ne bi vsakih šest mesecev ali kadarkoli jim ti vizumi potečejo, ponovno plačevali. Na koncu to ni bila več delavnica, smo bili kar biro, na katerega so ljudje prihajali in smo mi izpolnjevali formularje.

Asja tudi pojasnjuje, da so ti delavci po nekaj letih pripeljali svoje družine v Slovenijo, njihovo društvo pa jim je pomagalo pri vključevanju v lokalno okolje: »[…] te družine sprejeli v naše okolje. Jim razkazali mesto, jim pokazali osnovne institucije, na katere se bodo morali obračati. Po navadi smo

šli z njimi na prve pogovore ob vpisu otroka v šolo ali v vrtec. Potem smo jih kako leto spremljali oziroma so se oni na nas obračali s prošnjami po informacijah ali pa recimo za pomoč pri pisanju oziroma pri prevajanju.«

Te mreže svojim članom omogočajo dostop do več »ekonomskega, človeškega in socialnega kapitala« (Faist 2000, 193), pri čemer je število oseb v mreži, ki so pripravljene ali dolžne pomagati, ključno. »Informacije so prav tako koristne« (ibid.), in večja kot je mreža, več koristi nudi.

Opazili smo tudi sledi gospodarskega sodelovanja med potomci bosanskih priseljencev in poslovno skupnostjo v Bosni in Hercegovini. BiH je četrta najpomembnejša trgovinska partnerica Slovenije tako po izvozu kot po uvozu (Izvozno okno[8]). Veliko podjetij, ki poslujejo z BiH, je v lasti pripadnikov bosanske skupnosti v Sloveniji. Ena izmed naših sogovornic ima podjetje, ki uvaža izdelke iz BiH v Slovenijo, pri čemer uporablja svoje sorodstvene povezave v Bosni za uspešno poslovanje. Podjetniki pogosto izkoriščajo prednosti, ki jih imajo zaradi poznavanja obeh držav, kot so znanje jezika, mreže prijateljev in znancev v izvorni državi, kar vse omogoča lažji vstop na tržišče (ibid., 195).

Institucionalno sodelovanje preko kulturnih društev

Poleg gospodarskega sodelovanja v okviru transnacionalnih sorodstvenih skupin obstaja tudi institucionalno sodelovanje med kulturnimi društvi v Sloveniji in Bosni in Hercegovini. Ena izmed naših sogovornic je izpostavila sodelovanje preko društva:

> Ustanovljeno je bilo leta 2005 na pobudo druge generacije priseljencev. Predvsem zaradi tega, ker nismo bili zadovoljni s ponujenim programom in aktivnostmi, ki so jih nudila druga društva. Same potrebe druge generacije so bile bistveno drugačne od potreb prve generacije. Zbrala se je skupina študentov in ustanovili smo društvo. Najprej je bilo društvo namenjeno reprezentiranju kulture, projektnemu delu in humanitarnemu projektu. Predvsem projektom ozaveščanja, promociji bosansko-hercegovske kulture, pa tudi sodelovanju s kulturnimi institucijami v Bosni.

8 Izvozno okno, https://www.izvoznookno.si/drzave/bosna-in-hercegovina/poslovno-sodelovanje-s-slovenijo/ (25. maj 2024).

Po podatkih Medvešek et al. (2023) je v Sloveniji registriranih 17 nevladnih organizacij (društev) bošnjaške skupnosti. Gre predvsem za kulturna in športna društva, katerih glavne dejavnosti so izobraževalne. V Sloveniji je registriranih tudi 36 nevladnih organizacij, ki zastopajo srbsko skupnost, vključno z bosanskimi Srbi. V svojem poročilu Medvešek in drugi (ibid., 222) analizirajo dejavnosti priseljenskih nevladnih organizacij in ugotavljajo, da imajo te ključno vlogo pri gradnji močnih družbenih omrežij in podpornih sistemov, saj priseljence vključujejo v družbeno življenje preko društev. Ena njihovih pomembnih nalog je ohranjanje prvotne kulture in jezika priseljencev, zavzemanje za vključitev priseljenskih glasov v javne razprave in oblikovanje politik ter zaščita pravic in interesov priseljencev (ibid.). To vključuje sodelovanje z državnimi organi in drugimi organizacijami pri reševanju vprašanj, kot so diskriminacija, dostop do izobraževanja in zdravstvenega varstva ter drugih izzivov, s katerimi se sooča priseljenska skupnost (ibid.).

Organizacije prav tako organizirajo ali sodelujejo v dobrodelnih akcijah tako v državi gostiteljici kot tudi v državi izvora (ibid.). Medvešek et al. (2023, 223) poudarjajo, da priseljenske organizacije delujejo tudi kot predstavniki svojih skupnosti v državi izvora in imajo pomembno vlogo pri vzpostavljanju stikov z institucijami in organizacijami v teh državah. Nekateri naši sogovorniki so potrdili, da aktivno sodelujejo v teh društvih, prispevajo k ohranjanju in promoviranju svoje kulture ter vzdržujejo mreže, ki se oblikujejo preko teh organizacij.

Komunikacija in sodobna tehnologija

Tehnološki preboj na področju komunikacij in potovanj je skrčil svet in pospešil nastanek transnacionalnih družbenih prostorov. Castells (1996) je že v 90. letih 20. stoletja poudaril vlogo tehnologije pri oblikovanju transnacionalnih družbenih prostorov. Trdil je, da je razvoj informacijske in komunikacijske tehnologije ljudem omogočil komunikacijo in interakcijo prek meja, kar je ustvarilo nove oblike družbene in kulturne izmenjave. Danes je komunikacija še intenzivnejša ter nove oblike družbenih in kulturnih izmenjav še bolj prisotne.

Slovenija ter Bosna in Hercegovina sta geografsko blizu, zato pogoste in cenovno ugodne letalske povezave med državama ne igrajo bistvene vloge.

Vendar pa so takšne povezave ključne za ohranjanje vezi z globalno bosansko mrežo. Po besedah naših sogovornikov so njihove transnacionalne sorodstvene skupine razpršene po Evropi in po svetu. Schengenski režim in nacionalne meje v Evropi lahko predstavljajo oviro za pogoste obiske. Kljub temu pa je, kot že omenjeno, vstop Bosne in Hercegovine v vizumski liberalizacijski režim z EU leta 2010 olajšal potovanja po Evropi.

Potomci migrantov so pogosto označeni kot »digitalni domorodci« (Prensky 2001), kar pomeni, da so odrasli v obdobju, ko so digitalne tehnologije vseprisotne in integrirane v vsakdanje življenje. Zato so običajno bolj vešči in samozavestni pri uporabi komunikacijske tehnologije, kot so družbena omrežja, aplikacije za sporočanje, videoklici in elektronska pošta, v primerjavi s starši, ki so pogosto tako imenovani »digitalni priseljenci« (ibid.) in so se morali teh tehnologij naučiti kasneje v življenju. Potomci, ki so odraščali z instant sporočanjem in družbenimi omrežji, pogosto dajejo prednost hitri in neposredni komunikaciji. Uporabljajo aplikacije, kot so WhatsApp, Facebook, Messenger ali Instagram, za stik z družino in prijatelji v domovini, kjer se pogovarjajo v realnem času in si pogosteje izmenjujejo informacije kot njihovi starši, ki se pogosto še zanašajo na klasične oblike komuniciranja, kot so telefonski klici ali pisma.

Za mlajše generacije so komunikacijske tehnologije neločljiv del vsakdanjega življenja in služijo kot ključno orodje za ohranjanje vezi z državo izvora. Tehnologijo uporabljajo ne le za stik z družino in prijatelji, temveč tudi za dostop do novic, sodelovanje na kulturnih dogodkih in dejavnostih ter vključevanje v spletne skupnosti, povezane z njihovo dediščino.

V naši raziskavi smo opazili, da so bosanski potomci zelo dejavni pri ohranjanju socialnih stikov s širšo družino in prijatelji. Vsi naši sogovorniki komunicirajo s svojimi sorodniki, ki živijo bodisi v Bosni in Hercegovini bodisi drugod po Evropi (predvsem v Avstriji, Švici, Nemčiji, na Švedskem, v Združenem kraljestvu, Italiji) ter celo v ZDA in Avstraliji. Uporabljajo sodobno komunikacijsko tehnologijo in vsi potrjujejo, da jim to omogoča bolj redno komunikacijo. Najpogosteje uporabljajo aplikacije, kot so Viber, Skype, Facetime, Facebook, Messenger, pa tudi običajni telefon.

Leila je hvaležna za sodobno tehnologijo: »Ja, hvala bogu imamo danes Skype, Viber, WhatsApp … Poleti, ko pridejo dol, če je le možno, jih grem pač pogledat v Bosno.«

Samir se spominja, kako je bilo komunicirati v preteklosti brez moderne tehnologije in aplikacij:

> Je lažje. Prej tega ni bilo, bilo je vse drago. Spomnim se, da sem kartico za telefon »filal« za 500 tolarjev, samo pokličeš, pa več nimaš. Ko sem imel punco dol, sem samo »filal« telefon. Ko sem končal službo, sem šel vsak vikend dol. Ona je bila dol, jaz sem bil tukaj. S tremi ali štirimi, ki smo delali skupaj, smo se peljali z enim avtom, da smo si delili stroške. Ali pa sem se peljal enkrat z enim, drugič z drugim. Zdaj pa s temi aplikacijami se lahko bolj pogosto pogovarjaš, bolj si povezan.

Pogostost komunikacije se giblje od vsakodnevne do tedenske, mesečne ali letne. Odvisna je od bližine sorodstvenih vezi – najožji družinski člani (starši, bratje, sestre) so v pogostejšem stiku kot širša družina. Prav tako tesni prijatelji bolj redno komunicirajo. Amila, ki je pred leti prestala operacijo hrbtenice in bila štiri mesece negibljiva, se spominja: »Povem, da me je žlahta od daleč pa od blizu povprek klicala. To je pa res, če je kaj veselega, se kliče, če je kaj tko, vsi kličejo, in sem majčkeno imela stike, ko sem bila bolna. Očitno je za operacijo moja mama povedala sestri, sestra svojim otrokom.«

Komunikacija s starejšimi generacijami poteka še vedno preko tradicionalnih medijev: »Ja, po telefonu. Dve leti nazaj, ko je bila mama še živa, sem kupila laptop, ker sem imela tudi doma skype, da bi se lahko videli s pokojno mamo, zdaj pa z mojo taščo, pa ni bilo interesa, da bi se oni s to škatlo ubadali,« pravi Amila.

Geografska bližina Slovenije in Bosne in Hercegovine omogoča pogosto mobilnost in obiske, kar krepi družinske vezi. Večina naših sogovornikov je v otroštvu pogosteje obiskovala BiH kot danes. Kljub temu nekateri še vedno obiskujejo sorodnike in prijatelje vsako leto, običajno enkrat letno. Nekateri imajo v BiH tudi hiše in tja hodijo pogosteje ter za daljše obdobje. Ko sorodniki iz Evrope potujejo v Bosno, pogosto potujejo skozi Slovenijo in se ustavijo pri njih.

Na splošno, čeprav tako potomci kot njihovi starši uporabljajo komunikacijsko tehnologijo za ohranjanje stikov z izvorno državo, se način in stopnja vključenosti teh tehnologij v njihovo življenje med generacijami močno razlikujeta – zaradi generacijskih, kulturnih in tehnoloških razlik.

Na podlagi naše kvalitativne raziskave lahko povzamemo tri glavne ugotovitve. Potomci bosanskih migrantov v Sloveniji so del širšega omrežja bosanskih migrantov po svetu. Redno komunicirajo med seboj in pomagajo drugim članom omrežja, kadar je to potrebno. Recipročnost se uresničuje predvsem znotraj transnacionalnih sorodstvenih skupin. Naši sogovorniki omenjajo pomoč drugim članom sorodstvene skupine, ki želijo emigrirati iz Bosne in Hercegovine – pomagajo jim z informacijami in finančno podporo. Zaznali smo tudi podjetniške aktivnosti znotraj teh skupin. Glavna oblika institucionalnega transnacionalnega sodelovanja poteka preko kulturnih društev, kjer tudi potomci igrajo aktivno vlogo.

Zaključek

Oblikovanje in pomen transnacionalnih družbenih prostorov v kontekstu migracij je postalo pomembno področje raziskovanja. Priseljenci pogosto vzpostavljajo mreže in ohranjajo povezave z državami izvora, kar vodi v nastanek družbenih prostorov, ki presegajo nacionalne meje. Slovenija, ki je v zadnjih desetletjih doživela opazen porast migracij, predstavlja zanimiv primer za proučevanje razvoja transnacionalnih družbenih prostorov med priseljenci. Prispevek obravnava potomce priseljencev iz Bosne in Hercegovine v Sloveniji ter oblikovanje transnacionalnih družbenih prostorov.

Značilnosti transnacionalnih vzorcev mobilnosti so se izraziteje pojavile po razpadu Jugoslavije. Prva generacija priseljencev iz 60. in 70. let prejšnjega stoletja je bila notranje migracijsko aktivna in je razvila obsežne mreže, predvsem s člani širše družine, pa tudi s pripadniki lokalnih skupnosti, iz katerih so se izselili. Čeprav takrat še niso imeli sodobne telekomunikacijske tehnologije, kot jo poznamo danes, so ohranjali tesne stike s širšim migrantskim in nemigrantskim omrežjem.

V naši kvalitativni raziskavi smo ugotovili, da potomci bosanskih migrantov v Sloveniji sodelujejo v transnacionalnih dejavnostih znotraj svojih transnacionalnih sorodstvenih skupin, kjer uresničujejo načelo recipročnosti s socialno in finančno pomočjo članom skupine. Poleg tega smo zaznali prisotnost dejavnosti v okviru transnacionalnih krogotokov, kar pomeni, da obstajajo podjetniške povezave med potomci v Sloveniji in poslovno skupnostjo v Bosni in Hercegovini, kjer izkoriščajo svoje prednosti poznavanja obeh držav, kot so jezik in družbene vezi. Za to podro-

čje predlagamo dodatne raziskave, saj nismo zbrali dovolj podatkov za poglobljeno analizo.

Zaznali smo tudi pomembno sodelovanje med kulturnimi društvi etničnih skupnosti v Sloveniji in organizacijami v Bosni in Hercegovini, zlasti na področju kulture. Ta društva pa ne delujejo zgolj kulturno, temveč tudi kot predstavniki svojih skupnosti v Sloveniji, pri čemer imajo pomembno vlogo pri vzpostavljanju stikov z institucijami in organizacijami v Bosni in Hercegovini. Tudi to področje zahteva nadaljnje raziskovanje za boljše razumevanje institucionalnega sodelovanja.

Eden izmed raziskovalnih poudarkov je bil način komunikacije v transnacionalnih omrežjih. Napredek na področju komunikacijske tehnologije je omogočil širitev teh prostorov v širša migrantska omrežja, ki vključujejo tako ožje kot širše sorodstvo po vsem svetu. Potomci migrantov so odraščali v obdobju digitalnih tehnologij in so zato vešči uporabniki orodij, kot so družbena omrežja in aplikacije za sporočanje. Raje imajo hitro komunikacijo prek platform, kot sta WhatsApp in Facebook Messenger, za razliko od staršev, ki pogosto še vedno uporabljajo bolj tradicionalne oblike, kot so telefonski klici. Za mlajše generacije so te tehnologije neločljivo povezane z vsakdanjim življenjem, saj jim omogočajo ohranjanje vezi s transnacionalnimi sorodstvenimi skupinami, dostop do novic, sodelovanje na kulturnih dogodkih in vključevanje v spletne skupnosti, povezane z njihovo dediščino.

Kljub močni integraciji v slovensko družbo večina naših sogovornikov ohranja močno vez s svojimi predniki in koreninami. Izražajo globoko spoštovanje do tradicij, običajev in družbenih vezi z Bosno in Hercegovino. Izvajajo dejavnosti, ki so značilne za transnacionalne družbene prostore, kot so recipročnost (finančna in socialna pomoč članom sorodstvenih skupin), izkoriščanje prednosti poznavanje obeh kultur kot podjetniki in sodelovanje v omrežjih, ki imajo institucionalne vezi z Bosno in Hercegovino.

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