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Mogu li šume biti ksenofobne?

Susreti antropološke vrste, Zadar 5-6. 5. 2023.



ERIM



SENTIENT ECOLOGIES

Xenophobic Imaginaries of Landscape

Edited by Alexandra Coțofană and Hikmet Kuran

CHAPTER 9

Can the Forests be Xenophobic?

Migrant Pathways through Croatia and the Forest as Cover

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According to research by forestry scientists, the forests in the most forested region in Croatia, Gorski Kotar, are a mixture of fir and beech trees, where the coniferous trees slightly outnumber the deciduous ones.¹ One important feature of these so-called natural forests² is their dense network of forest roads, which are very often used by people working in the forestry industry (Klepac 1997) as well as by walkers, hikers, and mushroom and fruit pickers—both from the local areas and beyond. In the last few years these forests have also become a part of the landscape for migrants, mostly from the Global South, who pass through them on their journey to Western Europe. They move along the so called “Balkan route.” Since 2018 one of the most used northern parts of the Balkan route traverses north-west Bosnia and Herzegovina (Beznec and Kurnik 2020; Hameršak et al. 2020; Stojić Mitrović et al. 2020), and then clandestinely proceeds into the EU via the Republic of Croatia.

Croatia, while a member of the EU, is not yet a Schengen state and sits at the EU's external border. The migrants' journey then continues into Slovenia, which is also an EU member state but, unlike Croatia, a part of the Schengen area. It is here that the migrants' transit from Croatia to Slovenia frequently passes through the Gorski Kotar region, since it is located in northern Croatia and sits on the border with Slovenia. Thus, as a result of its specific geopolitical position, the Gorski Kotar region and its forests are a locus of intense migratory movement. Attempts by migrants to cross the borders are systematically prevented by the European Union acting through local state authorities, and differing border strategies and

"YOU LOOK UP AND THEY BEAT YOU WITH THE STICK"

2022- Around a 15 minute walk from Hamzabeyli but on 12-09 the Bulgarian side of the border

Pushback from: **Bulgaria** to: **Turkey**

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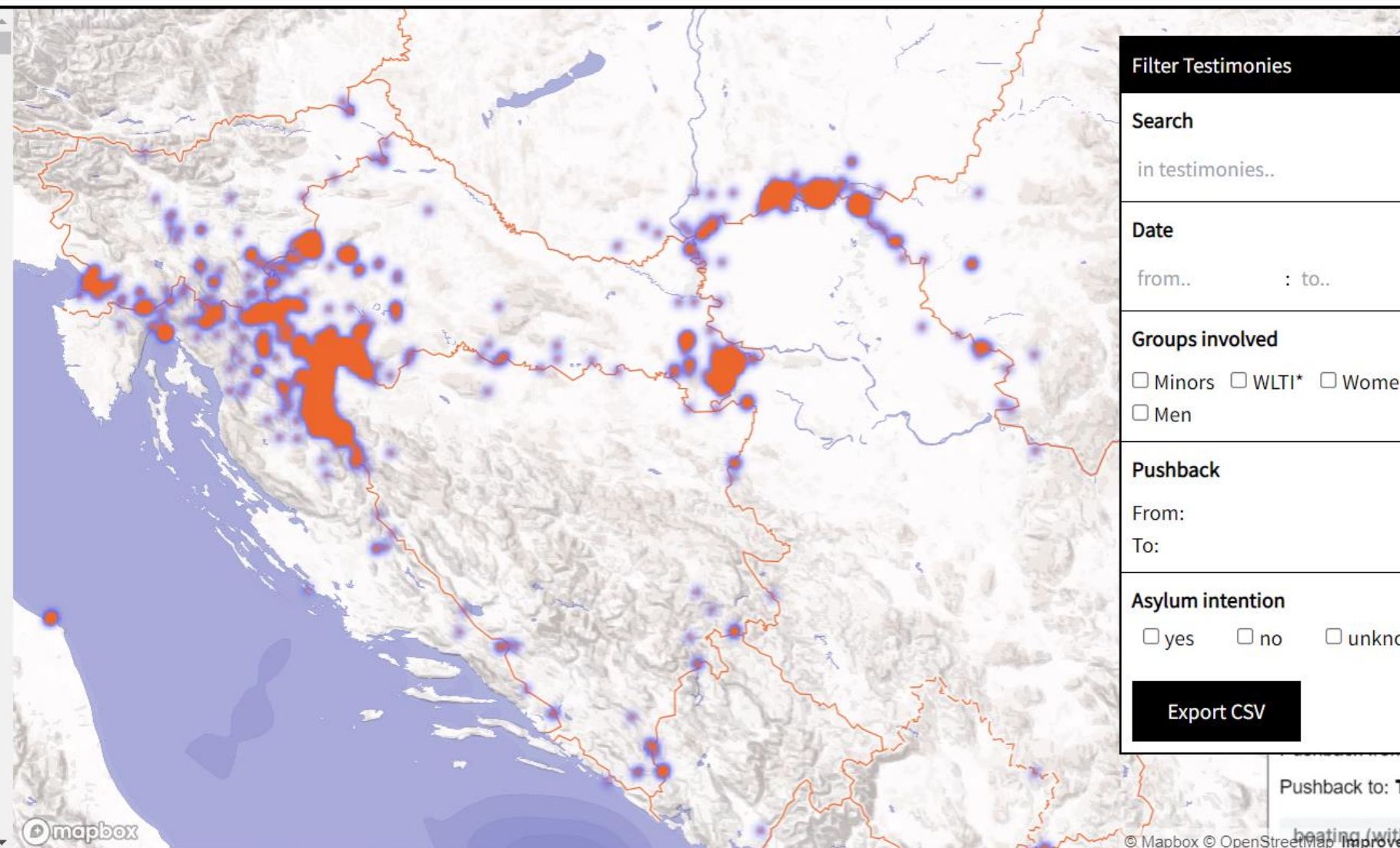
"THEY [THE OFFICERS] SAID 'YOU COME,' THEN THEY BEAT. THEN 'YOU COME,' THEN THEY BEAT. ONE BY ONE."

2022-12-01 near Tovarnic, Croatia

Pushback from: **Croatia** to: **Serbia**

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"THE RESPONDENT, WITH THE DEEP CUTS ON



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“The larger group was spotted attempting to cross the stretch of river, protected by a border fence. The police spotted the interviewee and his companions by the river and began to shout at them. The group was scared and fled into the nearby woodland (back into the Croatian interior)” (25. 8. 2018, BVMN, Balkan Info Van)

“The group of eleven males left Velika Kladuša on foot and crossed the Croatian border through the forest. They walked during the day using the cover of the forest and waited for the night to cross exposed areas” (7. 8. 2018, BVMN, Balkan Info Van)

