

Assamblage of violence. The agency of Białowieża Forest in the UE migration policy crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border.

The project aims to analyse the role of the Białowieża Forest's environment in the ongoing crisis of European Union migration policy on the Polish-Belarusian border since 2021. In doing so, we understand the environment of the Białowieża Forest broadly as an assemblage, a hybrid collective of humans and non-humans who are equally participants in this crisis.

Ongoing since autumn 2021. refugee crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border, also referred to as a humanitarian crisis, is discussed in public and academic discourse primarily from an anthropocentric perspective, focusing on irregular border crossers, who are presented either objectively, as powerless tools of hybrid war of the Putin and Lukashenko regimes, or as agents seeking a safe place to live in Europe and exposed to structural violence from the restrictive migration policies of the European Union. The issue of environmental degradation as a consequence of these policies resounds with a much weaker voice. On the Polish-Belarusian border, increased migration movement takes place primarily within the Białowieża Forest, which is one of the oldest and largest forest complexes in Europe and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Arousing many objections and protests from the scientific and activist communities, the construction of a wall on the Polish-Belarusian border in 2022, carried out without expert and public consultation, cut this complex in half, closing migration routes not only for humans, who cross this barrier without much difficulty, but also for animals, posing a serious threat to their reproductive cycles, biodiversity and general welfare. The environment of the Białowieża Forest, its non-human and human inhabitants are equally victims of the militarisation and securitisation of the border, and their fates should not be treated separately as they are inextricably linked.

It is this interconnectedness and interdependence, the presence in crisis of the entire environment of the Białowieża Forest, its human and non-human inhabitants, will be the object of analysis in our project. Its theoretical background is the post-anthropocentric perspective of ecological humanities, underpinned by the assumption of the interdependence of the human and natural worlds, their relationality and networking within a shared environment. This research does not aim to shift the burden from the human to the non-human; rather, it aims to analyse them in their mutual relations without introducing unnecessary divisions and hierarchies so that those categories that usually remain in the background - plants, animals, landscape - become equal subjects of events.

An in-depth reflection on the methods and techniques for investigating the causal role of the environment in the co-creation of the socio-political reality of the borderland is an additional task of this project, which, by including non-human actors as equal research subjects, aims to contribute to widening the field of vision in the humanities and social sciences.