

**1. Title of the envisaged research:**

*Movement(s) along the Balkan Route: Borders, Citizenship, and Everyday Geopolitics*

**2. Applicant:**

Dr. David Henig

**3. Promotor(es):**

Prof. Dr. Rebecca Bryant

Dr. David Henig – Co-Promotor

**4. Department:**

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**5. Description of the research idea:**

This PhD project will investigate the dynamics of migratory movements along the Balkan Route, and what forms of social movements and citizenship these movements engender. Scholars of migration have recently proposed that we may think of migration as a social movement in its own right, and this project aims to make an ethnographic intervention through exploration of a context in which migratory movements and social movements intersect. Focusing on makeshift ‘camps’, grassroots humanitarian organisations, municipal offices, and townscapes around the Croatian-Bosnian border, this project will study the dynamics of intersecting movements in what is currently one of the world’s most difficult and volatile migration bottlenecks.

Key words: Activism; Balkan Route; Bosnia and Herzegovina; Citizenship; Humanitarianism; Migration; Movement;

**6. Research problem:**

The Balkan route is one of the EU’s major hotspots of contemporary migration and border crossing that gained its public prominence during the ‘European migration crisis’ in 2015. Although the response of EU countries in the crisis’ buffering zone was primarily focused on stopping migration at the Turkey/Greece border, it also increased militarisation of Hungarian and Croatian borders in their attempts to contain the migratory flows in the countries of the EU’s immediate outside – Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of North Macedonia, and Serbia – while providing only little support to them. This has escalated into a number of unfolding localised humanitarian crises along the migratory corridor, and in particular in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). In 2017, there were fewer than 1,000 migrants and asylum seekers in BiH. In 2018 there were over 23,000, and since the beginning of 2019 the numbers have risen a further 3,400, all stranded in a few small border towns. The border is heavily militarised, and Croatia has been consistently violating EU laws by sending asylum seekers back across the border, with numerous recorded cases of violence and abuse. Moreover, both sides of the border continue to be contaminated with landmines left behind from the Bosnian war, making the migration bottleneck particularly dangerous to navigate. Yet there is no existing humanitarian infrastructure that could accommodate the rising numbers of migrants stuck in the bottleneck, as BiH continues to struggle economically as well as politically with the legacies of its own war, as well as postsocialist, postwar transformations. In the absence of any international and state humanitarian assistance, the migratory movement has engendered the formation of numerous grassroots humanitarian responses, civic initiatives, and social movements in the bottleneck and beyond. This project will investigate how the migratory movement and social movements intersect, and what forms of contestation over the borders, citizenship, and politics emerge from these intersections.

**7. Research questions:**

The central research questions will be: What forms of friction as well as collaboration occur at the nodes of intersection where activists, BiH citizens and people on the move come together? What forms of agency, citizenship and political imagination emerge from the movements challenging the EU’s politics of borders? How do the encounters between humanitarian movements and the people on the move relate to (political) institutions that are key to EU policies and/or practices, and which might provide avenues for future citizenship within EU?

**8. Methods:**

The candidate will conduct multi-sited ethnographic research in northwest BiH around the Croatian-BiH border, in the migration bottleneck where the movements intersect. Although it will be located primarily in the municipalities of Bihać and Velika Kladuša, it will trace the movements to other nodes along the route in BiH, and beyond. The project will draw on the methods of participant observation, ethnographic interviews, urban

ethnography, content analysis, and visual anthropology. It will also engage with the recent turn to the materiality of clandestine migration (De León 2015).

### **9. Rationale and approach:**

This project aims to probe the hypothesis put forward recently by scholars of migration, whether and how we might think of migration as a social movement in its own right (De Genova 2017; El-Shaarawi and Razsa 2019). This project will take ‘movement’ as a point of departure and will focus on two intertwined forms of movement: i) ‘movement of people’ along the Balkan route; and ii) ‘social movements’ of solidarity, humanitarianism, and activism that those movements of people engender (Rozakou 2016). The key objective will be to investigate the intersections of the two forms of movement. To answer the research questions this project will draw on a mix of theoretical approaches including critical border studies (De Genova 2017), humanitarianism (Cabot 2018; Fassin 2012), social movements (Razsa and Kurnik 2012), as well as work on everyday diplomacy and geopolitics (Jansen 2009; Marsden, Ibanez-Tirado, Henig 2016). Furthermore, it will be in conversation with the approaches of engaged anthropology (Kirsch 2018) in order to translate its findings into a critical interrogation of the national and the EU’s politics of borders.

### **10. Institutional environment:**

This research project will contribute to the UU Faculty strategic theme *Institutions for Open Societies*, in particular the subthemes of the Future of Citizen-Based Initiatives and Gender and Diversity. It will also contribute to a number of research themes currently pursued by the *Centre for Global Challenges*, with its focus areas on Human rights and Conflict and Security. This project will be embedded in the Department of Cultural Anthropology’s research program *Sovereignty and Social Contestation in Complex Societies* (SoSCo). The applicant and co-promotor, Dr. David Henig, has a long standing track record of researching socio-political transformation, and genealogies of mobility and displacement in the Balkans. The proposed promotor Prof. Dr. Rebecca Bryant has a long-standing track record of researching displacement, border practices, post-conflict reconciliation, and contested sovereignty on both sides of the Cyprus Green Line, in Turkey, and Eastern Mediterranean at large.

### **11. Relevance:**

The Croatian-Bosnian borderland is one of the world’s most difficult and volatile migration bottlenecks in the present, yet it is seriously underreported and understudied. Therefore, it is urgent to gain more insight into the socio-political and humanitarian dynamics that are unfolding at the grassroots level, and in particular what forms of social movements and citizenship these movements of people engender – locally, nationally, and internationally. This project will make a significant contribution to the anthropological and cross-disciplinary debates including critical border studies, everyday diplomacy and geopolitics, humanitarianism, and social movements. Furthermore, its findings will make a critical interrogation into the national, regional, and the EU’s politics of borders.

### **12. References:**

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