

# Social Mobility in the Balkans: Border Policing Practices Are Potentially Letting Through Mostly the Members of the “Elite Club”

## Review of the Book “Border Policing and Security Technologies: Mobility and Proliferation of Borders in the Western Balkans” by Sanja Milivojevic<sup>1</sup>

Countless articles and books have been written so far about migration and its effect on countries. This topic is currently one of the most important ones among scholars from different fields of study, especially among social scientists. Although it has been almost eighty years since the end of the Second World War, certain regions are not peaceful even now. The Russian-Ukrainian conflict and the Israeli-Palestinian War are causing migration waves, which will inevitably force people to leave their homes in the hope of better faith. Because of its actuality, this book with its approach might provide interesting and useful lessons about migration, even beyond the Western Balkans. Naturally, migration cannot be narrowed down to one discipline, it equally concerns economics and sociology, as well as criminology and police science. Even though the Western Balkan and the south-eastern region of the Schengen area, which is the gate of Europe, is a hotspot when it comes to migration, there are not many papers focusing on this region. This is why the book *Border Policing and Security Technologies: Mobility and Proliferation of Borders in the Western Balkans* is highly relevant and actual, as it attempts to fill this gap.

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<sup>1</sup> Milivojevic, S. (2019). *Border Policing and Security Technologies: Mobility and Proliferation of Borders in the Western Balkans*. Routledge.

First, about the author. Dr. Sanja Milivojevic is a Serbian scientist and professor who earned credits from La Trobe University, the University of Bristol, and the University of Oxford. She is deeply engaged with quite under-researched topics such as border policing, human trafficking and gender and victimisation. It is not only the topic itself, which is not well explored yet, but also the region in which she conducts her work. Even though she has managed to build up an international career, she did not abandon her home country and aims to enrich her research with an insider perspective. Her research mainly focuses on the Western Balkan region, which is one of the hotspots of migration. It is obvious that the migration crisis in the 2010s had a huge impact on the outer borders of the Schengen area. This is why her mission is to provide an overview and an understanding of these topics, with special regard to the Balkans.

The book has seven chapters, following a logical thread throughout the pages. The first chapter begins with an introduction, where the author starts with conceptual clarification with regard to borders and transnational mobility. Milivojevic also mentions unusual dilemmas here, such as the contradiction of human-drawn borders (Chapter 1). She argues that borders are naturally invisible, they were set by humans to keep the integrity of the state and to secure transnational mobility. Also, in this chapter, the author elaborates on why she is deeply engaged in topics such as transitional mobility and border policing, especially in the Western Balkans. After the personal initiatives, she gives an overview of the upcoming structure by discussing the outline of the book.

The second chapter discusses the case of social mobility. It addresses the average travelling citizens as members of an “elite club” who can travel through countries without being hustled. According to Milivojevic, the main difference between the average citizens and the migrants in terms of social mobility is the freedom to travel. Theoretically, every single member of every society should have the opportunity to decide when and where they would like to travel. Practically, this is not the case. Naturally, if the average citizen wishes to travel to another country, they may be obliged to get a visa or walk through security screenings, yet still be able to complete their travel. However, when a migrant wishes to move in the hope of a better life, they are usually stopped and closed out. That is why the author addresses the average citizen as a member of an “elite club” since they are able to travel without restrictions.

Another intriguing idea of the book is the classification of borders (Chapter 2). It divides them into “solid”, “liquid” and “cloudy” borders. Milivojevic begins the discussion by highlighting the changes to borders that globalisation brought to us. There are usually more passport checks and security screenings. When it comes to borders (especially on the edge of the Schengen area), walls, barbed wire fences, patrols and guardians are also present. They are supported by modern technologies such as cameras or biometric systems. (Later in the book, the author also writes about her concerns in the case of continuous surveillance.) The “liquid” borders have a different meaning than it sounds. In Milivojevic’s book, “liquid borders” are such borders which are “letting through the right number of right people” (p. 48).

It means that while the people's flow is continuous (like the flow of a liquid), the authorities are actively filtering and decreasing social mobility (like a filter which divides trash from liquid). Last but not least, the borders have a "cloudy" characteristic, because the authorities are collecting information not only about citizens who are crossing the borders legally but also about illegal border-crossers via surveillance and documentation. Additionally, based on these data, models are built in order to decide whether a citizen is safe to enter the country or not. Based on the collected data, the (binary) system decides whether this person is wanted in the country or not. The main takeaway of this chapter is the change of behaviour in the case of border policing. Their goal is not to intercept the threat when it arrives at the borders but to "assess the threats likely to emerge in the future" (p. 59).

There are two main topics in Chapter 3 which are worth mentioning. The first is the situation near the Hungarian-Serbian border. It is well known that Hungary built a physical barrier alongside its border with Serbia and Croatia. That is because the authorities of the Balkan countries (Serbia, Croatia, and Macedonia) were incapable of handling the extreme flow of migrants. By doing this, the Hungarian government lowered the social mobility of migrants by denying them entrance to the Schengen area. Milivojevic brought a lot of examples of the circumstances with which the migrants had to deal with. Indeed, their journey was difficult. In the case of most migrants, the goal was to reach Northern or Western Europe, yet Hungary denied them by building a physical barrier. The country got a lot of political attacks because of its decision. However, as one of the border-protecting countries of the Schengen area, it is an obligation to commit to a thorough screening of people. Naturally, when it comes to human rights and atrocities of the authorities towards migrants, the goal cannot justify the sometimes incorrect behaviour. This question leads to the second main topic in this chapter (Chapter 3). After Croatia joined the EU recently, there are still a few potential EU-candidate countries in the Balkan region. Based on the migration crisis in the 2010s, it is unclear whether Serbia or Macedonia would be able to fulfil the protection of the Schengen area. They are in the process of joining the EU and fulfilling the minimal requirements; however, this would mean a thorough change in the workflow of the authorities and policies. The question is when the Balkan region will be ready for such a difficult task. According to the Serbian President, they are ready.

Chapter 4 mostly discusses the opportunities related to social mobility in the case of the Balkan region. There are important factors which are strongly related to the lower mobility of the Balkan people. For example, in Serbia and Macedonia, there is a Roma minority, who are only marginally able to move across countries; however, the right to be where one wants to be should not be a topic of argument. Also, this chapter introduces the case of the visa liberalisation between Serbia and FYR Macedonia, and how it sometimes led to discrimination. In the early 2010s "(...) Macedonian parliament passed a law allowing border police the discretionary power to 'temporarily suspend the right to travel on only the suspicion of being

a potential “failed asylum seeker” (p. 110). This enabled ethnic profiling and gave somewhat discriminating power to the authorities by allowing them to decide whether a person was ‘suspicious’ or not. Naturally, this so-called ‘suspicion’ could be an extremely subjective point of view.

Since one of Milivojevic’s fields of research is feminism, it is not surprising that she included a chapter about the situation of women when it comes to border crossing. Also, the gender dimension is a hot topic in migration studies, so this chapter is a must-have in this book. Naturally, the case is not only related to the legal crossing of borders but even more so to the more dangerous and illegal form of it: human trafficking. According to the author, several studies have emphasised that women are more likely to be victims of human trafficking. They are much more exposed to violence than men, since they are more in need of help, especially if they are carrying a child. This is the main reason that among migrants, there are only a few women who are able to reach their destination country, in this case, Northern or Western Europe. Also, they are exposed to sexual harassment and other violent crimes. In response to the vulnerability of women, countries tend to commit two main counteracts. First, they can reinforce the border patrol and enhance the efficiency of border policing. This is not only practical because they would be able to prevent human trafficking, but it also helps to explore other crimes and ensures a much more thorough screening. However, as the previous chapter discussed, it could easily turn to discrimination when the authorities start to supervise based not only on professional checkpoints but also personal prejudices. The second option which, according to Milivojevic, some countries practice, is to restrict women’s mobility in order to prevent their victimisation. In other words, the government does not let women migrate as freely as men. The logic behind this is that if there is no opportunity for the smugglers to use women as victims of their crime, then there is no crime. However, this also leads us to the previous problem. The right to move freely should be an inalienable and fundamental human right, but by restricting this very right, the authorities also negatively discriminate against women. Despite the detailed literature review in the book, this topic seems to stay open without any real suggestions against women’s victimisation.

Finally, the last chapter concludes (Chapter 7) the volume. It starts the discussion from the beginning by highlighting the four main focus points or key terms of the book: the nature and formation of borders, their location, performance and impact. The last section of the final chapter not only explores potential ways to continue this research but also encourages scholars to dive into the problems by underlining the significance of the topic once more.

The volume of Milivojevic is indeed a gap-filling book in the field of migration studies. The questions which the book attempts to answer are highly actual and relevant, especially in territories such as these. Additionally, when it comes to the Balkan region in the aspect of social mobility, the topic is under-researched. There are only a few other papers which offer relevant insights by applying a new and innovative approach as Milivojevic does. Moreover, the author also connects this topic to other well-known themes of hers, by adding a chapter about the situation

of women. It not only provides scientific analysis and formulates policy implications of border policing strategies of the Balkan Region, but also explores the root causes of certain actions. Milivojevic has managed to establish a good atmosphere for the whole book while providing insider views and perspectives about the topic. However, being so practical, yet keeping high quality had a price. In the book, there is little information available about the context of the whole topic. Indeed, the volume is about the Balkan, yet still, it would have been even better if Milivojevic had reflected on other regions and territories from her point of view. Additionally, the whole approach of the book is rather negative towards border policing and the authorities. It feels like Milivojevic gives higher importance to the problem from the perspective of migration studies. The book would be more balanced if the author had put a little bit less focus on migrants and more on the institution's perspective. It is obvious that migrants have a difficult life in reaching their goal, which is usually Western or Northern Europe, but the volume keeps up the negative atmosphere towards authorities and questions several decisions of the governments and authorities which are unfavourable for migrants.

To sum up, I would most of all suggest the book to an audience who is interested in the field of migration studies or border policing. Also, the volume is feasible for those who are not working with these topics, since Milivojevic discusses the fundamentals necessary for understanding. I also suggest the book to students who are learning about international relations and international affairs, because migration is causing international effects, which cannot be narrowed down to just one country, and have significant impacts on different regions. Last, but not least, the book would be a good choice for everyone who wishes to understand better the conflict between migrants and authorities.

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