Chapter 11
Photovoice as a Research Tool of the "Game" Along the "Balkan Route"

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11.1 Introduction

Migratory pathways across the borders of South Eastern Europe have been commonly recognised within public and policy discourses as the "Balkan Route" (Frontex, 2018; UNHCR, 2019). Yet those pathways do not follow one linear route across the official border checkpoints of former Yugoslav states – Serbia and Bosnia, to the European Union – Croatia and Hungary (Obradovic-Wochnik & Bird, 2019; Stojić & Vilenica, 2019). As often encountered by displaced populations, the journeys consist of perpetually moving onward and being pushed backward across diverse European towns, highways, mountains, forests, rivers, minefields, and camps, necessary to cross to reach western or northern Europe. Displaced people stranded in Serbia and Bosnia generally call their border crossing attempts the "game"; the term that conveys the daily mobility struggles, violence and deaths.

Although the "Balkan Route" has served as the transitory point for migration and smuggling to western and northern Europe (Ahmetašević & Mlinarević, 2019) for centuries, it reached its visibility in 2015/2016, when hundreds of thousands of displaced people walked through here while searching for protection in the EU (Cocco, 2017). However, the passage soon became entangled with the EU's political sentiments against immigration, while repeatedly picturing those seeking protection as a "security threat" (Dobreva & Radjenvic, 2018). For example, the far-right United Kingdom Independence Party called for "taking back control of the EU's borders" when releasing an anti-immigration poster "Breaking Point";

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depicting thousands of refugees walking from Croatia to Slovenia (Steward & Mason, 2015). In 2015, Hungary constructed an US$80 million razor wire fence along its southern borders, marking the EU-entry point from Serbia (Thorleifsson, 2017). What followed to further close the "Balkan Route" was the deal between the EU and Turkey (Cocco, 2017), as well as Croatia restricting its own borders with Serbia and later with Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Despite the route's closure, daily movement across Serbian and Bosnian borders onwards showed that the routes continued to be active. Militant and legislative border closures only made the migratory movements irregular, more hazardous and expensive, particularly for male migrants, who appeared on the bottom of support priorities (Arsenijević et al., 2018). The year of the "Balkan Route closure" (2016), Frontex detected 130,325 unauthorised entries from Serbia to Croatia and Hungary (Frontex, 2018). The responses to the border crossers by Hungarian and Croatian state authorities consisted of denial of asylum application and collectively expulsing them to the states of their departure (Arsenijević et al., 2018), commonly with the use of violence (Augustová & Sapoch, 2020). Despite violent border deterrents, all residing in Serbian and Bosnian camps hoped to transit undetected and reach the EU, which they believed was possible only while playing the "games".

Numerous scholars explored harms in migration, when paying attention particularly to structural violence: the one that is embedded in unequal state rules (Ansems de Vries & Guild, 2018; Fassin, 2011; Jones, 2019; Mbembe, 2003; Sayad, 2004; Vaugham-Williams, 2015), disruption of landscape border crossing channels (Stojić & Vilenica, 2019), denial to be saved when drowning in the sea (Cuttitta, 2018; Little & Vaughan-Williams, 2017; Squire, 2017; Stierl, 2018), and enclosure in inhospitable living spaces (Davies, Isakjee, & Dhesi, 2017; Laurie & Shaw, 2018; Mould, 2018; Salvador, 2017). However, direct border violence have predominantly been the focus of activist and NGO's research rather than academic research (No Name Kitchen, 2019; Border violence monitoring, 2019; Amnesty International, 2019; UNHCR, 2019). This is where I wish to make the empirical contribution with my research, exploring the daily negotiations of violent mobility obstacles as experienced and understood by people most subjected to them – generally, displaced men playing the "games".

To this end, I conducted one year of ethnographic fieldwork in South Eastern Europe, in Serbia (June – August 2017 and January 2018) and Bosnia-Herzegovina (June 2018 – January 2019), while providing aid with solidarity activists in various camps. In Serbia, I combined ethnographic research tools with participatory photographic methods – *photovoice* (Wang & Burris, 1997). As photographed *by* and interpreted *with* the displaced men, the "game" became the vector into their daily mobility struggles and violence. This chapter aims to reflect on the photographic methodologies used in violence migration research and their abilities to sensitively explore the world of "games" as based on cooperation. The main contribution to this book therefore focuses on the visual participation of people who have embodied experiences of migration and violence while questioning: "What are the security, ethical and methodological implications of participants being *in front of* camera versus *behind* camera?" and "to what extent does photovoice provide insight into

everyday violent spaces that are restricted to access due to positionality, ethical and legal issues?"

This chapter is divided into three parts. Letting participants photograph and interpret their images became the tools of understanding the research objectives. Albeit, visual collaboration happened to be the focal methodology as the result of daily rethinking presence and position of (my) camera at the borders, which are sensitive, securitised and quickly evolving fields. The first part reflects on how I encountered migratory spaces in Serbia with my camera and explains why I eventually utilised photovoice. In the second part, I provide methodological explanations about photovoice: how it was used in the research, with whom it was conducted, and how the participants were selected in line with ethical and legal (visual) research. The chapter then goes on to the presentation of participants' photographic data and discusses these within the methodological implications of photovoice. I argue that photovoice in combination with ethnography enables to enter the participants' daily events of "games", which I as a researcher could not otherwise access due to the barriers of state-rules, different positionalities and ethical issues. The final part discusses the implications and limitations of the participatory visual methodology.

11.2   "Who Is Behind Camera?": Reflecting Photography Along Borders

When arriving in Serbia, I encountered the migratory routes and camps with a camera in my hand to capture the visual memos. However, I soon found the researcher-led photography problematic as it posed questions regarding methodological restriction and research ethics. Firstly, I faced the tacit dilemma of conducting (photographic) research in an authoritarian and securitised field (Gentile, 2013) – formal accommodation centres. Here, the state authorities forbade photography taking, besides closely following my movement. So, I avoided using my camera there to not lose access. In contrast, no state authority was present in makeshift camps and squats, except occasional police raids. Although the makeshift accommodations were the only spaces where the displaced people could rest and live their everyday and intimate moments, they were not considered as their private properties in legal terms. For this reason, movements across makeshift camps were not restricted. This provided an opportunity for photojournalists on their missions to capture stories of violence and misery. While professional photography is crucial to explore what images can tell public and social scientists about more ambiguous aspects of life at borders, to be able to do so, it needs to be established based on the dignity of the subjects and cooperation with them for extended period (Langmann & Pick, 2014). However, photography practices in Serbia often omitted collaboration with the displaced population due to the limited time that photojournalists spent in the field. They also lacked considerations of how their photography impacted on life and action at borders.

Most photographers seemed to have preconceived understandings of how to visualise deprivations from the most dramatic angles to satisfy the media demands, without paying attention to identities and visual accuracy of their subjects. Photographers were daily stepping into makeshift camps with no consent or empathy when taking images of displaced persons' faces, injured bodies from police attacks, or asking them to pose with their destroyed possessions, and then, disappearing. For example, Imad[1] said during our conversation: *"She [the photojournalist] came and just took many photos of my injuries and my face, although I said no face. After, she sat in a café, edited her photos and left back to the US. How does this help me? She knew nothing about me"*. This and other similar practices posed questions regarding informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, power positionalities and, dignity of the people being photographed. The displaced people were hiding their camps' locations as they feared police violence and evictions. Some men also said during our conversations that their families were not aware of their living situations as they felt ashamed to tell them. The previous research in the Calais camp found similar findings when people avoided to be photographed by journalists and described "don't want my mother to see me like this" (Davies et al., 2017, p. 1271). Hence, photography capturing the men's identifying features and locations exposed them to risks and were entangled with sensibilities ignored by cameras pointing at them. Those who happened to be in the locus of camera objectives had often limited or no power over the photography's depiction, but also interpretation, dissemination and profit.

For these reasons, a camera in the hands of "strangers" presented distrust. While some men cooperated with journalists, many left their shelters when journalists arrived, covered their faces, ignored them, or reacted with anger. Although the photographic media coverage of migration highlighted humanitarian issues and developed pressure on policy makers, the visual data collection process was often problematic. Another issue of taking photographs "from the outside' identified along borders was related to border surveillance techniques. Frontex as well as Croatian and EU's state authorities daily use drones, satellite images, CCTV, thermal cameras and radars to detect, stop and violently deter the "game" mobility, as reported by state authorities and displaced population during interviews. Repeated episodes of being demeaned and oppressed by "outside" cameras resulted in displaced people's resistance to being photographed. The camera was, therefore, reconstructed in camps from the tool leading to awareness and positive global impact into a dangerous and exploitative object. This has already been pointed to by Sontag (1977, 2003), who raised the issue of power and danger of photography when she called a camera in the hands of strangers as an aggressive object, which does not provide us with understanding of violent fields. Lack of collaboration with those being photographed does not only result in their lack of control over photography itself but also over what is perceived to exist in (violent) migration worlds (Butler, 2009).

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[1] All participants' names have been changed in the text to protect their identities.

Since researchers are responsible for visual practices and representations as much as journalists (Desille & Nikielska-Sekula, Chap. 1, in this volume), the research-led photography became distorted as the research method in camps due to serious security and moral implications on the ground. I did not want to be associated with exploitative and merely Euro-centred visual conceptualisation of what life was like at the borders. Instead, I wished to explore peoples' (photographic) perceptions and interpretations and develop cooperation with trust. For this reason, I gave up on taking photographs by myself. Instead, I paid attention to photographs produced by the displaced men as these captured their worlds' according to their own understandings. It was not difficult to access such images as most people living in the camps said to daily photograph their journeys on smartphones, which they had carried on them to communicate with families and smugglers as well as to navigate the foreign terrains (e.g. GPS, translation). Recent research mentioned refugees taking photos on smartphones to preserve memories of their journeys to Europe (Alencar, Kondova, & Ribbens, 2018; Gillespie, Osseiran, & Cheesman, 2018). However, it did not consider the self-directed images as a tool of exploration of violent mobility obstacles, which I found out to be a crucial reason for displaced population taking photos. People in the camps photographed difficult terrains, violence, perilous camps' conditions while trying to resist these and gain more protection, as the data will show. Since the self-directed images were omitted in violence and migration studies despite its rich information about the issue, I wished to place them in the study locus, with the men's consent. To grasp more complexity about migration and violence within the everyday moments along the borders, I further asked the men whether they wished to borrow my camera and take more photos and they agreed.

11.3 Photovoice Methodology

Letting participants take photographs, with only limited instructions, is a visual participatory research method called *photovoice*, developed by Wang and Burris (1997), and used by numerous scholars researching migration (Berman, Ford-Gilboe, Moutrey, & Cekic, 2001; Green & Kloos, 2009; Gilhooly & Lee, 2017; Lenette & Boddy, 2013; Okigbo, Reierson, & Stowman, 2009; Piemontese, Chap. 10, in this volume; Schwartz, Sable, Dannerbeck, & Campbell, 2007). When using photovoice, the men in this research could decide and manage via their images *what* they wanted people see and *how* they saw it (Pilcher, 2012). Such an approach increased participants control over the research themes and legitimised their unique vision of realities at the borders. Since the images were unexpected and unforeseen, I could enter a gateway beyond their own naturalised ideology and consciousness about other human beings' everyday worlds (Bourdieu, 2012; Mannay, 2010; Mizen & Ofosu-Kusi, 2010). Following the suggestions by Wang and Burris (1997), I further used *photo-elicitation*; the collaborative reflective discussions over images to explore the men's subjective narratives associated with visuals. Photo-taking and

photo-elicitation due to their participatory nature, therefore, promised to challenge the main issues that appeared in the researcher-led photography: using camera as a predatory object, excluding the men from photographic process, representations and meaning makings about violent immobility, based merely on researcher's presumptions.

Participants were selected on the basis of circumstance and using a snowball sampling technique. As previously pointed out, I used the photovoice in combination with three months of participant observation in Serbian camps, which enabled to engage with the life at the borders and meet potential participants. After providing aid in the camps for several weeks, I approached the male inhabitants, with whom I established living and working relations with trust. I explained to them the purpose of my research and asked them whether they wished to collaborate. Some shared with me their images on their smartphones, while spending time together in the camps, during which I asked them whether they were interested to use their images for the research purpose as well as to take more photos and elicit them. The men agreed and further networked me with other camp cohabitants, about whom they knew that they were taking photos of their journeys or would be interested to do so. Eventually, 17 men from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Syria, between 17 and 28 years old became photographers and collaborative narrators in the research.

Since consent is the crucial principle of ethical visual research (British Sociological Association and VSSG, 2006; Papademas and International Visual Sociology Association, 2009), I obtained oral consent from the men to participate in the study. I avoided written consent as it was inappropriate in the context and developed customs along migratory routes (Langmann & Pick, 2014). Participants said they repeatedly sign forms that had undermined their rights and mobility; when being forcibly moved from makeshift camps to detention centres, apprehended in border zones, or arrested in police stations during the "games". Consequently, the men had developed distrust in signing official-looking documents, and for this reason, it was avoided in the research. Furthermore, written consent would contain their real names and signatures, which would undermine their anonymity. Instead, I dedicated weeks to establish dialogue and trust with the participants and in details discussed with them the research to later obtain their autonomous oral consent. Consent was however re-negotiated when moving to photo-elicitations and decision-making about dissemination of photographs.

Some participants decided to take photos for one or few days and others continued taking images for weeks/months on their smartphones. In total, the men took 487 images. The images were discussed during both individual and collective photo-elicitations, based on the men's choice. During the photo-elicitation, I posed two core questions to the photographers: "What is happening in the photo?" and "Why did you take a photo of this?", letting the men control further discussions. With respect to their legal rights as owners of the images, the men were asked whether to keep or destroy the photographs after the photo-elicitation. Participants had choice to select the images as well as their titles for academic publications. While following standards what to display (Nikielska-Sekula, Chap. 2, this volume), I suggested to use those that did not contain any identifying features and those

that the men assigned rigorous narratives, and they agreed. With the oral consent of my participants, these images are presented in this chapter. While the images depicted diverse sur-faces, the photo-elicitations surprised when the men mostly connected the image locus to the narratives of the "game". The following section presents the men's photographs and interpretations, while discussing to what extend photovoice provides the insight into their world of "games" that are challenging to access due to diverse positionalities, legal and ethical issues.

11.4   "I Took a Photo of the "Game" Because I Wanted to Show You My Life Here"

The English word "game" was so familiarised among diverse communities in camps that I could hear it even when the men were communicating in their mother tongues, with smugglers, and aid providers. The "game" became an ordinary term at the borders, albeit, its meaning was entangled in extraordinary painful experiences. I wanted to be mindful of the men's sensibilities and traumas involved in their cross-border journeys, and for this reason, I had struggled to openly question them about the "games". However, when they positioned the "game" in the visual research locus, their images opened our discussions over this term and its meanings. During the photo-elicitations, the men often pointed to undertaking risks, winning and losing while crossing borders, upon which they constructed the term "game". For instance, Ali said: *"You know, this [border crossing] is like the "game" because it is risky. It is like a video game. You fail and start playing again, fail and again, fail and again until you win"*. The men also pointed to various rules and strategies that needed to be understood prior to winning: *"Border crossing is like the "game' because you need to understand its rules and theory if you want to win"* (Fareed). Finally, the word "game" also served to minimise the association of border crossing with danger and better cope with its difficult process. When taking about the "game", many smiled or laughed, although the images captured difficult moments: *"It is just the "game" [laugh]. That is why we call it "game". It is nothing else. […] You have to win otherwise nothing will change. That's it"* (Hasseb). These glimpses of photo-elicitation indicate that the participants' images provided a gateway to the world of the "games", which I could discuss, see and feel closer. To this end, the participant-made images began our conversation about the sensitive topic of "games", and that under the men's control of visual depictions, terminologies and meaning makings.

   The most common focus that the participants decided to photograph were their daily routines within diverse transient accommodations; "jungles", "barracks", tents, shelters, makeshift kitchens, bedrooms, dining rooms, and playgrounds as well as state-run camps. Since the men could carry their smartphones or a small digital camera and take photographs anywhere at any time, the photographs provided insight into spaces, where I had forbidden or restricted access to. These were

particularly rub halls, where the men were accommodated in state-run accommodation centres, and makeshift camps in the night-time. While most images seemed mundane and innocent at first, participants often assigned to them unexpected stories that showed hidden preparations for the "games". For instance, Fareed, took the photograph of his two friends, sitting on their beds in the rub hall in the night: *"We cannot sleep in the night. It is too hot and loud. But also, smugglers come to the camp in night. Night is the time for planning. … I am always prepared, download offline maps, have compass, study terrain. You must be clever and make strategies and cooperate with others"* (Fareed). Fareed through his photography pointed to the theoretical preparations and social connections as fundamental strategies for the "game". Since I could not enter the rub hall and see the night life in the camps, these were strange and unknown to me within my ethnographic research. However, the men's photographs made the "strange familiar" (Bolton, Pole, & Mizen, 2001).

The photovoice also worked vice versa; "making the familiar practices strange again" (Mannay, 2010). Participants photographed various daily practices, which they had routinised and perceived them as ordinary: eating, praying, resting, exercising, and calling on a phone. I was regularly observing these seemingly innocent practices, without assigning them any special meanings or border mobility negotiations. However, the men connected these to their physical and mental preparations prior to attempting the border crossing. For instance, Hassed said: *"We exercise a lot to be fit and be able to walk for days and weeks and to run in the jungle [forest]. We also rest and pray the day before the "game""*. Hence, the images shed new light on the daily routines in camps, for both me and the men. The photo-elicitation processes made the men to re-think the meanings and repetitions of their daily routines, as well as my observations, when connecting them to broader narrative of the world, in which they had been stranded. In this way, participatory visual methodologies resulted in portraying and understanding of border violence through the everyday and ordinary rather than only extreme events and visual stereotypes, such as injuries and stories scored with remarkable practices of border guards or poverty in camps. If only research-led photography would be used, the men's ordinary and intimate visual angles of immobility would be lacking, in which stems the strength of photovoice.

The scenes of "games" across the photographs were repetitive and captured a predominantly masculine experience. When we were discussing what was driving the "game" repetitions and why it was gendered, the men connected these to border policies and states' rules. The men believed that the "game" presented the only means of escaping a life of deprivations in camps and of reaching their destination: *"We cannot just stay in the camp and wait. We have been here over ten months, and nothing happened. The Commissariat [for Refugees and Migration Republic of Serbia, managing camps] laughed at me that I don't have any chance to legally cross because I am a single [man]"* (Basir). Five participants also pointed that they had tried to negotiate the legal access to the two Hungarian transit zones, which were the only authorised ways of accessing asylum procedures from Serbia to Hungary. However, they were mostly rejected or told to wait even 7 years as 9 from 10 places per week were reserved for the families, like Remi: *"The Commissariat*

told me to go to the "game" or go back home. I can't go back because I would be killed. So, I keep trying the "game" every week."

Participants attributed their limited legal border channels to their recognition as "single men"; the label that assigned them lack vulnerability and dependency. Trencsényi and Naumescu (Chap. 7, this volume) argue that public and film visual narratives, besides asylum and border policies and rules, construct this generic migrant figure, upon which the men are framed as predators invading Europe. However, the men through their images showed and discussed various vulnerabilities, which were opposing their dehumanisation and criminalisation. The visual narratives conveyed past war and extreme poverty experiences and related psychological and medical problems, which were causing them struggles throughout their journeys. These were accompanied by poor living conditions in makeshift camps in Serbia, due to limited space in state-run accommodation centres prioritising families (Fig. 11.1). Hence, the photovoice and elicitations contextualised participants backgrounds of limited border crossing options as well as the everyday enclosure in inhospitable camps intercepted with their gender. As a consequence, the men were practicing the irregular and highly securitised "games", despite their dangerous nature and violent or deadly consequences.

The men's photo stories also showed various "game' practices and their processes on the ground, when portraying "chocolaty game" and the "guarantee game":

Chocolaty game is without a smuggler. It is less expensive but difficult because you must walk by yourself in the jungle [forest]. You get very dirty, you have mud everywhere and look like a chocolate [laugh], that is why chocolaty. If you go with a smuggler it is more

Fig. 11.1 Jungles and squats are places only for single men. (Photo by Kazim)

guaranteed that you will make it. Guarantee is more comfortable because you go by car from the border, but it is very expensive. Smugglers sometimes charge 3000 or 4000 euros to cross from Serbia to Croatia (Fareed).

The processes of the "guarantee game" and the "chocolaty game" were particularly explored through the images of few men, who decided to take photos beyond the camps; in border zones, mountains, forests and highways, through which they were perpetually moving onwards and forced backwards: *"Me and my friends went on the "guarantee game" last night. I took the camera with me because I wanted to show you my life here"* (Fig. 11.2) (Ahmad). Ahmad looked exhausted when he switched on a small digital camera and showed me dark and blurred photos that he had taken the previous night. The images depicted him and his friends walking through diverse forest routes and a highway, and his dirty shoes from walking through mud (Fig. 11.3). While looking at the images, Ahmad was narrating the process of his twentieth "game" from Serbia to Croatia. This time, he tried the "guarantee game", which despite its name resulted in failure:

> Me, my friends and a smuggler left around 9.30 p.m. from the camp. We were walking for seven hours to the borders where we supposed to call another smuggler and he should pick us with a car and transport us to Zagreb. But the Croatian police saw us. We did not run because the smuggler said our whole group could be in danger and he could be arrested. … The police only slapped our faces and smashed our phones. After that, they returned us to Serbia (Ahmad).

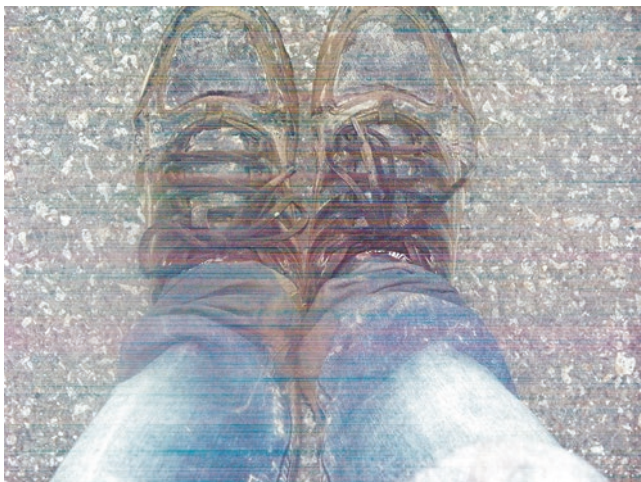

Fig. 11.2 The "game". (Photo by Ahmad)

Fig. 11.3 Dirty shoes in the "game". (Photo by Ahmad)

Although the men considered the "game" without the help of smugglers as an even smaller chance to win, most of them were practicing the "chocolaty games" as they lacked finances. The photographs of "chocolaty games" carried the narratives of walking and running in forests and mountains for days and weeks, dealing with extreme weather with lack of food and shelter, and being chased by patrols and dogs: *"We were running in the rain in the jungle [forest] for two days. I felt the police behind my back. There was no dry place to sit or lie down and no time to rest. We had no food. I knew that police dogs would find us once we got tired and had no energy to run anymore, and they did"* (Ali).

Several men also took photos of trucks and large car parks. This "chocolaty game" consisted of walking for two days through the jungles [forests] to car parks in border zones, where searching for a truck to hide under, followed by a dangerous transport to Zagreb or another European city:

> We wait till the truck drivers go to sleep and after hide under truck. There is a space for spare wheel under truck in the back and if there is only one wheel I can sit there. It is a lottery if you hide under the right truck as some of them drive back to Bulgaria and you find out this when truck starts driving. If you are under the wrong truck, you must jump off. If you get the right one, you need to hold yourself under the truck for 300 km (185 miles) to Zagreb. I am trying not to be scared because otherwise I would fail (Basir).

These visual narratives demonstrate how the men's images permitted me as a researcher to see the "game" terrains and the detailed processes of border crossings. I would otherwise struggle to see these due to legal constraints of entering border zones with them when I could be accused of human smuggling. The images of border crossings were also narrated in the men's own language, without me intervening their stories with my assumptions of what the mobility struggles meant on the ground. Similarly, Piemontese (Chap. 10, this volume) argues that handing camera to participants' hands results in in-depth information, beyond a researcher's primary

expectations and understanding as a privileged observer. The photovoice therefore positioned my participants in the role of research experts of what everyday border immobility and struggle meant, shaping the research process and focus. The men were mostly discussing the detailed practices of "games" captured on the photographs with confidence, treating them as part of their daily reality despite its failures and risks. However, one of the most fundamental facets captured on the images were fears and experiences of abuses, detentions, violence, and deaths involved in the "games".

Several men took images of various injuries. Common were foot blisters and cuts on legs and arms, or thorns in skin, which were caused while crossing dangerous landscapes. However, the most prominent injuries (bruises, open wounds, fractured/broken limbs) captured in the images were caused by the EU's border authorities while detaining the men or pushing them back to Serbia, after their interceptions during the "games". When looking over the images, the men were describing how Croatian or Hungarian border patrols were beating them with kicks, fists, batons or using electric shocks, razors or dog bites. The scenes on photographs depicted brutal border deterrents and traumas, however, the photographs enabled their sensitive exploration. The men could decide which photographs to show, hold control over the images' narratives, and when to start and stop the narratives, without me interrupting or asking direct questions about violence. For instance, Fareed took the photo of his friends' wounded back (Fig. 11.4): *"Hungarian police spotted us [in the game] and it was bad. They [police] were beating us by batons and after forced*

Fig. 11.4 "Game punishment". (Photo by Fareed)

*us to climb through the hole inside of the wire border fence that was very sharp and
kept beating us while we were crawling through the fence"* (Fareed). All men par-
ticipating in the photo research said to have experienced several episodes of "push-
backs" and violence, some even thirty times across months or a year of traveling.
Other three participants took several images from detention cells, where they were
detained out of the legal procedures, in Bulgaria and Greece (Fig. 11.5): *"I have
been arrested three times for border crossing. I was sharing the room with drug
dealers and killers, but I am not a criminal. I just want to escape from the war and
study again"* (Hamid).

   Violence and abuses discussed over the images were also perpetrated by people
smugglers, whom the men relied on when trying to cross the hazardous terrains.
Although smugglers" practices and communication with the men were not directly
photographed, the men included these into the photo-elicitations. While the men
shared their images presenting only frozen moments, their meanings and stories
were set in motion, including the once about experiences with smugglers. For
instance, the photographs of "game" preparations in the night captured a memory of
communicating with smugglers, negotiating prices and the tight border between
help and exploitation: *"For some, smugglers are angels because they are the only
people who help to cross the border. But for others, they are nightmare"* (Basir).
Most commonly, the men said to pay in advance to be smuggled from Serbia
onwards, but (a person pretending to be) a smuggler disappeared without providing
transportation service. Participants also recounted to be financially exploited, and in

Fig. 11.5 "For what
arrested?" (Photo
by Hamid)

rare cases, sexually abused, attacked and tortured by smugglers. The images of wounds inflicted by border guards evoked an emotion that helped the men to explain further harms by smugglers. For instance, Hasseb said that he had struggled to pay unexpected additional fees above those previously agreed upon with a smuggler, leading to physical torture: *"I was kidnapped by smugglers in Bulgaria who locked me in a flat and they were beating me. They were taking photos of my injuries and filmed how they were torturing me and sent it to my family asking for more money. My family sent them 800 euros and they let me go"* (Hasseb). The men shared these traumas to complete the narratives captured on their photographs, without me asking additional direct questions. The information completing the photographic narratives was fundamental, uncovering the complexity of violent mobility struggles and diverse actors involved.

While physical pain that occurred in the "games" was visible on the photographs and injured bodies in the camps, the most profound consequence of the "games" – death, was hidden in the men's fears and emotional worlds. Fairly innocent objects that had happened to be photographed by purpose or by mistake evoked narratives of the photographers' cognitive worlds, leading to a more nuanced understanding of the "games" fatal consequences. For instance, Basir took the photo of a bed inside of the rub hall, where he was sleeping. The purpose of the image, as he explained, was to show his accommodation. When describing what was on the photograph, he then, pointed to a flower on the left edge that was almost invisible (Fig. 11.6) and said: *"You see this bed with flower? This bed is empty. There is just a flower now. It belonged to my friend who died last week. Him and another boy from our tent went in the game. One was sixteen and other fourteen years old. They hid under the truck and when it started driving, they realized it was going back to Bulgaria. They jumped off and one died"* (Basir).

Another three men also said during the photo-elicitations that they had friends who died during the "games", as the result of perishing in a river, falling from a driving truck, or freezing to death while hiding in front of border patrols in a forest in the winter. The men knew little about what happened to the dead bodies of their friends. According the ARD Wien Südosteuropa (2019), at least 170 people died along the Balkan routes since July 2013, while trying to reach the EU. However, this number is expected to be higher due clandestine routes that displaced people take and perish in, where dead bodies are difficult to detect or remain unreported. In the interviews and conversations with activists, I learnt that discovered dead bodies were buried in secluded areas along the Balkan routes, for instance in Zvornik (Serbia), in graves with the sign "migrant" and the death date, unbeknown to their families and friends. Some dead bodies were repatriated with mere public acknowledgement in media that "a migrant [without a name and concrete reason] died".

While the deaths were anonymised, unclarified, hidden and silenced, they spread rumours around camps, causing fear across all people preparing for the "games". Most men mentioned during the photo-elicitations that they feared dying while picking a truck to hide under, crossing rocky terrains, or a river when struggling to swim, or deciding whether to go on the "game" in the winter when temperatures can reach −20 °C in Serbia. Whereas death conveys emotions, thoughts, and

Fig. 11.6 "Flower for death". (Photo by Basir)

abstractions that are difficult to grasp, the photographs opened such discussions and facilitated its concepts. The previous study by Salvador (2017), also showed how visual (film) and participation lead to exploration of death as unrecognised, silenced and absent phenomenon in bereaved persons' lives. Participatory visual materials, therefore, enable participants to show intersubjective portrayal and understanding of deaths in their lives, that might otherwise be more challenging verbally or in an acquired language alone.

11.5 Conclusions: Re-Thinking Photography and Participation in Violence and Migration Research

In this chapter, I justified the usage of participatory visual methodologies to shift the role of "who is behind the camera and research". I did so to give more control to my participants over *what* to reveal about their cross-border mobilities, *how* to interpret their images as "games" and whether (or not) to disseminate them. I stressed how fundamental the participation was in the sensitive and violent border research field, where the displaced men regularly felt undermined, exploited and attacked by

diverse camera objectives pointing at them from "outside" and surveying them throughout their cross-border journeys. In the discussions of visual data collection and findings, I argued that participatory visual methods, in particular, provide an insight – a witness to people's spaces that became securitised and hidden, but where violence and death in migration are embodied and experienced.

Participants used their images to discuss border "games", within which their mobility was criminalised and violently punished. In this way, the men's images opposed to stigmatised visual representation of male migrants as "not vulnerable", "dangerous" or "criminals", when showing their various struggles. These did not only stem from extreme direct attacks and deaths, as commonly medialised, but also in ordinary routines, social relations and language in camps. Since the "games" were securitised and socially distant and difficult to investigate due to sensitivity of the topic, I as a researcher would have struggled to see and discuss it with the men without their visual encounters. The scenes captured on the images further helped the men to recount their memories, stories and emotions, beyond photographic frozen moments. Without asking direct questions that could potentially result in emotional distortions, I learnt how the men experienced intimate moments of pain, death, and everyday fears via "games".

While discussing co-working in (visual) research, including profit, I also wish to point out how the participants used their photographs for their own purposes. The visual process served for both the men and me as an "investigatory tool" and a revelation of what they believed was the truth but had been omitted within visual conceptualisation of borders. The male "game players" visualised violent mobility obstacles on their smartphones to resist rendering such violence as a seamless and accepted fact occurring daily on European borders. Participants said that the main reason they kept visual memos of their journeys on their smartphones (particularly injuries and dire living conditions in camps) was to share the images with humanitarian organisations, activists and the public. Others hoped to use such photographs as support material when applying for asylum in their final destinations. Thus, through the visual display medium, these men wished to gain greater protection throughout their migratory journeys.

Although the photographs did not directly change the men's limited legal transit options, "push-backs", and violence, self-directed photography gave them the right to express their opinions and contribute to the systems trying to implement policy changes. NGOs, activists, independent lawyers told, during conversations, of using images of various human rights abuses taken by displaced people as evidence material for advocacy purposes. As Butler (2009) argues, photographs are needed as evidence of violence and crimes, but their narratives mobilise people. In this way, vision is political, and visual methodologies have a power that non-visual qualitative methods often lack (Warren, 2005), particularly when control over camera and narratives is in hands of those being subjected to violence. However, photography as a tool for self-protection and advocacy became a threat to perpetrators and border patrols commonly destroy the mobile phones of displaced people to obstruct their potential to document human rights violations and hinder their further movement (Augustová & Sapoch, 2020).

Besides the damage of visual material and safety of participants, other limitation stems from collaboration after our withdrawal from the field. While photographing and filming, as well as interpreting visuals, is based on co-working, the final process of writing and publishing involves no further active interplay between all those involved in the research. I found it difficult to keep in contact and further discuss the written work with my participants after my withdrawal from the field, due to the men"s regular movements, damage to phones, sim-cards changes and many other unplanned events on their unsteady and traumatic journeys. The loss of contact was also caused by the participants' "right to disappear", as discussed by Prieto (Chap. 18, in this volume), particularly after the men themselves also left violent borders and camps and started negotiating their new peaceful life in safety. The researcher's writing up process, when re-interpreting the men's photographic stories in an "academic narrative", derived from participants' meanings and interpretations of photographic material. However, the main arguments on the uses of participatory visual methodologies or how to structure participants' photographs into an academic story about border violence is no longer co-production, but the researcher's final decisions based on her assumptions, interests and objectives.

A further limitation involved in using (participatory) visual methods, as encountered in the eight months of research in Bosnia, was the inability to overcome the camera-as-an object-of-exploitation and aggression image. With an even greater influx of journalists, NGOs, activists, and tourists daily stepping into Bosnian camps with cameras, the visualisation of migration was perceived by the displaced population as generating a zoo effect. People regularly reacted to large camera lenses angrily, saying "This is not a zoo!", which was also written on the camp showers with their painted symbol of a crossed-out camera. Out of respect for participants, the following study in Bosnian camps avoided using (participatory) photography except from photo documentation of injuries for advocacy purposes when requested by/consented by victims for their own potential increase of protection. While participatory research methods are useful investigatory tools and increase control for all people involved in research, their use needs to be always re-negotiated with participants and reconsidered in relation to quickly evolving border contexts, in which displaced people play the "games" (of violence and death).

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