

"GEO-": WEAPONIZATION, POWER AND THE GEO-POLITICS OF MIGRATION

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This article sets out to consider the prefix "geo-" and its potential role in advancing research on the relationship between migration, power, and the environment. "Geo-" highlights the current orientation toward understanding migration through the field of ecology and its critico-philosophical premises. Notions such as *geopower* or *geontopower* have been suggested to unpack how *geomorphological* environments are co-opted and weaponized into deterring, debilitating, and killing migrant people in a way that seems, by official accounts, somewhat less intentional: the trope of a putatively inert and empty Nature legitimates the appropriation of geo as the *inhuman* ground of biopower. The prefix "geo-", moreover, aptly captures the scale of the Earth as being proper to migration, in light of the urgency of conceptualizing migration as a condition and governmental logic proper to the Anthropocene, understood as a vast technological and commercial operation that ultimately posits the Earth as an appropriable object of power. These claims will be substantiated by looking at a specific case of geo-physical weaponization in the context of migration management in a peripheral(ized) region of Europe, that is, an extensive felling operation on the border between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia. From an exploration of this peripheral(ized) border environment, the paper will try to highlight the inhumanity of the Earth as an avenue for rethinking contemporary migration and environmental struggles.

Keywords: environment, weaponization, Earth, inhuman, felling, migration

INTRODUCTION: THE PREFIX "GEO-"

In modern scientific terminology the prefix "geo-" is used in compound words to indicate a relation to the Earth as ground, soil, or land, as well as to its planetary dimension. "Geo-" has come to indicate both land in its telluric form – one thereby measurable as

property and territory in legal-economic terms (Elden 2013) – as well as the Earth itself.¹ The doubleness or ambiguity of this prefix is the premise for this contribution to move from a localized form of *geo*-physical weaponization to the violence of an environmental appropriation at a truly *geo*-political scale. What undergirds both environmental manipulations – and thus allows this conceptual and analytical shift – is the presupposition of an “external, controllable, reducible” Nature (Moore 2015: 2) that can be destroyed and remade at will (Neyrat 2019).² By exposing this logic, this paper will ultimately reflect on the Earth as an *inhuman* ground that allows for a different consideration of politics, the environment, and migration.³

The methodological orientation Nicolas De Genova and Martina Tazzioli (2022) have shared regarding “minor keywords” claims that some words are greatly used yet remain under-scrutinized in political discourse and theory. Their goal is to critically examine these minor keywords, “to de-naturalize their apparent transparency, and re-politicize the de-politicization that ensues from their mundanity” (De Genova and Tazzioli 2022: 2–3). In methodological terms, this implies upending the ubiquity and univocal appropriation of the prefix “geo-” in order to reveal its discursive and material operativity. This paper will align with such a standpoint while, however, specifying the fact that a keyword might not have a single correct use or meaning (De Genova and Tazzioli 2022: 5). The concept of “keyword” itself should, in fact, come under scrutiny for its inherent inappropriability, for the very linguistic mechanism that prevents any word from being given any singular, stable meaning (Peragine and Fardin 2025). In this sense, we will consider “geo-” not as a *keyword* but rather as a conceptual and analytical *key* to locate a research intersection between power, migration, and the environment that questions contemporary practices of migration management in light of the manifold ways in which they articulate ecological dimensions. The paper will therefore veer away from ethnographic inquiry and use the prefix “geo-” methodologically, as a tool to cut across scales, conceptual and material domains, forms of existence, while exposing the inherent presupposition of the discursive deployment of the word.

Such a standpoint becomes apposite to considering “geo-”, since, in its singled-out form, it is pervasive but somehow not always given adequate weight in dominant political narratives. In fact, the prefix is used to indicate a relation to the Earth, with the Earth constituting

¹ “Geo-” is derived from the Greek word for the Earth (γῆ-, from γῆ or γαῖα, *Ge* or *Gaia*), as opposed to the sky (Οὐρανός, *Uranus*) and the sea (Πόντος, *Pontos*). On this, see Agamben’s “Gaia e Ctonia” (2020).

² Nature with a capital N: the figure for a single, pure, and substantial nature (Neyrat 2019: 17), one that has been rationalized, externalized, and appropriated by the historical project of capitalist accumulation (Moore 2015: 17–18).

³ Building on different political ecologies (Grosz, Moore, Neyrat, Povinelli, Yusoff), this paper refers to the Earth as a way to think of nature differently than by employing our dominant economic and technological model. Instead of the empty, external, and appropriable – “constructable” – Nature posited by capitalist accumulation, such a framework highlights the concrete dimension and geological time of the Earth, in order to conceptualize the inappropriable part of nature which resists all symbolization, appropriation, construction, or production. The inhuman – rather than “nonhuman” (see note 13) – is a way to name precisely that which of the Earth is “unavailable” to humans (Neyrat 2019: 163).

the *object* of disciplines such as *geo-politics*, *geo-geography*, *geo-physics*, *geo-economy*. The persistence of the prefix across different discourses thus brings together seemingly disparate positions under a common logic: one whereby the Earth, as a global whole, is subjected to violent appropriation in the name of political, economic, cartographic, and technological imperatives. This logic has destructive social and ecological impacts in the form of resource extractions, landgrabs and enclosures, manipulations and weaponizations of whole environments.

To highlight this rationale, the paper will start by describing the vast felling operations that have taken place on Plješevica, a mountain along the northern stretches of the Dinaric Alps, which marks the Bosnian–Croatian border west of the town of Bihać, in what is (contentiously) known as Bosnian Krajina. The account is based on field work in the area conducted between 2021 and 2024. The focus of the paper is on the way in which this episode points toward the co-optation of natural environments along the Balkan route(s) like in other geographies of migration management, employed as a tactic of border control and securitization – an appropriation legitimated by the presumed emptiness or immobility of an externalized Nature.

What follows will be an abstraction regarding the Krajina, but only in the etymological sense of singling-out an element as the focus of research, while drawing away from the concrete geographical and historical condition that triggers thought itself – an abstraction, thus, which derives from and goes back to concrete conditions on Plješevica. The intention is, therefore, to move *from* this specific site of violence, and, consequently, from a periphery of a periphery (i.e., what we could loosely and contentiously identify as the Bosnian Krajina) *to* migration at the scale of the Earth. In fact, felling operations on Plješevica – whose specific geo-political, economic, and ecological characteristics make it a paradigmatic environment of Western Balkan “rurality”⁴ – are a way to assess the state of the much broader deployment of a tactic that targets and co-opts the environment in other borderlands as well, such as that between Poland and Belarus, or geo-physical features themselves, such as the Alps and the Channel.

This exploration of the prefix “geo-” in relation to the Balkan route(s), and more broadly, to border and migration studies, highlights three things. First, a practice of bordering by way of the weaponization of *geophysical* features. Second, that this weaponization could be understood according to a logic of rule in contemporary capitalism that we might call *geo(nto)power*. Third, that the scale of operation of this logic of rule is that of the world: in effect, “geo-” is a prefix for a mode of global governance or the *geo-political* strategizing of migration. The text will be organized around these aspects.

⁴ Balkan rurality must be understood in relation to the historical articulation of the urban–rural divide in the region (Henig 2016; Hromadžić 2018), that is, as a spatial, uneven condition that works within a racialized discourse regarding Balkan backwardness and uncivilization (Rexhepi 2023).

FELLING ON PLJEŠEVICA: GEO-PHYSICAL WEAPONIZATION

In May 2020, Hrvatske šume, a state-owned Croatian company that manages the national forest reserve, started chopping down what is now a fifteen-kilometer long, 100-meter-wide strip of the forest covering mount Plješevica. Plans are to raze another 25 kilometers (Vale 2022) and there are concerns regarding the possibility that pesticides have been sprayed to prevent regrowth, hence making felling operations more permanent (Hromadžić 2021). Using heavy equipment and machinery, roughly 150 hectares of mostly black alder, beech, and fir were removed, leaving a dismal scar down the Plješevica, together with the many tracks left over from supporting technical and logistical activities.

Since late 2017, this part of Bosnia and Herzegovina has been one of the gateways of the Balkan route(s) and the felling has allowed Croatian border police to more easily apprehend migrant people trying to cross the border along the mountain tracks that lead from the Baljevac plateau in Bosnia to the area around Korenica on the Croatian side of the border. In doing so, the deforestation has made tangible the geodetic line of the border west of Bihać, igniting political contention. The Croatian company was accused by Šumarija Bihać, one of its Bosnian logging counterparts, of carrying out clearing operations on Bosnian territory. Since the border has not been ratified,⁵ authorities from both countries were involved in a dispute⁶ over a small portion of territory above the barred-up entrance of tunnel 4 of the abandoned Željava military airport, where migrant people were known to walk along the many trails that lead into Croatia through the mountain's forests. The dispute reignited diplomatic conflict between the two states and uncertainty regarding the exact location of the border and, consequently, the actual extent of national territory. Official statements expressed the need to make state borders clearer and more secure against the threat of irregular migration (Hromadžić 2021), ostensibly following the international doctrine concerning the identification, definition, maintenance, and visibility of state borders. In other words, by levelling this part of the forest on Plješevica, Croatian authorities aimed at violently detecting, apprehending, and pushing back people crossing the international border while, at the same time, *turning Nature into an environmental border and weapon*.

⁵ Presidents Franjo Tuđman and Alija Izetbegović met in Sarajevo on July 30, 1999, to sign the Treaty on the State Border between the two newborn countries. On the basis of the General Framework Peace Accords (Dayton Agreements), this treaty turned the border between the two former Socialist Republics into a border between their successor states, putting the newly formed state contours under international law (Navari 2014; Bešlin 2021). Yet, the Treaty of 1999 was never ratified, leaving sections of the border a contentious matter, most notably, the Neum corridor; a river islet along the Una river close to Kostajnica east of the Una-Sana Canton in the Republika Srpska; and the area around the Željava air base, at the base of Plješevica.

⁶ Encroachment and rights over logging activities – silviculture and wood production being an important driver of the local economy – sparked political reactions at the local level. Cantonal authorities first appealed to the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and then to the State presidency, ministries, as well as the Office of the High Representative, calling for the preservation of territorial integrity (Vojić 2020).

With the hefty supply of EU funds and the support of Frontex, the Croatian state has been at the forefront of border control and securitization in the Western Balkans. It has committed an act of violence against people as much as forest life on Plješevica, in order to repel and confine irregular migration in the deep woods on the inter-state border. Similar acts of destruction of ecosystems, such as cross-border pollution and environmental warfare, are being referred to as “ecocide”.⁷ Following this definition, by felling a vast swathe of a potentially primary forest, Hrvatske šume – and thus the Croatian state – is complicit in bordering practices that sanction violence on racialized bodies through environmental harm. This logging operation resembles a military strategy and we might refer to it as “weaponization”: a bordering tactic through the manipulation of geo-physical features (seas, forests, mountains, deserts, rivers) predicated on the figure and discourse of a de-historicized and empty Nature.

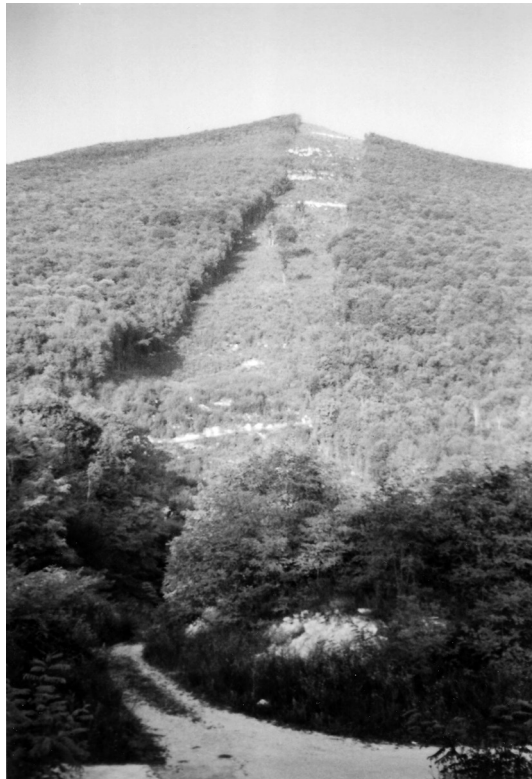


Figure 1 – Plješevica, September 2023. Photo by the author.

⁷ Nabil Ahmed (2017) claims that: “Ecocide today is not state crime limited to environmental destruction caused during armed conflict. It also includes ecological damage as a result of corporate activities during peacetime, i.e. for the exploitation of natural resources” (Ahmed 2017: 141).

Marijana Hameršak and Iva Pleše (2021) have noted the way in which a sweeping characterization of “the forest” is instrumental to the creation of this trope. They rightly point out the shortcomings of media descriptions of the types of forests in which detection, pursuit, arrest, and expulsion take place. These descriptions in fact resort to a generalized portrayal of forest environments. An ambivalent depiction of rescue operations of migrants stranded in the forests, mountains, and waters along the Balkan route(s), as well as the definition of spectacularizing narratives of migrants’ journeys, tend to obscure the fact that migrant people “are pushed and expelled into these forests by exclusionary policies” (Hameršak and Pleše 2021: 217). This spectacularization hinges on a “dehistoricized” and “depoliticized” understanding of what Nature is, which:

obscure[s] the moral responsibility of individuals, policies, and societies for the suffering of migrants in nature by linking that suffering to supposedly neutral natural forces. But what is presented as a neutral natural environment [...] is an active factor of mobilization for the purpose of exclusion and removal of the unwanted. (Hameršak and Pleše 2021: 217)

By erasing all specifications and qualities from the woods, the media refer to a neutral and apolitical Nature, ultimately absolving state institutions from their complicity. In this narrative, Nature is equated to an uncontaminated space that is actively being co-opted by authorities with the goal of excluding and literally “subtracting” (Aradau and Tazzioli 2020) spaces for rest and recovery from people attempting to cross the border. The act of trapping migrant and refugee people into a de-historicized Nature, as a fundamentally *appropriable* space, is denuded of political significance, that is, carried out as if such practices were not part of recorded military strategies that violently manipulate environmental features to harm the enemy.⁸ In this sense, the technologically sophisticated weaponization of the environment of EU bordering practices is paralleled by an almost rudimentary tactic. Part of the consistent funds of the Croatian state are thus mobilized to create an environmental weapon at the border, in which migrant people are more than likely to be unable to trespass unnoticed.

The eradication of trees and plants or the upturning of soils and rocks have affected and disrupted what is probably one of the few primary forests on the European continent – that is, the most biodiverse and carbon-dense form of woods.⁹ This weaponization, as

⁸ These operations in fact build on a long history of environmental violence and weaponization in the Krajina. For instance, Gábor Ágoston reconstructs how Ottoman strategy and warfare, thanks to thorough mapping campaigns of marshlands, mountains, and rivers, involved deforestation, flooding, and scorched-earth tactics against the Habsburg in the Hungarian part of the inter-imperial Krajina (Ágoston 2009: 57–77).

⁹ According to FAO, the term refers to: “Naturally regenerated forest of native tree species, where there are no clearly visible indications of human activities and the ecological processes are not significantly disturbed” (FAO 2020: 8). Primary, like other terms such as old-growth forest or virgin forest, are also used to indicate specific conditions of biodiversity, small-scale disturbance to the forest canopy, and longevity of trees. The scarcity of old-growth forests has produced certain rhetoric and ideologies around their secluded and ancestral environments, which have, moreover, been mobilized against migrant people and rural groups (see Cielemecka 2020). With the encroachment of urbanization, intensive agriculture, and their extractive and infrastructural ramifications, old-growth forests in terrestrial Europe (excluding Russia) have shrunk to

suggested by Hameršak and Pleše (2021), also has consequences for the accountability of Croatian state institutions, whose denial resembles the institutional stance that Jason De León detects in deterrence-through-the-environment strategies on the US–Mexico border (2015). In fact, Plješevica's multiple peaks, jagged karstic rocks, scarce human infrastructure, harsh temperatures, the sheerness and "wilderness" of this mountain range, not to mention the presence of explosive remnants of war,¹⁰ allow border police to act with impunity. This also allows for Nature – as the name for an entity rejected and denied by capitalism's dominant constructivism; an empty nature which can be destroyed and remade at will (Neyrat 2019) – to be somehow identified as the cause for the injury and death of migrant people.



Figure 2 – Wrecked mountain cabin, Plješevica, September 2023. Photo by the author.

0.25% (Sabatini et al. 2018). At the beginning of the 20th century almost 50% of Bosnian forests were primary, today, this has decreased to only 0.1% or approximately 2,000 hectares (Motta et al. 2008). The actual extent of high forest on Mount Plješevica, mostly comprising beech, fir, spruce, and oak, is yet to be mapped.

¹⁰ Allow me to refer to my keyword on explosive remnants of wars on the *e-ERIM* platform (Peragine 2024).

Felling on Plješevica is one of many operations along the Balkan route(s) that have turned seas, rivers, mountains, and high plateaus into hostile environments. However, more strikingly than in other such sites, the specific spatial politics on the border between Bosnia and Croatia reflect not only migration management in the Balkan Peninsula but even broader arrangements of capital and power, particularly those related to the regionalization process of the EU's Western Balkan periphery. The externalization of the EU border infrastructure and the containment of undesirable racialized bodies in Bosnia, as in other non-member states, is at the forefront of this project of EUropeanization. By organizing "the Western Balkans Six" as its immediate, peripheral Outside – and thus as a source of cheap racialized labor, raw materials, and (green) energy as well as a dumping ground for illegal(ized) migrant people, toxic waste, and extra-territorial detention – the EU provides new opportunities for nationalist agendas of regional governments to reach internal economic and political interests (Hameršak et al. 2020), all the while reinforcing the operativity of a "geo-racial frontier" between a mature, White, democratic, Christian Europe and its Others (Buden 2020; Rexhepi 2023). In other words, the co-optation and weaponization of Plješevica's geo-physical environment and of other geographies along the Balkan route(s) is a constitutive element of this geo-political scheme. Indeed, EUropean borderwork systematically "exploits the agentic capacities of the physical context in which [migrant people] are abandoned in an attempt to control 'irregular migration'" (Vaughan-Williams 2015: 81). Such weaponization causes the debilitation and death of migrant people across the peninsula: from the Evros to the Drina, from the Central Balkan Mountains in Bulgaria to the northwestern tip of the karstic Dinaric Alps.

In doing so, the weaponization of geo-physical features against migrant people also relates to the socio-environmental conditions of populations that are not the specific target of such strategies. Indeed, ecocide on Plješevica was facilitated by the legacy of uneven center/periphery development during Yugoslavia and post-war transitional ethno-politics. The Transition, as an ideological-teleological narrative of redemption through the integration within the liberal-democratic, Eurowestern world – "an endless process of catch-up with the West" (Buden 2020: 260) – has left in place structures of domination and regulation for mostly exogenous or crony accumulation (Horvat and Štikš 2015): preserving the power of former socialist élites; acting as a laboratory for Euro-Atlantic governance, eternally postponing a confrontation with the consequences of the Transition itself, while reaping the profit for capitalist cores and transnational financial debt institutions. The peripheralization, institutional abandonment, and organized neglect in the Bosnian Krajina is indicative of this transitional condition.

Put differently, if the notion of extraction describes both capital's appropriation of raw materials and the ways in which it targets practices of social cooperation (Mezzadra and Neilson 2019: 38), felling on Plješevica indeed builds on and entrenches the extractive peripheral(ized) environment of the Bosnian Krajina for non-citizens *as well as* local citizens.¹¹ In doing so, it adds to the abundance of dilapidated buildings, environmental

¹¹ Bearing in mind that the Bosnian citizen is arguably constructed as "the ultimate end point of what Wendy Brown calls 'sacrificial citizenship' – as 'citizen' in its oblatory function in relation to the imperative of

contamination, and violence due to unexploded ordnances as well as toxic industrial production all of which, within the transitional deadlock, harm most of the population while maintaining power and capital in the hands of coalitions of crony and transnational interests. Deprived rural and marginal(ized) groups *within* the national order and the racialized, migrant Other *outside* of it thus bear the brunt of these intersecting forms of capitalist governance. Plješeвица indicates the mutual implication between the management of migration *and* the management of Nature, border securitization and capitalist extractivism – or indeed, what has been called “geo-capitalism” (Padovan and Alietti 2019, emphasis added) – while exposing the conditions in which one can be mobilized against the other. The prefix “geo-”, as a methodological coordinate to examine the felling on Plješeвица as well as other weaponized geographies, calls attention to a constructivist capitalist logic that organizes Nature in order to serve the infinite accumulation of capital on a planetary scale: an “appetite for an integral reformation of the Earth” (Neyrat 2019: 55), namely, geo(nto)power. We will tackle this logic by moving away from the weaponization of an externalized Nature toward geo(nto)power’s attempts to seize the inhuman forces of the Earth.

GEO(NTO)POWER AND THE GEO-POLITICS OF MIGRATION

A focus on the geo-physical context of weaponization thus brings to the fore an ecological dimension to bordering strategies. This aspect is at the center of a burgeoning field of research. Entering into dialogue with it, this section will outline a conceptual and analytical move from the localized form of geo-physical weaponization on Plješeвица to the dominant constructivism of contemporary capitalism, whose ultimate goal is to appropriate and manage the Earth itself. Riccardo Badano and Tomas Percival have posited the notion of “border environments” to consider this aspect and bring together the seemingly incommensurate notions of border and nature. Together with Lorenzo Pezzani, they use this term to look at the ways in which

the border becomes a pervasive environment that subtracts life-sustaining resources (from water, food and clean air to rescue and healthcare provisions) and exposes migrants to harsh socio-natural conditions (chronic food and sleep deprivation, the lack of access to any social support, etc.). In all such cases, the environment stops being simply a site of border control, and rather becomes one of its modes of operation. (Pezzani et al. 2023: 9)

Pezzani, Percival, and Badano further put forward the argument that the environment, regardless of its “natural” or “artificial” definition, is not simply a backdrop of bordering practices but is itself operationalized by way of the weaponization of its geo-physical

growth in the increasingly authoritarian practices of finance capital” (Arsenijević 2023; see also Hromadžić 2015). The statute of non-citizens must also be assessed against the background of this disposability.

features; co-opted in order to deter and thwart illegal(ized) migration, in light of its supposed emptiness. As they put it, there is a “veritable process of design” (Pezzani et al. 2023: 9) that turns seas, rivers, mountains, and deserts into borders: a tactical weaponization of geo-physical features which suggests homing in on the relationship between migration and the environment by way of theories on power in contemporary capitalism.

The existing framework for this intersection between migration and environmental management revolves around the notion of *geopower* and is hence mostly Foucauldian.¹² Pezzani alludes to the term “environmentality” sketched out by Michel Foucault to indicate a shift that, under neoliberalism, transforms governmentality from a set of tactics and strategies that targets subjects as part of populations – in other words, Foucault’s formulation of biopower – to a governmental logic directed at the creation of hostile environments or spaces “in which certain ‘ways of life’ have been made unviable” (Pezzani 2020). Indeed, Steven DeCaroli highlights the possibility that Foucault understood biopower as a type of milieu: “something one simultaneously inhabits and constitutes, a medium in which one lives and by which one is constrained” (DeCaroli 2021: 127). According to Federico Luisetti (2018), while not pursuing its ecological implications, Foucault’s conception of milieu touched on neoliberalism’s project to engineer and capitalize on the environment. Geopower, Luisetti continues, would indicate a figure for those “mechanisms of ecological government” (Luisetti 2018: 8) that insert “the life of *homo oeconomicus* into the land, sea, and air, combining human populations’ regulation with systems ecologies and Earth sciences” (Luisetti 2018: 10).

The introduction of the framework of *geopower* to migration and border research is an attempt to curb its methodological humanism. In particular, Elizabeth Grosz’s conceptualization of the forces of the Earth itself (Grosz et al. 2017: 6–7) has been imported to describe the multifarious ways in which geographic environments are endowed with forces that both facilitate and restrict life (Pezzani et al. 2023: 7–8). This concept seeks to foreground how hostile environments are “perceived, experienced and strategized” (Walters et al. 2022: 19) not only by actors managing the movement of people, but also by migrant people themselves, who devise forms of resistance in order to avoid or face the malleable strategies of border monitoring. Plješevica is an example of this twofold strategizing: its remoteness and “wilderness” act as ways, on the one hand, of funneling and directing border crossings into adverse environmental conditions and, on the other, of eluding control.

The importation of Grosz’s cosmological notion of *geopower* to border and migration studies reveals the inhuman ground of biopower that engenders the weaponization of harsh terrains. Indeed, the referent of such a form of power, Life, is predicated upon “a prior mode of chemical (and geologic) organization” (Grosz et al. 2017: 5), upon the inhuman that biopolitics “requires as its other [and] aims to make an object of regulation” (Grosz et

¹² Indeed, Elizabeth Grosz (Grosz et al. 2017) and Kathryn Yusoff (2018a) point to the budding form of such a notion in Foucault’s oeuvre.

al. 2017: 7). Understood in these terms, the inhuman, as an outside *within* humans, acts as the precondition for human existence itself and geopower is conceived as the logic of rule that aims at capturing these inhuman forces.¹³

At the same time, the conceptual coordinate of geopower is perhaps less explicit regarding the discursive deployment of “geo-”. Elizabeth Povinelli’s concept of “geontopower” adds elements in this direction, while further unpacking the migration-environment-power nexus. As put by Povinelli:

The simplest way of sketching the difference between geontopower and biopower is that the former does not operate through the governance of life and the tactics of death but is rather a set of discourse, affects, and tactics used in late liberalism to maintain or shape the coming relationship of the distinction between Life and Nonlife. (Povinelli 2016: 4)

Geontopower names the strategies of governance over Nonlife *qua* inhuman matter. In Povinelli’s work, the articulation between Life and Nonlife is thus functional to the subsumption of the Earth under contemporary capitalism. Indeed, the active organization of an immobile, empty Nature is the very grounds for its capitalist appropriation, but, as Povinelli discusses in relation to settler colonialism, it is also a strategy for the government of racialized populations; a strategy that recalls the weaponization of space in the context of migration management. In the case of Plješevica, the distinction between Life and Nonlife – rather than that between *bíos* and *zoé* proper to the biopolitical paradigm – sets out to indicate how this logic of rule of sovereignty operationalizes Nonlife against what Giorgio Agamben would call “bare life”, by casting migrant and refugee people into a *specific* environment of exception.¹⁴ Conversely, by animalizing or dehumanizing migrant people (Sakr 2018) through the appropriation of the seemingly empty space of Nature – in this case, the “wild” Nature of Plješevica presented by Hameršak and Pleše as an incidental cause of death – border security acts as a justification for the capitalist appropriation of Nature-as-resource. As argued above, this specific weaponization of geo-physical features becomes an opportunity to reinforce the structures of regulation and domination of the so-called post-socialist transition.

While different, Grosz’s and Povinelli’s understandings of contemporary power are not mutually exclusive but rather invite reflections on both the metaphysical and material grounds of weaponization. Geo(nto)power highlights the environment of biopolitical

¹³ On the Earth as this condition of possibility of human existence, or “concrete transcendental”, see Neyrat 2019: 165–177. As such, the inhuman breaks with the “plane of symmetry” that capitalist constructivism produces between humans and their nonhuman Other (as well as with the “assemblages” and “entanglements” of flat ontologies) (see Neyrat 2021).

¹⁴ This paper cannot offer a reading of Giorgio Agamben’s famous elaboration on sovereign power, nor is such a framework taken to explain the logic of migration management. In short, the Italian philosopher posits the ban as the foundational structure of sovereignty: “the force of simultaneous attraction and repulsion” that binds together bare life and sovereign power as two polar opposites, both including and excluding the former from the sovereign order and political life in the city (Agamben 1998: 110). A focus on the environment arguably ushers in a novel take on the spatial dimension(s) of the state of exception or challenges its applicability.

abandonment and the ways in which the weaponization of geo-physical features put in place by EU apparatuses and member states seizes on the boundary between Life and Nonlife *within* the domain of border control and securitization.

The governmental logic which seeks to put to work the inhumanity of the Earth finally brings to the fore the third implication provoked by the prefix “geo-”. The ecological dimension of border violence and the sheer geo-political scale of the movement of people briefly touched on above warrants a reflection on the bond that ties migration to environmental governance. If 123.2 million forcibly displaced people are those most gravely affected by the social and environmental harm of human-induced climate change, the root causes for such an incidence are often swept under the carpet and framed as apocalyptic threats to international security by global climatic governance (Bettini 2013). Within such a dominant view, “nature’ or ‘the environment’ appear secondary to mobility rather than as the very material substance through which mobility itself is mediated, experienced, and conceptualised” (Baldwin et al. 2019: 290). The prefix “geo-”, in this sense, signals the technics that entangle these two governmental domains, whereby “the discourse of climate change and migration operates as a distinctive regime of power within the wider political terrain of climate change” (Baldwin et al. 2019: 290).

Indeed, the logic of risk prediction and organization is part and parcel of how the Earth is inserted into economic criteria. This logic also recurs in the calculus and representation of migration management.¹⁵ Luisetti (2020) has highlighted the presence of a speculative logic and security discourse that reduce migration to numbers, parameters, and opportunities for the optimization of economic output. By pointing to how climate change may be a cover up for the political causes of so-called environmental migration, Luisetti locates the logic that constructs migration as a

threat multiplier, a challenge to human security, or an opportunity to increase the “adaptive capacity” of vulnerable populations, thus minimizing the “adverse impacts of climate change” and optimiz[ing] economic output. (Luisetti 2020: 73)

The discourse of global environmental governance regarding sustainability, resilience, adaptation shines a light on the co-implication between the management of Nature within climate change and the putative threats posed to the management of migration due to the occurrence of climatic “natural” disasters. Such a form of governance, or indeed geo(nto) power, sets out to control both migration and climatic “crises” according to economic criteria, while leaving unscathed the fundamental root causes that produced them. In this sense, global environmental governance can simply frame migration as “a problem that warrants technical solutions” (Baldwin et al. 2019: 291).

This intersection points to a rationality that increasingly understands human flows via the lens of sustainable development, but also to a form of *Realpolitik* that does little to

¹⁵ See, for instance, the predictions of the migration and sustainable development (MIG), the World Migration Outlook, the Atlas of Migration or Frontex’s reports.

upset modern geopolitical thinking. In this sense, the so-called Anthropocene¹⁶ prolongs the contradictions of “global thinking”: the attempt to conceptualize and manage the Earth as a unitary whole, as first introduced by incipient geo-political thought in the late 19th century and heightened by the geo-economic discourse of globalization (Vegetti 2017: 31-76). In both domains, “geo-” is posited as an appropriable space, which is, therefore, measurable as property and territory in legal-economic terms. Within this framework, the Anthropocene denotes “a vast worldwide techno-commercial operation” (Neyrat 2019: 56), whose scale is that of the Earth. Ultimately, geo(nto)power exposes the effective geopolitical ends of migration management: the preservation of structures of regulation and domination within and between states via the border military-industrial complex – the same logic that governs the Transition in the Western Balkans.

Yet, to reduce geo(nto)power to an expanded biopolitics would fail to consider its twofold implication as “both the inhuman context in which biopolitical life is organized [and] a concept that opens thinking towards cosmic forces” (Yusoff 2018a: 204). The geopolitical claim which divides the entirety of the planet into bordered territories, through what we have tried to frame as a form of geo(nto)power, rehearses a constructivism that fails to reckon with the radical alterity of “geo-”. The dominant discourse on the Anthropocene resonates with the logic of appropriation at work within geopolitical thought in that – whether conceptualized as an empty, hollow object to be managed or as an active, motile subject to be stewarded – the Earth is denied its inhumanity (Neyrat 2019). On the contrary, the inhuman, “geo-” – as the prepolitical condition for the strategies and tactics of biopolitics – is constitutive of biopower and, as such, is a coordinate to think of another life and politics (Yusoff 2018a). For Grosz, in fact, inhuman cosmic forces are not only the pre-conditions to human existence but also an “excess within the human” (Grosz et al. 2017: 7). In a similar fashion, Frédéric Neyrat’s “unconstructable Earth” (2019) suggests conceiving of this inhuman excess as a resistance to the humanism that produces the *inhumane* treatment of racialized bodies through governmental tactics and the constructivist free-reign appropriation of geo-physical environments.¹⁷ Put differently, such a recognition also introduces the possibility of positing another (geo) politics starting from the Earth’s radical inhumanity: an attempt to unhinge the prefix “geo-” from the humanist presuppositions of migration management, extractive capitalism, and geopolitical thought.

¹⁶ While this text aligns with the Capitalocene thesis, the latter, in the words of Paolo Missiroli, “somehow removes the anthropological question from the field of inquiry, thereby avoiding one of the most radical issues (namely, that of the human-nature divide) which the notion of Anthropocene itself problematically forces us to confront” (Missiroli 2023: 23). The Anthropocene, this position would indicate, is ostensibly always already entangled within historical conditions and societal structures.

¹⁷ Indeed, geology and race are “intimate”. The category of the “inhuman” allows Kathryn Yusoff to locate a “connective hinge” between the “inhuman as matter” and the “inhuman as race” that has served the humanist, anthropocentric appropriation of geological forces as well as the labor/work of black and brown bodies within capitalism. At the same time, within this inhuman intimacy, Yusoff identifies a material praxis of resistance and refusal (Yusoff 2018b).

CONCLUSIONS

This paper has sought to reflect on the nexus between migration-power-environment by looking into the word “geo-”. Rather than giving a specific meaning to the prefix, we have tried to engage with its expansive use in contemporary political thought, while suggesting a heuristic shift from the geo-physical weaponization of Mount Plješevica to the geo-political scale of geo(nto)power; from the localized appropriation of Nature to the capitalist drive to reformatting the Earth itself. In this sense, the prefix “geo-” is arguably conceptual and global only insofar as it is grounded in events taking place at the EU’s periphery, and in a periphery of its periphery, such as the Bosnian Krajina. “Geo-” frames the Bosnian Krajina’s Plješevica as peripheral only insofar as it is actually central to a global condition and governmental logic in the Anthropocene.

In short, this paper has attempted to convey a sense of “geo-” as a conceptual and analytical key with respect to migration management. Firstly, by theorizing the prefix as a heuristic tool to examine the manipulation of multiple Earth environments that turn geo-physical features themselves into a border. Secondly, by positing “geo-” as the polar opposite to *bíos/zoé*: as the inhuman ground of biopolitics, a form of geo(nto)power that also surfaces in contemporary migration management. Thirdly, by suggesting geo as a way to name the inhumanity of the Earth: the condition and scale of such geo(nto)power, but also the inhuman possibility to rethink contemporary migration and environmental struggles.

This threefold consideration arguably foregrounds a relation between border and migration studies and critical political ecologies, which has recently been investigated across disciplinary boundaries, in light of a tactic frequently deployed in the domain of migration management. The weaponization of Białowieża, the Sahara Desert, the Mediterranean, the French Alps, the Darien Gap: the violence of borders oscillates between a form of strategic environmental abandonment and (digital) infrastructural technology. Reckoning with the inhuman of the Earth opens up conceptual and, thus practical avenues to question border violence and death through the appropriation of a putatively empty, inert Nature; at the same time, it suggests opposing yet another act of environmental violence in the name of border security.

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"GEO-": NAORUŽAVANJE OKOLIŠA, MOĆ I GEO-POLITIKA MIGRACIJA

Članak razmatra prefiks "geo-" i njegov potencijalni doprinos istraživanjima odnosa između migracija, moći i okoliša. Korištenje prefiksa "geo-" na tragu je recentnih istraživanja usmjerenih prema razumijevanju migracija iz perspektive ekologije i njezinih kritičko-filozofskih premisa. Predlaže se korištenje pojmova *geomoći* ili *geontomoći* kako bi se razjasnilo kako se geomorfološki okoliš kooptira i koristi kao oružje za odvracanje, iscrpljivanje i ubijanje migranata na način koji se, prema službenim navodima, ne čini eksplicitno ciljanim. Naime, trop navodno inertne i prazne Prirode legitimira prisvajanje onoga što je vezano uz *geo* kao temelja biomoći koja *nema veze s ljudskim* djelovanjem. Prefiks "geo-", štoviše, opisuje Zemlju u mjerilu prikladnom za migracije. Time se ukazuje na nužnost

shvaćanja migracija kao stanja i logike upravljanja svojstvene antropocenu – golemoj tehnološkoj i komercijalnoj operaciji kojom se Zemlja u konačnici određuje kao prisvojliv objekt moći. Ove se tvrdnje potkrjepljuju primjerom geofizičkog pretvaranja okoliša u oružje u kontekstu upravljanja migracijama u perifer(izira)noj regiji Europe, konkretno kroz veliku operaciju sječe šume na granici između Bosne i Hercegovine i Hrvatske. Istraživanjem ovog perifer(izira)nog graničnog okoliša, nastoji se istaknuti neljudskost Zemlje, potičući preispitivanje suvremenih borbi vezanih uz migracije i ekologiju.

Ključne riječi: okoliš, naoružavanje okoliša, Zemlja, neljudsko, sječa, migracije