

**Formation and Disintegration of the Balkan Refugee Corridor:  
Camps, Routes and Borders in the Croatian Context**  
Edited by Emina Bužinkić and Marijana Hameršak

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# Formation and Disintegration of the Balkan Refugee Corridor: Camps, Routes and Borders in the Croatian Context

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## Introduction

This book's chapters are derived from the papers presented at the conference about the Balkan refugee corridor held on 14 and 15 June 2016 in Zagreb, Croatia. The conference was organized by the Center for Peace Studies, Center for Ethnicity, Citizenship and Migration of the Faculty of Political Science of the University of Zagreb, the Welcome! Initiative / Inicijativa Dobrodošli! and the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research. The intention of the conference was to offer an opportunity for presenting and connecting the disciplinary and thematically diverse empirical research on various aspects of mass transcontinental migration across the Balkans towards Europe in 2015. The conference was focused on the movement of people, unprecedented at that time, which had been blocked several months earlier as a result of numerous political decisions, agreements, and strategic, physical and technological interventions. During the conference, twelve studies in different research phases were presented, as well as one artistic project. Moreover, a panel on comparative integration policies with four presentations was held. Detailed summaries of the panel presentations were distributed over the volunteers' platform of the Welcome! Initiative. The ongoing research studies that had been presented at the conference were completed in the upcoming months and prepared for this book, first published in Croatian language in 2017. This book, now also available in English, represents our collaborative attempt to describe and critically rethink the Balkan refugee corridor and the ways in which global migration policies and practices were adapted, established and collapsed in a specific time and space.

Editors





Marijana Hameršak and Iva Pleše

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## Confined in Movement: The Croatian Section of the Balkan Refugee Corridor

The continual fencing off of the European Union, the many that have died at its borders and en route to them, as well as the many marginalised and disenfranchised waiting for admission or a chance to continue their life in the EU at the edges of its territory or far from it, understandably evoke images of solid borders and a compact outer shield, i.e. a “Fortress Europe” (cf. e.g. Amnesty International 2014).<sup>1</sup> However, as critics of the term Fortress Europe point out (e.g. Höning 2014: 132; Walters 2002: 567–568), the borders of Europe in question – unlike the impenetrable walls of some imaginary fortress – are porous and in flux, selectively restrictive, dispersed, and not only robust and circumferential. They are a product of the interaction of practices, tactics and strategies employed by the people on the move, legal frameworks, political and other arrangements, military and police forces, technology, the media and public opinion. These borders are constantly being relocated, established and abolished, abandoned and determined, materialised and de-materialised. Even in an ideal type form they overlap, complement and cancel each other out. By going into the territories of individual countries or transcending them on several levels, these diffuse and stratified borders form a sort of constantly changing and frightening *live trap for the undesirables*.

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<sup>1</sup> For estimates on the number of deaths en route to Europe in 2015 see, e.g. Brian and Laczko et al. 2016: 5–12, for estimates of the status on the edges of the EU, e.g. in Greece in October 2016, see <http://www.refworld.org/country,COI,UNHCR,,GRC,,57f397094,0.html>. Also see map: <http://15years.morizbuesing.com/>. Overview of the number of people fleeing from Syria, for instance, to countries in the Middle East and North Africa in May of 2015, see: <http://www.refworld.org/country,,UNHCR,,LBN,,56e7ba714,0.html>.

For us, as well as countless others, this trap has been basically invisible in our daily lives until recently. Before the *long summer of migration* in 2015 (cf. e.g. Kasperek and Speer 2015), it was not apparent in its true meaning even in those rare instances where we witnessed its activation, for instance, when a few years ago one of us was on a train headed for Ljubljana (Slovenia) and one dark skinned young man was escorted out of the car by the border police “for additional checks”. Instead of some sort of direct or at least postponed reaction, this event in its de-contextualised form elicited only a vague feeling that the incident was in fact an encounter with something that could be recognised as a European apartheid (cf. Balibar 2004: 121–122). Therefore our review of the events that took place in the fall and winter of 2015/2016 starts with a brief overview of the first level in the manifestation of this apartheid and of some of the basic directions in building European borders. Afterwards, we examine a special form of the border established during this period, i.e. a corridor whose rules and directions constantly changed, funneling the movement of several hundred thousand refugees through state territories, finally evolving into, with regards to the Croatian section, a place of immobilisation, a place from which, it seemed, there was no way out, which we discuss in the final part of the article.

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– I’m kind of tired of it all. I get sick to my stomach when I think about Schengen. They have sensors smart enough to know when someone’s heart is beating in the trunk of a car. Then you have thermal vision cameras, and satellites, and Frontex. Meh. I don’t feel up to any of it. And you younger generation, you’ll manage somehow.

*Kristian Novak (2016) Ciganin, ali najboljši. Zagreb: OceanMore*

When Hungary closed its border with Serbia to refugees on 15 September 2015, our immediate surroundings were the stage for events that could be characterised as border drama, somewhat familiar to us from the scenes of refugees crossing the Aegean Sea and from the border crossings in Macedonia, Serbia and Hungary, which were shown to us by the media during that summer. The mass transcontinental movement which was being rerouted that September from Serbia to Croatia, and then further

branching out towards the Croatia-Hungary and Croatia-Slovenia border, was at that time, as well as afterwards, followed by different types of state of emergency at the border. Several hundreds of people, and at times more than a thousand, were stopped at the Croatia-Slovenia border, which we ourselves witnessed, and at the same time a significant number of police officers were deployed, communal services were mobilised and local solidarity networks emerged. On no man's land at the Bregana-Obrežje crossing, near the official ramps at the entrance to Slovenia, colorful tents were pitched, improvised stands erected, mobile sanitary units and additional fences set up, food and clothes were distributed. The media reported that one "man fainted from exhaustion and dehydration" at the nearby border crossing Harmica-Rigonca between Croatia and Slovenia, while another "climbed the railing of the bridge and threatened to jump into the Sutla river. [...] The man said he was desperate and that he could no longer stand the situation, that he did not know where he would be tomorrow and whether he would get anywhere at all."<sup>2</sup> The refugees, as reported by the media, were protesting and demanding the opening of the border, and even created a human roadblock at Bregana. Police officers with police dogs and riot police were deployed, the area was monitored by helicopters, even tear gas was used (cf. e.g. Lunaček Brumen and Meh 2016: 27–28). This was the state of affairs at the end of summer of 2015 at the entrance to the world without internal borders, or, as William Walters (2002) called it, Schengenland. However, the multiple regimes of border control gradually collapsed under the weight of the spoken and unspoken demands of those that were stopped and those that were arriving, at least temporarily (cf. Ladić and Vučko 2016: 17–18). In other words, these border crossings were open to them for a brief period of time, as was the case before at the Serbia-Croatia border.

Although the borders of Schengenland today do not encompass all EU members, as they did when Walters authored his paper 15 years ago

<sup>2</sup> "Protest and blockade in Bregana; Refugees from Harmica thank humanitarians; No more refugees in Beli Manastir", 20 September 2015, <http://slobodnadalmacija.hr/novosti/hrvatska/clanak/id/286908/u-bregani-prosvjed-i-blokada-izbjeglice-s-harmice-zahvalile-se-humanitarcima-u-belom-manastiru-vise-nema-izbjeglica>. Cf. e.g. I. E. M./S. S./Hina, "Harmica clogged up, Slovenians spray people", 18 September 2015, <http://www.tportal.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/396968/Izbjeglice-i-dalje-stizu-u-Beli-Manastir-zupan-Sisljagic-se-cudi.html> and Hina, "28 migrant buses leave Tovarnik for the border with Hungary; Kovacs: Croatia let down Hungary and the EU", 19 September 2015, <http://www.novolist.hr/Vijesti/Hrvatska/Iz-Tovarnika-28-autobusa-migranata-otislo-prema-madarskoj-granici-Kovacs-Hrvatska-iznevjerila-Madarsku-i-EU>.

(Walters 2002: 566), as some of its newer members, such as Croatia, are outside the Schengen Area, the basic mechanisms of this unique “laboratory” (Papadopoulos et al. 2008: 162) fundamentally remain the same. The Schengen border basically functions as the external border of the central European Union countries (Walters 2002: 566). This border bounds a territory that is not subject to a single, comprehensive political centre, which is why its postnational, regional (Walters 2002: 565), transnational or post-liberal (Papadopoulos et al. 2008: 162 et passim) origins are asserted. But this does not mean, as we have witnessed during the period this text deals with, that national borders within this territory cannot be quickly and easily activated. For instance, in June 2015, France already intensified security controls at its border with Italy, which trapped hundreds of people in the border town of Ventimiglia (Schwarz 2016: 257). Other countries soon followed suit, and among them was Germany. Germany intensified its security controls in rail and road traffic with Austria (Schwarz 2016: 257–258) in September, only a few weeks after opening its borders to refugees that were stopped in Hungary due to the Dublin Regulation (which stipulates that the application for international protection, i.e. asylum in the EU, has to be made in the country that was the entry point) (cf. Kallius et al. 2015). In addition, some parts of the borders within Europe were physically fortified, fenced off and had wire barriers installed during the same period. Therefore, aside from separating certain EU members from neighbouring countries (e.g. Greece and Turkey, Bulgaria and Turkey), wires and fences persist even today within the EU, separating the Schengen Area countries from those outside of it, such as Hungary and Croatia or Slovenia and Croatia, and even Union members within the Schengen Area, i.e. Austria and Italy, and Austria and Slovenia (cf. Guild et al. 2016).<sup>3</sup> The intensity with which the existing borders were fortified and the once abandoned ones were being reestablished suggests that the point in issue called the “refugee crisis” or the “migrant crisis” could also be understood as a “frantic attempt by the EU and European nation-states to control, contain, and govern people’s (‘unauthorised’) transnational and inter-continental movements” (New Keywords Collective 2016: 20).

The European Union also gave Macedonia and Serbia, as non-EU countries on the refugee route, additional financial resources during this period.

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<sup>3</sup> This period also saw the erection of a border fence by Macedonia, a state not within the EU, on its border with an EU member, Greece (cf. Beznec et al. 2016: 22, 26).

These funds were intended to facilitate, among other things, an efficient response “to the migration crisis” which included not only humanitarian assistance but also the “management of migration flows”, as well as the “coordination and data gathering on migration routes”.<sup>4</sup> This all leads us to another important direction with regards to establishing the borders of the EU. Aside from the direction focused on external borders such as the Schengen one, another direction is the one associated with the externalisation of borders, which entails the multiplication of procedures in border management, further refining the concepts of sovereignty, followed by the displacement of borders far from the EU or Schengen territories, or even Europe altogether (Cobarrubias et al. 2015: 23).<sup>5</sup> Externalisation, apart from countless formal and informal “neighbourhood policies” associated directly or indirectly with migration control and treaties of the EU or its member states with non-European countries (e.g. with North African countries such as Libya or Morocco) (cf. e.g. Andersson 2014; Bialasiewicz 2012; Casas-Cortes et al. 2012) encompasses the direct actions taken by the European Union or its members with regards to, for instance, transnational police operations (e.g. operation Hera in Mauritania and Senegal) and strategies of early vessel detection in the Mediterranean which transfer responsibility for interception/rescue and docking to non-EU countries (cf. e.g. Cobarrubias et al. 2014). The externalisation of borders, i.e. the processes of border management and “remote management” of migrations, could also encompass the different agreements between the EU and Turkey, which are indispensable for the understanding of this topic, among them the agreement from March 2016 which stopped the mass movement of people along the so-called Western Balkan Route towards the western and northern countries of the European Union.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, the EU does not set the borders for the “undesirables” only at the edges of its territory or beyond it, but also within it, which brings us to the third direction of establishing borders: interiorisation, i.e. receding and dispersing the borders in the interior of the Union’s territory. These

<sup>4</sup> At: [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-15-5795\\_hr.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-15-5795_hr.htm).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. e.g. [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/9880/factsheets-migration\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/9880/factsheets-migration_en); [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/atyourservice/hr/displayFtu.html?ftuld=FTU\\_6.5.4.html#\\_ftnl](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/atyourservice/hr/displayFtu.html?ftuld=FTU_6.5.4.html#_ftnl).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. reports from the European Commission for 2016: *First/Second/Third/Fourth Report on the Progress Made in the Implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement* published at [https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/countries/detailed-country-information/turkey\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/countries/detailed-country-information/turkey_en).

interiorised borders are one part of an apparatus of capture, which, as Federico Rahola writes, following Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, re-territorialises the “deterritorialized borders of the EU, by precipitating their weight into an archipelago of scattered points, each of them being a manifestation of border” (Rahola 2011: 99; also cf. Höning 2014: 134–135). As an example of a manifestation of such an interiorised border (cf. Schwarz 2016), we highlight the situation one of us witnessed during a December evening in 2015 when the police at the Munich bus terminal apprehended a group of thirty three people, *a family* with about ten small children seated on the upper deck of a bus headed to Hamburg where their several month long journey from Afghanistan to Europe was supposed to end. The size of the group or the language they spoke, their humble luggage, worn out clothes and probably the green vests of the volunteers who helped them board the bus attracted the attention of plainclothes officers who entered the bus just as it was about to depart and asked to see their documents. After about ten minutes, the passengers left the bus calmly and downcast without saying a word, in an almost automatised fashion, and a little while later a police mini-bus came to pick them up.

The interiorisation of borders and border controls in everyday life is not only carried out through police controls of “suspicious persons” in places such as railway stations, streets or parks, but also through the delegation of these controls to, for example, travel agents, hotel and hostel employees, concerned citizens. Thus, people who were assessed as “suspect migrants” when checking into some Zagreb hostels in February 2016 were asked, following instructions from the police, to produce not only identification documentation but also an official decision issued by the competent police administration stating the deadline by which they had to leave the country. Some hostels simply did not board persons not in possession of this decision, while some contacted the police. Finally, during that period, the airport ticket counter at Zagreb airport took on the role of the border, and certainly not for the first time. An acquaintance of ours, a young man from Syria, was refused an airline ticket by an employee of Croatia Airlines in February, regardless of the fact that he had a valid travel document with a visa which guaranteed him a reunion with his family in the Netherlands after years of separation and life as a refugee in Turkey, a journey through Greece, being detained in a camp in Slovenia and deported to Croatia. He was able to purchase his ticket eventually, after an intervention by the border police. Another employee tried to jus-

tify the actions of her colleague by saying that airline companies decide who can and who cannot buy a ticket due to possible financial penalties, “although they are in fact not trained to do so”.

The interiorisation, apart from these “everyday” spaces, which become places of stratification, detection and exclusion due to actions carried out by the police or other actors, also encompasses spaces designed precisely to control migration and exclude the undesirables. These spaces are, speaking in euphemisms found in applicable laws (cf. e.g. *Aliens Act*, Official Gazette “Narodne novine” nos. 130/11, 74/13), reception centres for aliens, or as they are referred to in practice: detention centres, where the ones who, for example, enter the state territory without permission, or remain there after their permitted stay has expired, are detained and/or prepared for deportation. Detention centres are part of the mobile and punctiform structure of the re-territorialised European borders (Rahola 2011). The Reception Centre for Aliens in Ježevo near the Croatian capital of Zagreb belongs to this, as William Walters (2002: 234; 2004: 243) calls it, “detention archipelago”, comprised of several hundred centres across Europe.<sup>7</sup> Normally not an issue in the public’s interest, this small part of “barbed Europe” (Perrin-Martin 1996 according to Razac 2009: 104–105) also came into the spotlight briefly in September 2015 when, as already mentioned, the mass and publicly visible movement of refugees was re-routed to Croatia. The media, among other things, showed footage of a bus full with refugees coming to Ježevo to undergo registration. They passed through a gate with iron bars and continued along a high concrete wall featuring barbed wire at the top towards another gate, the same as the first one, deeper inside the compound.<sup>8</sup> In the news stories showing footage of people detained behind the double enclosure at Ježevo who

<sup>7</sup> For the geography of detention centres, see the maps on the Global Detention Project platform (<https://www.globaldetentionproject.org/>) and Migreurop (<http://en.closesthecamp.org/>). In 2016, there were 260 functional detention centres for aliens in Europe, with a total capacity of over 32,000 people (cf. Arbogast 2016, e.g.). There is currently one functional detention centre in Croatia, the one in Ježevo in which, according to data reported by Goranka Lalić Novak (2013: 149), 16,850 people were forced to reside from 1997 to 2012. According to the annual statistical surveys of the “basic security indicators and results of work”, published by the Ministry of the Interior on its website, from 2013 to 2016 there were 1892 persons in Ježevo, which means the total number of persons since the establishment of this facility to date is 18,742.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. “See the first photographs of refugees taken in by Croatia”, 16 September 2015, <http://net.hr/danas/hrvatska/utociste-pogledajte-prve-fotografije-izbjeglica-koje-je-hrvatska-primila/#>.

expressed, using gestures and words, how they do not want to be on the other side of the “wire”, Ježevo is even explicitly referred to as a prison.<sup>9</sup>

The external, externalised and interiorised borders referred to so far are part of the standard apparatus of the migration control regime which became more visible during the fall and winter of 2015/2016. In response to the movement of people that had, as we have seen, disrupted the logic and mechanisms of the external border, a special type of an interiorised border was formed during the same period, which would soon receive an exteriorised dimension from the perspective of Croatia and the Union as well. During that time, in accordance with domopolitical tactics (Walters 2004), the punctiform manifestation of the interiorised European borders (Rahola 2011: 96–97) is joined by a linear one – the network of detention centres is joined by the refugee corridor. The issues of how this corridor was formed on the territory of Croatia and what were some of its basic features are discussed below.

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- And what'll happen when there's more of them than we can get across? – I ask.
- Will you come and help us?
- If it comes to that, the government will take over the business anyway. And then it's not our problem anymore.

*Kristian Novak (2016) Ciganin, ali najljepši. Zagreb: OceanMore*

The mass, visible movement toward the northern and western European countries which was, depending on the state, governmentally tolerated, sanctioned, assisted or organised, from late summer 2015 up until the closing of the borders in late winter 2016, for the purposes of mapping can be visualised as a channel, which entails abstraction and simplification, i.e., it can be seen as a series of one-way arrows spanning from Greece through Macedonia, Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Austria to the border with Germany (cf. e.g. Šelo Šabić and Borić 2016: 2). In practice, the layout of this movement was not a one-way channel, but a network of paths that, if

<sup>9</sup> Cf. “Refugees sent to Zagrebački velesajam after being told they can go to Slovenia”, 17 October 2015, <http://hr.n1info.com/a73027/Vijesti/Izbjeglice-salju-na-ZV-a-rekli-im-da-mogu-u-Sloveniju.html>.



one would take a closer look and consider time as a factor, indicates the complexity of the relationship dynamics between the migration and the efforts to control it during that period.

When we refer to the Croatian section of this movement, the entry and exit points for refugees when entering and exiting the country in the first days following the mentioned closing of the Hungary-Serbia border in September 2015 were located at various positions. Upon entering the country by circumventing the regular border regime, which meant mass arrivals without passing any regular checks and procedures at the crossing itself, most of the people on trains and buses were accompanied by police and led to existing, *ad hoc* reception facilities (e.g. the already mentioned Ježevo, but also facilities in Zagreb, Sisak, Čepin, Luč near Beli Manastir). From there, the people went, in an organised way or by themselves, to different locations on the Hungarian border, but also toward Slovenia, at the crossings at Harmica and Bregana where they were, as already mentioned, temporarily stopped at the external border of their desired destination.<sup>10</sup>

Only a few days after the movement of people was redirected to Croatia, a reception centre, i.e. a transit camp, was opened in Opatovac, and a fully organised and closed system of refugee transit was formed on the Croatian part of the route, with Opatovac serving as the only place of reception and registration. However, contrary to expectations, even then the movement did not take the established form of a stabilised channel. This is evident from the information published by the Ministry of the Interior on its website in September and October, which stated that refugees came from various points on the border to the Opatovac camp and departed from it in different directions.<sup>11</sup> They entered Croatia from Serbia at Tovarnik, Bapska, Strošinci, and elsewhere, while the exit points, in a “bizarre turn” (Kasperek 2016: 6) – taking into account that the movement was diverted through Croatia because Hungary closed its border with Serbia – were on the Hungarian border, near Baranjsko Petrovo Selo, Terezino Polje and Botovo. The media coverage focused on “the spectacle of the border” (cf. e.g. De Genova 2002), scenes of drama, despair and chaos, and these areas were less represented than the entry points and the camp, but for some of them, especially Botovo, records and descriptions relevant for under-

<sup>10</sup> Cf. <http://www.policija.hr/main.aspx?id=220928>.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. <http://www.policija.hr/main.aspx?id=220928> and <http://stari.mup.hr/main.aspx?id=223121>.

standing the situation exist, although they are rare.<sup>12</sup> One of them describes in a striking way the practiced night crossing of the border at that point – a surreal sight of “stately organized border-smuggling” (Moving Europe 2016: s. p.) of refugees accompanied by the Croatian police moving from a train to Hungarian territory, entering through a narrow path in the wire fence from where Hungarian soldiers take them across the field and to the train that will take them further into Europe.

When Hungary closed its border with Croatia for refugees on 16–17 October, the mass movement of refugees was directed completely towards Slovenia. But it still remained scattered, and even unpredictable, as well as publicly hidden, state managed, police controlled and directed. At first, as reported on the official website of the Ministry of the Interior, the refugees were taken to the border crossings Macelj-Gruškovje and Mursko Središće-Petišovci and the crossings Bregana-Obrežje and Trnovec-Središće ob Dravi, but also to other places that are not mentioned in the official public reports.<sup>13</sup> In the following days, the places where refugees crossed from Croatia to Slovenia grew in number, but any information about specific crossing locations came almost exclusively through reports from volunteer platforms and friends out in the field, and sporadically, with some delay, from the Croatian and Slovenian media as the official website of the Ministry of Interior ceased reporting on exit points.

One of the key places where the crossings to Slovenia took place during these October days and where citizens organised themselves to bring and distribute food and clothing was Ključ Brdovečki near the border crossing Harmica-Rigonce (cf. Juranić 2015). As was the case with the described crossing at Botovo, Ključ Brdovečki was also the site of “transfers” of refugees over the green border, which was at times overseen by helicopters and “secured” by armored military vehicles on the Slovenian side. During this period, several times per day, sometimes at intervals of only a few hours, a train with refugees who had previously been registered in the Opatovac camp arrived at the train station in Ključ Brdovečki from Tovarnik. After exiting the train, the people were escorted by special police in a column which was ushered along, at a brisk pace for twenty minutes along a route through

<sup>12</sup> Cf. e.g. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=531zJx9NzEY>.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. <http://stari.mup.hr/main.aspx?id=223121>. For the media, cf. e.g. “Night of Drama: Refugees Traverse Train Tracks on Foot at Trnovec to Reach Slovenia”, 19 October 2015, <http://mnovine.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/aktualno/nova-kriza--je-li-na-pomolu-nocna-izbjeglicka-drama-u-cakovcu->.

the village centre of to a bridge on the Sutla river, and afterwards they continued on their own to the Slovenian border. During the day, the most tired among them, without knowing they would spend the night, or even several cold nights, outdoors, left the heavy, gray UNHCR blankets at the station or along the way, the same kind of blankets which to us were perhaps one of the clearest signals of a movement or a gathering place for refugees in the coming months. The rumbling of footsteps announced to the volunteers who were at the bridge the arrival of the vast and crowded mass of people which abated towards its end, and when it seemed that they had all gone through, the sick, elderly, tired, children, all those who could not keep up with the fast pace of the young men at the front of the column trudged along afterwards. After clearing the bridge, the column of people turned right along the river, following a path traversed by several tens of thousands of people during those days. The scent of fire from the desolate fields wafted through the air and reached us at the bridge from the direction they were headed in, the scent of “burned plastic bottles they were burning to warm themselves at least a bit” (Juranić 2015), sometimes accompanied by the disturbing, frightening sounds of commands and of the crowd. During the night, the spotlights shed light at a place near a settlement on the Slovenian side of the border where the refugees waited to enter Slovenia in “chaotic and inhumane” conditions (Ladić and Vučko 2016: 19; cf. Lunaček Brumen and Meh 2016: 29; Pistotnik et al. 2016: 103–104). Rarely, some came back to the bridge in secret seeking help, warmer clothes or blankets, food for the children or doctors which were not present even on the bridge.

The map of movements in this period presented here only in a summary form, as well as the methods of crossings at Botovo and Ključ Brdovečki, indicate that the state, in its efforts to establish control over the movement of people, had in some way followed the movement patterns of the so-called irregular migrants from earlier periods, also referred to in the literature (cf. e.g. Hassan and Biörklund 2016: 126–127). The refugees entered and exited the country under police control almost as if engaging in so-called illegal, clandestine crossings, and the routes they were funneled through were not permanent. They depended on a variety of factors from weather conditions to current, short-term and long-term assessments, decisions and agreements between different actors, states, police officers and directorates, and others.

At the end of October 2015, formal bilateral and especially multilateral agreements at high and the highest state levels (agreements between

presidents and prime ministers, ministries and police directorates, etc.)<sup>14</sup> formalised and strengthened the control over the movement of people. An “ad-hoc political space, orthogonal to all previously existing spaces, such as the EU, the Schengen Zone, and so on”, as formulated by Bernd Kasperek (2016: 7), was established, i.e. a refugee corridor coordinated between multiple states was formed, the so-called Balkan refugee corridor which was regulated in an improvised and pseudolegal manner in each country it passed through, as elaborated in detail for Slovenia (Kogovšek and Šalamon 2016), and indicated for other countries (cf. e.g. Beznec et al. 2016: 17–21, 45–49; Petrović 2016: 404; Petrović 2017), and which functioned in the following months with constant changes in the applied models and rules (cf. Santer and Wriedt 2017; for Serbia and Macedonia cf. Beznec et al. 2016; for Slovenia cf. Lunaček Brumen and Mehn 2016; Kogovšek and Šalamon 2016). When referring to Croatia, following the agreement with Slovenia, the refugees were no longer being left at the border, but transferred onto Slovenian territory, to Dobova, by train. In accordance with the agreement between Croatia and Serbia, and logistically primarily related to the opening of the camp in Slavonski Brod (Croatia) on 3 November 2015, the refugees no longer had to wait at the green borders to enter Croatia, but entered its territory by train directly from Šid. With the establishment of this “railway line” which was not a part of the regular timetables, the corridor through Croatia became an ideal-type of a channel connecting Šid and Dobova from the east to the west, a channel which was completely isolated from the surrounding territory it passed through and largely separated from its legal system, population, etc.

The corridor, which until then meant an almost secret state-organised mass transfer of people from one border to the other, and which replaced the criminalised and dangerous individual crossings of these borders at the so-called Balkan route (cf. e.g. Hassan and Biolklund 2016: 126–127), definitely transformed into what is described in literature as a “formalized corridor” (cf. Beznec et al. 2016) where the rules were readjusted in reaction or coordination between states, and the border controls of a state in some cases even literally crossed onto the territory of another state. In this period, the Croatian, and thus the Union’s, exteriorised border was formed in Serbia, which entailed the presence and activity of Croatian po-

<sup>14</sup> Cf. e.g. [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-15-5904\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-15-5904_en.htm) and <http://stari.mup.hr/main.aspx?id=223121>.

lice officers in Šid, defined by a special protocol which stated the “Croatian Party” sends a “train composition with its crew to the railway station in Šid, with a sufficient number of police officers of the Republic of Croatia, as escort” (Protokol Article 3 paragraph 2). The same protocol describes the task of the police as “ensuring reception and further transfer”. In practice, from the middle of November, this included a selection which the Croatian police used to forbid some of the refugees from continuing their journey along the corridor.

This selection, which was also referred to as migrant profiling in Croatia, was conducted starting from the Greece-Macedonia border (cf. Santer and Wriedt 2017: 146–147), where Croatian police officers were also occasionally active, in February 2016 explicitly in order to perform “migrant profiling”.<sup>15</sup> The selection at first meant the exclusion of all those who did not come from Afghanistan, Syria or Iraq, while over time it became more and more restrictive and included some coming from these countries. From February 2016, when at a joint meeting of police directors of Austria, Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia and Macedonia it was concluded that “the migration flow along the Western Balkans has to be reduced to the greatest possible extent” (Joint Statement 2016), all people coming from Afghanistan were also excluded (cf. e.g. Beznec et al. 2016: 49; Lunaček Brumen and Meh 2016: 30–31). In practice, the profiling, apart from the selection made on the basis of the country of origin, also relied on segregation according to speech, regions and cities, as well as on various other questioning, and it was marked by arbitrariness, intimidation and violence (Banich et al. 2016a and 2016b; also cf. s. n. 2016). Consequently, the application of this increasingly rigorous segregation meant the number of people who moved along the Balkan corridor significantly decreased and a foundation was being laid for it to soon be closed (cf. Beznec et al. 2016: 49).

The introduction of profiling also modified the movement of refugees in several ways and with varying intensities. Profiling led to significant unrest from time to time, and then to a halt and temporary change of the corridor route in the western direction. For instance, when in mid-February 2016 the refugees who were, due to profiling in Slovenia, returned to Croatia, and then to Serbia,<sup>16</sup> blocked the railroad tracks in Šid, the refugees who

<sup>15</sup> Available at: <http://stari.mup.hr/main.aspx?id=229923>.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. e.g. press release of the Ministry of Interior from 16 February 2016. Available at: <http://stari.mup.hr/main.aspx?id=230492>.

were granted passage to the west entered Croatia by buses via the border crossing Batrovci – Bajakovo, not by train from Šid directly to the camp in Slavonski Brod. Furthermore, the profiling had a more lasting impact on the form of the movement of people through Croatia. With its introduction, the movement again started to branch out and along with the “official” mass and visible movement within the corridor, the “illegal” ways of crossing the border were activated. Some that were excluded from the corridor continued their journey to the west outside of it, by themselves or with smugglers (cf. e.g. Banich et al. 2016a; Frébutte 2016). The profiling also established a reverse direction of movement, one towards the east, which could be called a counter corridor. Based on profiling, the Austrian police extradited the refugees to the Slovenian police, who turned them over to the Croatian police, who then turned them over to the Serbian police, which led to what was then called “table tennis” with people.<sup>17</sup> Active until the closing of the borders, this reverse direction of movement organised by the state never took on the form of a channel and only one part of it, and sometimes not even that much, overlapped with the path of the corridor towards the west.

It is hard to recognise any sort of permanent pattern in this movement to the east. According to the information we received through informal networks and from direct contacts, and to some extent the media, people stopped in Slovenia, for instance, were returned to Croatia in different ways, in secret, in a more or less (in)formal manner, in groups or individually (cf. e.g. Banich et al. 2016a; Konjikušić 2016). Sometimes groups of people were merely left at a border crossing (e.g. at Harmica), sometimes they were taken from there by Croatian police to the Zagreb railway station, the Reception Center for Asylum Seekers in Zagreb, the camp in Slavonski Brod, but sometimes to Serbia as well. The two movements mentioned, the movement along the “illegal” routes towards the west and the movement along the counter corridor towards the east, sometimes intersected at specific points. So the already mentioned interiorised border controls at hostels in Zagreb in the vicinity of the railway station equally affected those who returned to Croatia from Slovenia along the counter corridor, as well as those who entered Croatia from Serbia outside the corridor.

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. <http://welcome.cms.hr/index.php/hr/2016/02/03/igranje-ping-ponga-ljudima-u-sustavu-azila/>.

The corridor towards the west, as suggested by Duško Petrović (2016: 412-416), could be understood in categories of security humanitarianism as indicated by the dominant forms of its public representation through the scenes of masses of undifferentiated faces in movement that are directed or supervised by police officers and facilitated by the standard actors of humanitarian action: Red Cross employees and volunteers, UNHCR, UNICEF, and others. However, although it is undeniable that the corridor, which provided many with a relatively safe, legal and fast passage, had a humanitarian dimension that manifested itself in the elaborate, not always adequate, but mostly sufficient support to provide the “bare life” necessities to the people who were moving along the corridor, this dimension should not be overstated.

The frailty of humanitarian motivation is evident, for example, from the fact that in the phase preceding the formalisation of the Balkan refugee corridor, refugees were brought and left at the border in the dehumanised and chaotic conditions that awaited them, as we have seen in the example of Ključ Brdovečki mentioned above, just one of the many examples of the additional suffering produced by the corridor itself (Lunaček Brumen and Meh 2016: 32). This is even more evident from the fact that at one time passage was granted only to citizens of Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria, who were the most numerous in the Balkan refugee corridor, but not to citizens of Eritrea and other countries that usually have high rates of granted asylums in Europe (cf. Kasperek 2016: 7). And lastly, the corridor was not closed when there was no longer a humanitarian need for it (which was still present at that time), but when an almost complete and coordinated control over the movement of refugees had been established from Macedonia onwards. For example, around 12,000 refugees who were barely surviving in front of the closed border fence in Idomeni in Greece waited for weeks for the border to open, a border which is closed to them even today.<sup>18</sup>

Among certain activists and researchers (cf. e.g. Speer 2015; Kasperek 2016: 6), the corridor was quickly recognised as primarily a method used to establish control over the active movement of people and a method used to passivate the movement of refugees which was unseen in such numbers and strength until then. Being in the corridor literally meant, as was already pointed out in the literature for the Slovenian section of the corridor (see Ladić and Vučko 2016: 21-22; Kogovšek Šalamon 2016: 44-47),

<sup>18</sup> Cf. e.g. <http://www.msf.org/en/article/eu-migration-crisis-update-march-2016>.

and unlike the situation in Macedonia and Serbia (see Beznec et al. 2016), being in complete control of movement which could not even minimally be adapted to individual needs. The movement of refugees within the corridor had to coincide with the direction, area and rhythm of the corridor itself. Boarding the train in Šid, which, on the one hand, opened up the possibility of accelerated movement with no additional charges toward the west, and on the other hand meant abandoning individual freedom of movement and the necessity of continuing the movement exclusively within the corridor. Generally, one could not, temporarily or permanently, exit the corridor on one's own accord to satisfy their individual needs such as, to mention only a few of the situations we encountered in the camps in Dobova and Slavonski Brod, to slow down and rest or to speed up one's journey, to stay the night in a hotel room instead of a tent or on the floor as it was in Dobova (Slovenia). For example, a man who asked to return to Turkey for the funeral of his close relative was not allowed to exit the corridor in Dobova. On the other hand, those few refugees who found themselves, for different reasons, on Croatian territory outside the corridor were unable to join the corridor. Since 3 November and the opening of the camp in Slavonski Brod, in line with the agreement between Croatia and Serbia, the only entry point into the corridor for Croatia was the "border", the train in Šid. All this suggests the possibility of understanding the corridor from Croatia and onwards as a specific form of detention,<sup>19</sup> which, moreover, was not founded in national or EU legislation, as explained in the case of Slovenia by Neža Kogovšek Šalamon (2016: 44-47). The corridor could be conceived as detention consisting of locked trains, buses

<sup>19</sup> In principle, detention, i.e. the deprivation or restriction of the freedom of movement of "non-nationals", such as asylum seekers, apatrids, and, using the current Croatian legal terminology, aliens illegally residing in the country, etc., is carried out by an administrative decision, with a rudimentary and only subsequent supervision by the court. In Croatia, such a deprivation or restriction of the freedom of movement can last up to 18 months. The term "detention" does not appear in Croatian legislation, but we nonetheless encounter it, sometimes merely on a marginal level, in the rare legal and other texts focused on the subject (cf. e.g. Lalić Novak 2013: 144, f 9; s. n. s. a; Tučkorić 2008), and more frequently in speech and practice in general. Instead of detention, it may be possible, given some common key features, to speak of internment, a type of confinement that can be historically traced from the colonial practices of the late 19th century when the first internment camps were opened (cf. e.g. Grbac 2013; Rahola 2011: 101-102; Wachsmann 2015: 6-9 et passim). This text does not discuss internment, nor the internment camp, but discusses camps and detention, taking a cue from contemporary speech and practice, without intending to conceal the common genealogy of these kinds of confinements and facilities, and the intention is to move away from the contemporary official euphemisms such as centre, transit centre, etc. (cf. e.g. Papadopoulos et al. 2008: 195).



and walking columns of refugees guarded and directed by the police, as well as the camps becoming some form of convergence point for different pathways of movement and a kind of obligatory stopping points.

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The only kind of freedom we get in this camp get sick and go out. "Freedom" comes with a price. I really look forward for one of my friend gets sick so that i can go out and for briefest moment be free.

*A message from the camp in Slavonski Brod (5 April 2016)*

The corridor as a unique form of detention, as a mobile detention, calls for further research into its mobile aspect, i.e. the type of research William Walters (2015a, 2015b: 10) calls *viapolitics*. This kind of a research would deal with the journey itself, in addition to the routes and paths used, and also with the means of transport that are at the same time the subject and the place of controls and resistance to controls, of movement and stopping, etc. Nevertheless, we will not focus here on vehicles as specific places for understanding the corridor through Croatia, but on the key immobile element of this mobile structure, i. e. the camp as an obligatory and central station of the corridor. In our case, this was the camp in Slavonski Brod where we, unlike the special refugee trains and buses, had intermittent, but long term access (cf. Hameršak and Pleše 2017).

As well as camps in Gevgelija (Macedonia), Preševo (Serbia), Šid (Serbia), Dobova (Slovenia) and elsewhere along the Balkan refugee corridor (cf. e.g. Beznec et al. 2016; Kogovšek Šalamon and Bajt 2016; Lunaček Brumen and Meh 2016; Speer 2015), the Slavonski Brod camp was a so-called transit camp. These camps could, to a degree, be compared to camps at the external borders of Europe that existed before this period (cf. Tsianos and Karakayali 2010: 383), which, instead of being locations of permanent stopping, are a prerequisite for continuing the journey. However, unlike the transit camps along the Balkan corridor whose basic function was "processing migrants as fast as possible, as well as the connecting lines of transport" (Kasperek 2016: 6), transit in the other camps is implicit and associated with longer stays.

Around 350,000 people passed through the camp at Slavonski Brod, which, as mentioned, opened on 3 November 2015, in more than five

months of its existence according to some estimates, with people staying only briefly, for a few hours it took to process their registration and give humanitarian aid. On some days, mostly around the time the camp was opened, the trains that brought and took on refugees from the camp followed one right after the other, and a single day, for example, saw almost 8,000 people pass through the camp.<sup>20</sup> This fast and efficient transit combined with the spectacle of numbers (New Keywords Collective 2016: 21–25) also dominated the public perception of the camp. However, it had an exclusively transit function for only a very short period of time. Namely, during the latter part of November, soon after the camp opened, something else took place there, beside the constant transit to the West. Already on 18 November 2015 the refugees who came on the early morning train were no longer being directed, as was the case until then, to one of the sectors after registration, from where they were sent to Slovenia. Instead, police directed some of them to the sector on the opposite side of the camp, to the deserted route where they were watched only by a UNHCR representative. According available information,<sup>21</sup> 110 persons, mostly men from countries such as Lebanon, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Morocco, Somalia and Ivory Coast, were separated and directed to this sector, which they left the same day.<sup>22</sup> From this time onwards, the Slavonski Brod camp, although still a place of constant flow of a large number of refugees to the west, was also a place of immobilization of movement (cf. Papadopoulos et al. 2008: 197), of forced stops, and of longer or shorter confinement. This way, the detention, discussed above and which entails the restriction of the freedom of movement and being placed under the jurisdiction of the corridor, took on an additional and more easily recognised form that will be examined in the text below.

It should be pointed out that this first known group of people who were separated from the others in the Slavonski Brod camp could be approached by volunteers on request. In contrast, in the following weeks and months, most of the volunteers were not allowed to approach the detainees. Moreover, the selection and detention of the people in the Slavonski

<sup>20</sup> Cf. <http://www.policija.hr/main.aspx?id=223121>.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. <http://welcome.cms.hr/index.php/hr/2015/11/19/odvajanje-izbjeglica-na-ono-koje-su-iz-tzv-ratnih-zona-i-na-ostale/>.

<sup>22</sup> As far as we know, the first group segregation by country of origin was conducted on 15 November 2015 in a camp in Slovenia. At the camp in Dobova during that day, 71 men from Morocco were segregated and sent to detention at Postojna (cf. Ladić and Vučko 2016: 23).

Brod camp was systematically hidden, not talked about, and concealed for a long time. Official reports of the Ministry of Interior Affairs did not mention them, nor did the reports from NGOs, the media and others. However, information regarding this matter came, albeit discontinuously and fragmented, from the outside, conditionally speaking, from the people who had been returned to Serbia after segregation and confinement in Slavonski Brod. There, some of them talked to activists, for instance, Moving Europe, who then in early January 2016 published a short release about the “systematic violence and unlawful process carried out by Croatian police officers at the Slavonski Brod Transit Camp for Migrants and Refugees”.<sup>23</sup> A few weeks later, Moving Europe published a more detailed report about police violence in the Slavonski Brod camp and in Šid (Banich et al. 2016a) with individual testimonies, among which is also the following one: “When we arrived to Slavonski Brod the Croatian police told me: ‘You are not Iraqi nor Syrian, you can’t pass.’”

People detained and confined in the Slavonski Brod camp arrived there in different ways and from different places. Except by the “regular” refugee trains from Šid, which also brought the mentioned first group of segregated and detained refugees, smaller groups of people from various directions were brought in by vans, which we have witnessed. On two occasions, a train from the West arrived in the camp with a large number of people, as reported by the Welcome! Initiative / Inicijativa Dobrodošli!<sup>24</sup> Information regarding their exits from the camp is even scarcer. The only exception, with regards to public awareness, is the mass deportation of refugees to Serbia in February when Croatia “sent back 217 refugees rejected by Slovenia to Serbia on Tuesday night [16–17 February]” by train from Slavonski Brod.<sup>25</sup> This event is the only known case of a mass exit from the camp towards Serbia.

Testimonies included in the above mentioned report by Moving Europe refer to a completely different style of returning refugees to Serbia, in

<sup>23</sup> Available at: <http://moving-europe.org/croatia-slavonski-brod-transit-camp-for-migrants-and-refugees/>.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. <http://welcome.cms.hr/index.php/hr/2016/02/17/sigurni-koridor-u-eu-za-neke-koridor-povratka-u-nesigurnost-za-druge/> and <http://welcome.cms.hr/index.php/hr/2016/02/28/gradani-europe-porucili-vladama-omogucite-izbjeglicama-siguran-prolaz-sada/>.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. <http://welcome.cms.hr/index.php/hr/2016/02/18/europske-zemlje-moraju-solidarno-preuzeti-odgovornost/> and HRT, *Dnevnik*, February 17<sup>th</sup> 2016, <http://vijesti.hrt.hr/322636/hrvatska-vratila-217-izbjeglica-u-sid-slovenija-ima-nove-mjere>.

smaller groups and accompanied by violence. According to the testimonies published in the report, police took refugees from the camp to the border zone from where they were forced to walk towards Serbia:

The next day they told us that we are going to Slovenia now. We had to get into a police car. Then we had to walk 7 kilometers by foot. They told us this is Slovenia, but then it was Serbia. [...] One of my friends tried to run away, but the Croatian police caught him and beat him here [pointing at his left cheek bone] and here [pointing at his left shoulder]. And at the legs. They were violent and beating him. And when they made us get in to the car they were also using violence. Croatia is no good! (Banich et al. 2016a: 6).

Finally, one more way to exit the camp for detainees, unknown to the public to this day, consisted of the widespread practice of once again joining some of those who had been confined in the camp for a longer or shorter period after they had been, which was perhaps the case most often, returned from Slovenia due to profiling, to the corridor towards West. On several occasions in the camp we saw police officers escorting smaller or larger groups of refugees which were previously, as it seemed, detained in the camp, to the train platform just before the train's departure and boarding them into the railroad cars. In the camps in Dobova and Slavonski Brod we heard that the people who "did not pass" profiling, which meant they had to be returned to the previous point, had new registration documents produced, their identities were adjusted and "fixed", and afterwards they were sent westward again.

The people in the camp were being confined to sectors with containers which are described in the already mentioned testimony: "They took me to a room, they kept me there from 12pm - 20pm. There were around 40 of us kept there" (Banich et al. 2016a: 10). During the time period this testimony refers to, i.e. January of 2016, the confined people were hidden in containers or deep within the sector, out of sight from the others present in the camp, but signs of their presence, such as lights in some of the supposedly empty sectors of the camp, could still be noticed. They could surely sense or hear the sounds of transit towards the west from where they were situated, the transit they were a part of until recently. These were the sounds of hundreds, even thousands, of refugees, but also of the hundreds of police officers and humanitarian and other workers that did not approach them. The following statement can be understood with this

in mind: “The UNHCR and other organizations were there in the camp, but nobody did anything for us. Only the police was there with us and they hit us and we couldn’t speak to anyone else.” (Banich et al. 2016a: 7). Already at the beginning of February, groups of people of all ages, standing in front of the tent or containers, could sometimes be seen from outside of one of the South-East sectors. Their “going outside” of the containers and tents and “entering” our line of sight is mostly due to the fact that more and more people were imprisoned in the camp, more frequently and for more substantial periods, among them whole families with children, which was hard to hide as was the case before.

When the last train left for Slovenia on 5 March 2016, several days before the official closing of the Balkan corridor, the camp at Slavonski Brod was not vacant. Around 300 people were still present there, arriving along the counter corridor during the period which followed the mentioned mass deportation to Serbia in the middle of February. Therefore, at the beginning of March, the camp that was opened for purposes of refugee control and registration, but also to make the movement of people faster, became exclusively a place where they were confined and immobilised, i.e. a place of clear, unambiguous and illegal detention, a place where freedom of movement was deprived or restricted (cf. Ured pučke pravobraniteljice 2017: 190–191). We entered the so-called detention sectors of the camp for the first time on 18 March 2016 after the suspension of entry into these parts of the camp, which lasted for several months, had been lifted, which we discuss in another article in this book (Hameršak and Pleše 2017).<sup>26</sup>

In the camp located outside the city and additionally separated from the local surroundings by a high fence and security system, most of its southern sectors served a detention function at that point. These so-called detention sectors of the camp were also separated from each other, and from the inside, despite being located on the edges of the camp, one could hardly see outside of it. These “camps inside the camp”, as so many other refugee “homes” of new Europe, consisted of prefabricated plastic or metal constructions placed and properly arranged on gravel plots. In each sector, these objects formed specific microspaces that served as

<sup>26</sup> During the next twenty days or so until the camp closed, we entered these areas around ten times in total, spending about twenty hours there, which was due to the fact that the organisation we were volunteering for, as did most of the others, even after the detention sectors were opened for volunteers and employees of the organisations in the camp, had limited, only a few hours per day, access to them.

squares, streets or passage ways. At night they were not illuminated by street lighting, but by heavy-duty spotlights placed high above and arranged inside and on the edges of the camp, and which could be used to locate the camp at Slavonski Brod, just like the one in Dobova for instance, from a distance. Containers used separately by the police and the Red Cross were located at the entrances to the sectors, and access to them was made difficult by mobile fences which could be found all over the camp. A huge white tent which was used as a dormitory in Sector 1, and the tiny containers which had the same function in Sector 3, were individualised only administratively, with stuck on or handwritten numbers on the “door” which served as “street addresses”. In this space, amenities that are usually private, intimate and part of a home, such as toilets, bathrooms or dining areas, were made “public”, collective, improvised and temporary, as well as strictly functional and non-individualised. In the tent intended for collective housing there were dozens of densely lined bunk beds which did not have mattresses and consisted only of wooden slats. Every occupied slat was, so to speak, the only personal space in the camp. The tiny containers housed up to six beds, i.e. three bunk beds, which filled almost the entire floor space.

During the brief period from the first time we entered the camp to its closing, only around twenty days in total, the space of the detention sector and the way they were handled changed. For instance, when we first entered them, the large wire fences at the entrances were chained with a padlock, and police officers stood on either side. In the days following, when the volunteers were allowed to enter the sectors, the gate was still chained up, but a padlock was no longer used. During the days before the camp was closed, the gate was no longer chained up and the police officer at the entrance casually gestured that we open it ourselves. The changes that occurred within the sectors were due to the fact that people stayed there for longer periods of time, for an undefined duration. In this regard, the organisations in the camp, after being allowed entrance into the detention sectors and up until the closing of the camp, made, affirmed, harmonised and defined plans for the “organisation” of the camp every day, discussing, for example, the purchase of washing machines and refrigerators, TV sets, a kitchen. Some of the planned interventions were carried out, and tents were being carried into and out of the sectors as well as items such as table tennis and table football equipment. The changes probably made the day-to-day lives of those who were detained

in the camp somewhat easier, but they also elicited anxiety formulated in the question “Does this mean we’re staying here permanently?”<sup>27</sup>

However, how much the living conditions in the detention sectors were rudimentary, and the context of their “improvement” limited is perhaps best seen by the fact that the desire of the volunteers to bring in a few mattresses for the pregnant and sick women was the subject of constant negotiation, agreements and institutional approval. The rudimentary conditions were also exemplified by the laundry drying on the fence that surrounded the sector, as well as the overturned blue garbage cans or blankets that, as the volunteers sometimes saw, were used to sit in front of tents due to the lack of chairs.

This pointed to the fact that the camp became a place where the daily lives of people unfolded, albeit in a limited capacity. The organisations present in the camp, in accordance with the principles of humanitarian intervention (cf. e.g. Harrell-Bond 1986), and while “furnishing” the sector, tried to structure this daily life, which also mostly remained in the planning stages. In this context, hairdressing, shaving, holiday gifts, creative workshops, education on hygiene, violence, and even human trafficking, film screenings, music events “where the occupants of the camp and the people providing aid could share their talents and culture”, sewing traditional clothes, yoga, pilates, a soccer tournament, and other activities, as well as talk about children’s education, were planned and only partially realised. However, as was the case with the furnishing of the space, the first somewhat complex activities that were supposed to be continuous, such as language courses, started taking place only a few days before the closing of the camp was suddenly announced at an official regular, daily meeting of the organisations present at the camp. The process in which the camp, which was until recently primarily intended for transit, at the planning level started to take shape of a long-term refugee town-camp (cf. e.g. Agier 2015: 53–55 et passim; Malkki 1995: 498) was appalling to us, having in mind the uncertain future of the people in confinement and the generally unknown directions of Croatia’s refugee policy.

It seems as if the process of humanitarisation of life in the camp, described here only in broad strokes, carried out by the present organisations, had additionally obfuscated the core characteristic of this space,

<sup>27</sup> See <http://welcome.cms.hr/index.php/hr/2016/03/25/unaprjedenje-zivotnih-uvjeta-kampu-nikada-nece-zamijeniti-slobodu/>.

which is that men, women and children, pregnant women, a new mother and her newborn, the severely ill, those who have lost members of their closest family to the sea on the way to Greece, little boys who had just started walking, schoolchildren, young men and women were, as pointed out by activists at that time (Banich et al. 2016b), and as the Office of Ombudswoman (Ured pučke pravobraniteljice 2017: 190–191) later confirmed, detained here against their will and with no actual choice in the matter nor legal backing. This closing, among other things, meant various prohibitions, and above all restriction of free movement. Detainees were not allowed to venture outside the camp, but their freedom of movement within the camp was also restricted, as they could not go from sector to sector. Detained people could leave the camp only with the approval of the police and with their escort, and only in exceptional cases, such as having to visit a hospital due to illness or accompanying someone, or when they collectively went to purchase groceries and other items. They also had to be approved and escorted by the police when moving within the camp, and outside the sectors, for instance to visit the kiosk located inside the camp. Movement was restricted even within the sectors, for example, after a certain hour they were not allowed to stay outside the sleeping areas at night.

The camp was a space excluded from the proclaimed social order of the European continent and the mechanisms that guard it, as evident from the manner in which identities were defined, redefined, and spatially distributed. Namely, people were held in different sectors according to the relevant camp logic at that time. In Sector 1, there were men who were identified by the camp administration as single males, regardless of whether they had relatives in the camp or nuclear families, wives or children, outside the camp. They were moved to that sector, with some giving passive resistance to the police, just before we first entered the detention sectors in the camp. In Sector 3, which was, according to available information, used for the longest period for the detention of people and whose title was a synecdoche for spaces of confinement, located in separate containers, loosely grouped based on language, nationality or country of origin, were those who were classified as family members by the camp administration. In Sector 4, in several containers, there were persons, only men, who were put in additional isolation by the camp administration for a certain period of time. With such spatial grouping, which was followed by pseudoadministrative grouping, the camp became a place of the produc-



tion of statuses in its own right. For some, this had radical repercussions at the level of individual biographies, which we will revisit later in the text, and as already described in the report on the criminalisation and detention of refugees transferred from the camp in Slavonski Brod published after the camp was closed (Inicijativa Dobrodošli 2016).

For the refugees in confinement, the options for a permanent exit from the camp were limited and, crucially, in the period discussed did not entail the option of continuing westward. After the borders were closed and the trains stopped leaving the camp, the half-clandestine re-entries into the corridor toward the west were no longer possible. Returning from the Slavonski Brod camp to the east, i.e. to Serbia as the previous corridor point, and further east from there, as it is usually the case in “chain deportations” (Papadopoulos et al. 2008: 163), was also not possible since Serbia, as we were told in the camp, stopped the readmission processes. Thus, what at the closing of the borders seemed like a likely and dreadful scenario in which detention is the “prelude to deportation” (De Genova 2016: 2), and which was initially announced at the highest state levels,<sup>28</sup> soon turned out to be an ill-founded fear. However, fear and uncertainty were not eliminated, but on the contrary, they intensified.

Uncertainty manifested itself on several levels. For example, after the final closing of the borders, there were uncertainties regarding the possibility of the legal practice of family reunification, which for some people could have been the mechanism for leaving the camp. On the other hand, as far as we know, a few people left the camp by having their relatives come in person to the camp and ask for their release, which is another indicator that the confinement in Slavonski Brod was primarily based on physical immobilisation in the camp and isolation from information, legal aid etc., but not on any legal basis (cf. Banich et al. 2016b). In addition, a few persons “left” the camp by being transferred to Ježevo for detention as part of the so-called voluntary return procedure, mostly to their country of origin. Apart from such a return to the country of origin (which did not apply to Syrian citizens), the camp management staff offered seeking asylum in Croatia as an option for leaving the camp, which meant transferring the refugees to the reception centre for asylum seekers in Zagreb or Kutina. This was the most common way in which most of the confined

<sup>28</sup> Cf. e.g. <http://vijesti.hrt.hr/325657/oreskovic-poslali-smo-jasnu-poruka-europskoj-komisiji>.

people gradually left the camp. Seeking asylum in this context was actually a way out of the camp, so this kind of practice could be called forced asylum (cf. Banich et al. 2016b). In practice, those who had applied for asylum after leaving the camp and arriving in the reception centres in Zagreb or Kutina mostly continued their journey sooner or later, secretly crossed the border, confirming Croatia's status as a poor and transit country, with a dysfunctional asylum system, and with no developed social nor other networks that could make their lives easier in the new environment (cf. Valenta et al. 2015).

On 7 April 2016 when the closure of the camp was announced, around a hundred people that did not choose any of the "offered options" until then were still inside the camp. Over the next few days, they were transferred to the centre for asylum seekers in Zagreb or the detention centre in Ježevo, depending on whether or not they had sought asylum, and also due to the above mentioned statuses and identities acquired during their imprisonment in the camp. All who sought asylum were transferred to the open centre in Zagreb, and gained freedom of movement on Croatian territory, although within the limits defined by the law and regulations related to asylum seekers. Those who did not seek asylum, but who were placed in Sector 3 and had the status of a family member in the camp, were issued decisions regarding the *temporary postponement of forced departure from the European Economic Area* because, as stated in the decisions issued to them, they came from war affected areas. They were transferred to a section of the centre in Zagreb which functioned as an "alternative to detention" and was informally called Sector 3, thus continuing the use of the generic term for the confinement in the camp after the camp's closing. On the other hand, those from the Slavonski Brod camp who also did not seek asylum in Croatia, but who were placed in Sector 1 and had the status of "single men" in the camp, were issued decisions on *expulsion from Croatia*, although they came from the same *war affected countries or areas*, which was not mentioned in these decisions. According to the decisions, they were sent to the Reception centre for aliens in Ježevo for a period of no more than six months before being forcibly removed, i.e. their detention was prolonged with the confinement in Ježevo (cf. Inicijativa Dobrodošli 2016).

There are numerous and complex reasons, ranging from the very specific to the more general, some of which are already touched upon in the literature (cf. Hess 2012; Papadopoulos et al. 2008: 183–203; Tsianos

and Karakayali 2010; Valenta et al. 2015), why the refugees detained in the Slavonski Brod camp delayed seeking asylum. Some of them, as it has been pointed out, refused to seek asylum even when they were faced with having their confinement prolonged and being transferred to the Ježevo detention centre. We can only be sure of the fact that the basis for all these reasons is the constant threat of “virtual prison” (Papadopoulos et al. 2008: 176), the fear of being caught in the virtual data networks which would make them more at risk of deportation once they reach the country in which they want to apply for international protection (cf. e.g. Migrant Voices 2017; Papadopoulos et al. 2008: 176–178). Seeking asylum in Croatia, which involves registering in the EURODAC (a fingerprint database of asylum seekers and so-called irregular migrants), would, in accordance with the Dublin Regulation, prove a further burden on their already very uncertain result in the process of applying for asylum in another European country with the constant threat of deportation to Croatia.<sup>29</sup>

Aside from purely avoiding danger, refusing or delaying to seek asylum in Croatia can be understood as part of an effort to continue the journey to a location that is seen as a good place to live, and not necessarily a predetermined geographic location. In these circumstances, waiting becomes an option based on knowledge and experiences of the journey itself and the stops which are an integral part of it. Namely, camps such as the one in Slavonski Brod were spaces that only “seem to oppose the very core of migration” (Papadopoulos et al. 2008: 191; Tsianos and Karakayali 2010: 381); they truly are places of immobilisation, but are also “transit stations” (Papadopoulos et al. 2008: 191; Tsianos and Karakayali 2010: 381). From one’s own experience or the experiences of others who faced confinement, the Slavonski Brod camp can also appear as a place where stopping, no matter for how long, is only temporary and in the end only a prerequisite for further movement (cf. Tsianos and Karakayali 2010: 383). Even when this movement implied a return to the east, as exemplified by the Slavonski Brod case, it could potentially once again turn to the desired, westward direction (cf. e.g. Picozza 2017). The people confined in the camp at Slavonski Brod were previously, as we have found out when talking to

<sup>29</sup> The Dublin Regulation, despite announcements and indications (cf. Kallius e.g. et al. 2015: 4), was never suspended in practice, and the first persons who traveled along the corridor through Croatia and reached the prosperous European countries were deported back to Croatia in early 2016, i.e. while the corridor was in operation. From then on, deportations have been continually carried out (cf. Asylum 2017).

them, confined in the centre in Zagreb, in the detention centre in Postojna, or elsewhere, but nonetheless, their movement, which was in the opposite direction at this level, always contained at least an implicit possibility of continuing the journey, as evidenced by their previous experiences or the examples of many others that successfully reached the west. From that perspective, confinement in the Slavonski Brod camp could be understood as something one needs to endure in order to continue their journey from there or from elsewhere.

Therefore, in this context, instead of being seen as an aspect of every bureaucracy, including the one related to the process of seeking asylum, humanitarian stay etc., waiting can be conceived as a way of resisting the bureaucracy, i.e. the statuses, options and false choices offered in the Slavonski Brod camp. Unlike the easily recognisable, though completely invisible from outside of the camp, and even outside the sectors, migrant struggles – such as the mentioned passive resistance to being transferred to Sector 1, but also those not mentioned such as different forms of self-harm or appeals and demands made in the camp itself, i.e. written on paper, or addressed to the activists in phone messages – waiting is recognised as a form of resistance only after the fact. “Waiting to grab a chance”, and even the seemingly passive “waiting out” can be seen as a form of imperceptible politics of resistance (Papadopoulos et al. 2008: 71–82 et passim). Like the other invisible, imperceptible daily migrant struggles (e.g. hiding their identity, movement, life) by which the “status quo is called into question” (Ataç et al. 2015: 7), waiting also more or less successfully, but persistently subverts and transforms the migration control.

It is in this vein that the events that took place in summer of 2015 (cf. Kasperek and Speer 2015) can be interpreted, when the closed borders of Europe collapsed and it's live trap for the undesirables started to take on new forms under the power of movement which in itself was the accumulation of decades of resistance and imperceptible daily struggles. We tried to indicate the contours of what followed: the corridor, the counter corridor, the isolated sectors of the Slavonski Brod camp, as well as other aspects, but also the tactics of resistance to these forms of control, in this text.

Translated by Juraj Šutej

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Duško Petrović

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# Humanitarian Exceptionalism: Normalization of Suspension of Law in Camp and Corridor

## Introduction

If there is one lesson from the recent so-called European refugee crisis, which is still ongoing albeit to a lesser extent, it is surely the insight that the public call for respect for political values created after World War II has not received wider support from the public and political elites. It is as if those calls are surrounded by deafening silence, hiding an underbelly of cynicism and lack of interest. If Hannah Arendt is to be believed, that fact speaks in favour of the thesis that we have found ourselves in difficult times in which calls to respect the usual norms and criteria seem meaningless and frivolous. In that situation, someone could gloatingly add: “The world you knew is irretrievably broken and you still deceive yourselves that it exists, so you talk to it as some dead friend in a dream.” Of course, no one publicly announced the end of that world, it did not collapse with an explosion; death came silently, crawling, in the silence of consciousness, in the dull everyday life, among us “normal folk”. Us, who have long been accustomed to the limits of the permissible and the forbidden constantly shifting with silent approval. It seems like the majority feels that some moral boundaries may be penetrated and that they are, in fact, non-existent, just like there is no automatic differentiation and alignment with the good. Such a situation creates an opening for extreme evil, but “extreme evil is possible only where these self-grown roots, which automatically limit the possibilities, are entirely absent. They are absent wherever men skid only over the surface of events, where they permit themselves to be carried away without penetrating into whatever depth they may be

capable of” (Arendt 2006: 67). Remaining on the surface also leads to the loss of the ability to act and to the fall into banality from which neither political nor intellectual elite is spared. After all, how else can we see the rise of politicians such as Viktor Orbán who publicly announced the end of the republic and liberal democracy in Hungary and understand the lukewarm response of the leading European politicians and European Union institutions to such politics? How can we understand the obvious violations of refugee rights committed by leading European politicians and European Union institutions?

Even though in the period covered by these proceedings, some of the states outwardly presented openness and solidarity with refugees on a humanitarian basis, such as Germany and Sweden, the general framework remained fairly narrow and below the level of refugee human rights policy established by the *Geneva Convention, the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees* from 1951 and the *Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees* from 1967.

In fact, all of the proposed solutions were and are based on providing temporary aid and shifting responsibility for accepting refugee groups to countries not within the EU, i.e. the exteriorization of responsibility for accepting refugee groups. In other words, they are based on the lack of desire to have incoming groups even approach the area of EU Member States. The principal focus on exteriorization also led to the signing of various agreements with Turkey (cf. New Keywords Collective 2016: 18), including the one from March 2016.<sup>1</sup> Even though EU representatives claim that this is not the case, that agreement between the EU and Turkey questioned the indisputability of individual and collective rights and obligations prescribed by the *Geneva Convention* and denied the individual right to asylum and access to legal instruments of protection for all those who reached the borders of the European Union in various ways. In that sense, it may not be surprising that the agreement offers assistance only to refugees from Syria, but not to others who will come to Greece for one reason or another. A kind of nationalisation of the refugee policy is a reduction of the universalism of the *Geneva Convention* and it certainly represents a regression of the European political framework created after World War II.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/03/18/eu-turkey-statement/pdf>.

All of aforementioned shows that humanitarian policies are based on short-spanned benevolence because it was not loudly accompanied by right. For that reason, a situation described by Immanuel Kant never arose: “But if both benevolence and right speak out in loud tones, human nature will not prove too debased to listen to their voice with respect” (Kant 2003: 87). The voice of right is not listened to with respect today. It is lonely and abandoned, backs are turned on it and the boundaries of good and bad are crossed in silence.

I believe that the reason that the voice of law no longer resonates strongly, however paradoxical that sounds, is that the most important thing is to protect the right to life and survival of incoming groups and to free their bodies from suffering and violence. At the centre of humanitarian policies that govern contemporary stances towards refugees and other groups are bodies and lives of people, abstracted into a universal principle of life in itself. Therefore, humanitarian policies invoke the exalted value of human life that needs to be preserved, as well as compassion for traumatic experiences and physical suffering because that principle of life in itself represents the highest and undeniable value in today’s world.

It is well known that some of the prominent thinkers who are well acquainted with moral and political life (cf. Arendt 2006; Kant 2003) stress that life in itself, or only living, cannot be the supreme ethical and political principle. In order to only live and survive, we do not need to be just nor free. To do something “in the name of life” does not immediately mean to do it in the name of justice or freedom. On the contrary, to invoke “life” and act politically also means to open Pandora’s box because life is a force that compels us to work, a force that pushes us daily in its unyielding vice. The court of life is a terrible court that knows no justice. Friedrich Nietzsche knew it well when he wrote: “Here it is not righteousness which sits in the judgement seat or, even less, mercy which announces judgement, but life alone, that dark, driving, insatiable self-desiring force” (Nietzsche § 3.5). To place life as the fundamental benchmark for good and evil also means to invite force to the courtroom and to the political assembly and to neglect rights and laws.

For this reason, modern humanitarian politics is “embedded” with the politics of force or preventive counter-violence carried out in the name of security. Such policies are given legitimacy by various security discourses that show refugees and asylum seekers as a threat (cf. e.g. Pozniak and Petrović 2014). That is why contemporary humanitarian refugee policies

fluctuate between two seemingly mutually exclusive poles, the poles of humanitarian compassion and repression led by the logic of security, or the poles of humanitarian care and security counter-violence. If we were to describe that situation with a single term, we would call those policies security-humanitarian policies.<sup>2</sup> At the centre of security-humanitarian policies is, on the one hand, care for the bodies and biological life within which human rights policy is reduced to the right to life. On the other hand, the centre of the security and counter-violence logic is the preventive detention of the so-called irregular foreigners, asylum seekers and refugees in camps where their movement and contact with social surroundings is limited, and indiscriminate use of violence along with the use of monitoring systems for risk control. The aforementioned neglect for rights and the law, or rather, the suspension of law with humanitarian exceptionalism occurs in that security-humanitarian framework, more on which will be said later.

In the text that follows, I will deal with the Winter Reception and Transit Center or camp in Slavonski Brod, Croatia, a key place of controlled humanitarian space (the so-called humanitarian corridor) where the mass transit of refugees through Croatia occurred in the autumn and winter of 2015/2016. I will show that its operation took place in the security-humanitarian framework. Moreover, the operation of the Slavonski Brod camp is an example of neglecting rights and laws and the “creeping” transgression of established moral and political principles and boundaries. The metaphor of “creeping” transgressions of moral principles and boundaries speaks of the gradual “normalization” of neglecting fundamental moral and political principles today. In this case, no one boasted or publicly displayed suspension of law. Instead, suspension took place in the silence of administrative management tactics and techniques and rules of conduct introduced *ad hoc*.

Finally, it should be noted that in the described security-humanitarian framework, the suspension of law with humanitarian exceptionalism that occurs actually confirms the sovereignty of the national state. The inherent national framework and the nationalism of such policies is also reflected in the “denying economization” of the refugee status whereby the right of access to the asylum system or the potential refugee status is

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<sup>2</sup> In other texts, I have shown that security-humanitarian policies are a variety of contemporary biopolitics (Petrović 2013 and 2016).

confirmed for people of certain national origin while it is denied to people of other national or racial origin defined with the category “economic migrant”. Such practices are characterized by the essentialization of national and racial identity since the right to obtain rights or the right to access the law is directly related to national and racial origin.

### Slavonski Brod camp

I came to the Slavonski Brod camp as a volunteer for the Centre for Peace Studies (CPS) / the Welcome! Initiative / Inicijativa Dobrodošli.<sup>3</sup> My intention was not to conduct a detailed research but to assist in providing aid to groups of people who passed through this transit camp. However, a few days’ stay motivated me to research the camp’s operation.<sup>4</sup>

Immediately upon arrival, it was clear that the camp was a closed facility with several types of security that could not be entered without a special permit. On entry, the authorities carried out control similar to that on airports. Groups that were received as refugees were unable to leave the camp and spend time in the city or the surrounding area. Their movement was strictly controlled, extremely limited and reduced to several points in the camp.

The camp was located far from the city at the location of a refinery that ceased its operation. Thus, the workers and the plant of the refinery were replaced by an almost factory-like camp for refugee transit. It is symptomatic of the contemporary social and historical moment after the end of the modernity era that was characterized by the global expansion of the equality of conditions (or, more simply, the impoverishment of the rich and the enrichment of the poor), as described by Alexis de Tocqueville

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<sup>3</sup> The description and analysis that follow have been previously presented in a slightly different form in my book *Izbjeglištvo u suvremenom svijetu* (Petrović 2016a: 401-416) and in an article in a special issue of the journal *Časopis za kritiko znanosti* (Petrović 2016b).

<sup>4</sup> The text is based on two short stays at the refugee transit camp in Slavonski Brod, Croatia, and on my stay in Šid, Serbia during January and February of 2016. I supplemented the information from the field, collected by participant observation, with systematic following of media reports from the beginning of the so-called refugee crisis in Croatia in the summer of 2015 and information collected in interviews and conversations. Primarily from a few semi-structured and unstructured interviews and conversations with the police (an interview with the deputy head of the Slavonski Brod camp), the refugees, other researchers, volunteers and employees of several humanitarian and non-governmental associations.

(2002). By following the relationship of social inclusion and exclusion at the margins of today's global political and economic system, Saskia Sassen (2014) convincingly shows that today's political and economic system, unlike the one that emerged after World War II, deprives proportionately more people of economic and political well-being than it spreads well-being and the aforementioned equality of conditions. Along those lines, derelict factories and industrial plants are now being converted into closed camps in which the surpluses of people from other devastated areas are managed, and the local army of the unemployed finds temporary employment at those centres. In addition to members of the police and volunteers, the camps were also maintained and managed by temporary employees of humanitarian organizations and the Red Cross employees who were employed through the institute of so-called public work. As part of public work, the Croatian Employment Service provides minimum wages for those classified as the long-term unemployed. In other words, the poor participate in managing refugees, the unwanted and the poor.

As I already mentioned at the beginning, this was a closed-type space that was managed by the police and the Croatian Red Cross. Other humanitarian and non-governmental organizations participated in providing aid but had no actual decision-making power. Their primary role was to assist people in transit, with limited ability to act or access certain areas of the camp. The camp area was divided into several sections and sectors that had different functions in the process of people management. People were taken in by a train that directly entered the camp, according to a schedule that the authorities tried to keep fixed, but which actually varied depending on the number of people at the border and the like. Exit from the train was monitored by the police and the Croatian Red Cross, which provided aid to those who needed it, while organizations had no access to that part of the process.<sup>5</sup> Their work was reduced primarily to the distribution tent where they gave away clothes, to tents intended for assisting mothers and children, the space in front and behind the distribution tent and the asphalted road leading to the train, or the road to the fences that marked the beginning of the train "platform". They had access to the so-called sectors in those rare cases in January and February 2016 when refugees stayed there for several hours as part of their tran-

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<sup>5</sup> I noticed that this prohibition was not strictly applied, especially upon entry into the train when members of other organizations also entered that space.



sit. Non-governmental organizations generally had no access permits for other parts of the camp, which made it much more difficult to monitor possible human rights violations and police violence that was recorded (cf. Banich et al. 2016). During the time I spent at the camp, the police formed queues for people awaiting registration. After registration, they entered the distribution tent where they were given necessities, mostly clothes, baby food, etc. After passing through the distribution camp, they were provided food and water at one point in the camp. After being given food, they were either directed towards a train for Slovenia or towards specially prepared sectors, the so-called heated tents where they waited until train departure. Special sectors were used for detaining those under the suspicion that they are not refugees, who did not come from Syria, Iraq or Afghanistan (cf. Banich et al. 2016), those that were returned from the Slovenian border and on their way to Serbia, and the like. Access to sections of the camp where those people stayed was at that time allowed only to certain Red Cross employees and the police.

As opposed to the situation in Šid, Serbia where people could move around the city and the train station reasonably well, their movement was strictly controlled in the Slavonski Brod camp and the police prevented a more free movement within the camp. Movement and stay were allowed only at several points on the preplanned route: from the train to the registration space where people were placed in organized queues monitored by the police, within tents where clothing was distributed to the place of food distribution and again on the way to the train or within accommodation sectors which they were not allowed to leave. The entire movement “process” was controlled, encouraged and sometimes accelerated by regular police that was armed, with the assistance of intervention police. Police behaviour was greatly affected by the time left until the train departs. If there was little time, police officers sometimes raised their voices or yelled at people, threatening or pushing them. During my short stay at the camp, I managed to witness unequal police conduct. Younger men were more often met with strictness and force than women with children or families. In general, communication with the police was reduced to a minimum, creating a great social distance.<sup>6</sup> When there was rushing, the

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<sup>6</sup> Unlike police officers, employees and volunteers of the Croatian Red Cross and other organizations, especially translators, communicated with people “in passing”. However, they still communicated more with families and children than with young men. But even their communication and behaviour greatly depended on police conduct. In cases of great

process was extremely humiliating because of raised voices and pushing, and it looked more like directing crowds during unrest at sports stadiums. Such police conduct is perhaps not surprising given that the legal status of most of those at the borders was unclear. Entry was allowed only for those with special documents obtained in Macedonia and/or Serbia. Those were documents that enabled free movement and transit through Serbia and/or Macedonia for 72 hours (cf. e.g. Kasperek 2016; Beznec et al. 2016). In the period I spent in Slavonski Brod, those documents were issued exclusively to people from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. Croatian police mostly issued postponement of forced return, deportation, in accordance with the *Aliens Act* that effectively allowed shorter transit through Croatia. Since most of the people did not seek asylum, they entered an ambivalent legal situation by entering Croatia. Although they were treated as refugees from war zones, their stay was regulated by the *Aliens Act* (Official Gazette “Narodne novine” nos. 130/11 and 74/13) which states that foreign nationals without valid visas and documents must leave the country within a specified period of time or they will be removed, deported. According to my insights, based on that Act, the refugees received written decision on registration that, among other things, stated that they must leave the country within a certain time. It is important to note that, for reasons unknown to me, such decisions were not issued to everyone, nor were they always the same. In other words, they were allowed to pass through Croatia’s territory because they were treated as they were refugees without the equivalent legal regulation of their status, as some form of illegal refugees. They were in the zone of humanitarian exception or humanitarian exceptionalism which is clearly becoming the norm (Fassin and Vasquez 2005) and part of legitimate policies, and which suspends or muddies the state legal order for a longer or relatively longer time and in a certain space, and in this case for a certain group of people.

From the description, one can conclude that the camp’s humanitarian space was created with the use of bureaucratic management and surveillance techniques and that it was structured as a closed camp that has been used since World War II as a technical aid for refugee group surveillance and management (cf. e.g. Malkki 1995: 498–500). Such a bureaucratic space is one kind of modern political technology or, in this case, biopoliti-

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rush, communication was reduced to a minimum and translators also started to rush and direct groups of people in order to achieve faster departure.

cal technology described by Michel Foucault (1994), whose primary objective is, on the one hand, control and care of bodies and their biological process and, on the other hand, control of security, establishment of order and segregation, enclosing and detention of refugee groups. Refugees are segregated from the community to which they arrive because they represent an “abnormal” surplus that disturbs the established normal order, which is reestablished and normalized by their isolation and detention.<sup>7</sup>

Philanthropic, humanitarian power rules in that space. It was caring and authoritative, it was rarely violent but it often quashed and took away dignity. It was torn between two seemingly opposed objectives, control and care. On the one hand, its role was to care for the basic needs of migrants and refugees. It was sensitive to the body suffering, lack of food, water, the cold, disease and physical disabilities, the needs of families and children. On the other hand, it secured and controlled the movement of people, the security of the space in and around the camp, the places of movement and stay, it was sensitive to the risks, bursts of violence, unforeseen events, it recorded, categorized, documented and counted.<sup>8</sup> As I already mentioned, that humanitarian aid had a structure that fluctuated between those two seemingly mutually exclusive poles, humanitarian compassion and repression, humanitarianism and control driven by security logic. The same security-humanitarian logic dominated refugeeness policies in developed liberal-democratic states in Europe and the United States (cf. e.g. Fassin 2005; Ticktin 2006, 2011), and it obviously affects refugee policies in Croatia.

It can also be seen that the aforementioned humanitarianism process is taking place within a security framework that is a part of the general

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<sup>7</sup> I received confirmation of this conclusion in an interview with the deputy head of the camp. Talking about his management of the Opatovac camp in the autumn of 2015, he emphasized that, after the camp was built and refugees were placed in it, the citizens of that small village did not even see the refugees. In other words, life continued as if there were no refugees.

<sup>8</sup> In the interview, the deputy head of the refugee camp confirmed that the main task of the police, which managed the camp on an operative and organization level, was security. The organizational model they applied was the same as the one they used in 2014 at the time of great flooding in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Thus, at the organizational level, the arrival of refugees and a natural disaster were treated the same way. The deputy head expressed satisfaction with police work because, as he said himself, there were no incidents that would endanger security in and around the camp. To my question about what he meant when he said “incident”, he said he was referring to violence committed by refugees. His examples were cases of stoning and tent burning in a camp in Brežice, Slovenia, in autumn 2015.

trend of securitization in refugee policies. As part of security-humanitarian policies for the “management” of refugee groups, the authorities apply security techniques and technologies that include preventive incarceration in reception centres, refugee camps, closed complexes in which their movement and contact with the social environment is restricted, with indiscriminate use of violence (Diken 2004; Fassin 2005; Kumar Rajaram and Grundy-Warr 2004). The use of various monitoring systems for risk control is also commonplace. It is important to note that here, along the immediate space in and around the camp, the authorities also monitored the space which was as wide and long as the movement of refugee groups. It was simultaneously homogeneous and heterogeneous because it was bound to the physical space of the Slavonski Brod camp, but it also expanded to wherever there was movement of people, to the train, the bus, borders with other countries, and via network systems and EURODAC, to the spaceless “space” of border and cross-border control networks and networks for monitoring criminal networks and spaces of “illegality” ranging from the borders of Turkey, Greece, Serbia, Hungary, Croatia and Slovenia to Austria, Germany and beyond. Didier Bigo (2007) called such “spaceless” security logic that operates beyond legal orders *banopticon*.

I received confirmation that control often crosses state borders in a painful testimony of a young Moroccan man who the police returned to Serbia from Slavonski Brod together with his companions. He told me that the police in Slavonski Brod, with the help of translators, discovered his Moroccan origin and then returned him to Serbia. He saw those same translators again in Šid, Serbia questioning people before they were to board the train. Such externalized border control was the result of informal and formal arrangements such as the one defined by the *Protokol o suradnji u migracijskoj krizi i sprječavanju nezakonitih migracija* i.e. *Protocol on Cooperation in the Migration Crisis and Prevention of Illegal Migration*.<sup>9</sup> The objective of this action, called profiling in Croatia, was the detection and removal of so-called economic migrants from the humanitarian inter-state corridor.

The described security measures lead to the conclusion that it was a space of control and increased institutional perception of risk.<sup>10</sup> As already

<sup>9</sup> At: <https://vlada.gov.hr/UserDocsImages//Sjednice/2015/271%20sjednica%20Vlade//271%20-%2015a.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> The then Minister of the Interior Ranko Ostojić confirmed this approach in an interview. “You can always have someone in a group who is problematic. We try to have

mentioned, that space was where compassion and care mixed with authority and dosed cruelty that rarely manifested itself as the use of violence, and more as indifference, indolence and distance that occurs due to the need for monitoring, managing and controlling the movement of people.

I felt the ambivalence of that space when providing aid in the distribution tent. The aid distribution tent was actually a passage enclosed on each side with a fence behind which humanitarian organization employees and volunteers stood. People came and went passing in front of us, row after row, an endless line of anonymous faces and unknown individual destinies that were, at that moment, reduced to a plea, a greeting, a smile, a request or a few words: "Hey, brother, friend!" ... "Thank you!" from the other side of the fence, looking for clothes or shoes. In that brief moment, you could feel, or at least think you are feeling, an infinite range of mental states, fatigue, disorientation, strength, resourcefulness, joy, humour, physical pain, numbness, emptiness... And your task was to try to fulfil the request. I noticed that, in communication that boils down to pleas and fulfilling requests, there is an interesting reduction of subjectivity. The many faces and individual destinies suddenly disappear and transform into something extremely simple – a suffering body that needs to be dressed, warmed up, etc. (cf. Malkki 1996). You approach all of those "bodies" friendly and in the same way. It is interesting that a certain affability and warmth is borne therein. Such feelings existed regardless of whom you were addressing and regardless of the fact that both you and the refugees were located in an inhumane, violent space. It seems that the reduction of personality to a suffering body encourages the expression of warmth and gentleness. It

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the police check everyone, our services are in the field, we record everything from a picture to every other information. This is all too big of risk for those who are suspicious, to pass all of those controls," said Ostojić, "commenting on potential terrorists among refugees" ("Ostojić: 'It is impossible to close the border, a humanitarian corridor must exist'", 4 October 2015, <http://www.hrt.hr/301688/vijesti/nedjeljom-u-dva-ranko-ostojic>). The growing sense of risk is best evidenced in the persistent suspicion that potential terrorists are hiding among refugees. After the attacks in Paris where the police found a Syrian passport, terrorists were immediately associated with refugee groups, even though the police later found that the passports were fake. A translator who was employed by one of the international humanitarian organizations described to me a change in atmosphere in the direction of increased caution in Slavonski Brod camp. Shortly after the Paris attacks, the police increased the number of people in the field who then started entering trains, checking the space and spending more time registering and verifying the identities of refugees. She also felt an increased distance and distrust from colleagues in her humanitarian organization, which ultimately led her to leave her position as a translator.

can be said that this is a feeling of compassion towards an “innocent” life that suffers and of content because of the possible release from suffering after receiving aid.<sup>11</sup> Similar feelings of empathy are described by Gilles Deleuze (2001: 29). They arise in relation to a “pure” unqualified life free from judgement on justness, good or evil. In my opinion, the aforementioned reduction of personality moves the lives of refugees to that imaginary neutral ground. That fact suggests that compassion may be generated precisely from the violent reduction of personality.<sup>12</sup>

On the other hand, even though the task of providing aid at first seems banal, it was not exactly that. The procedure itself was sometimes confusing because there was occasional shortage of clothing or footwear in the distribution tent. This shortage could make you start evaluating the other’s “objective” needs. Depending on what someone is already wearing, you might decide whether that garment is sufficient or not and whether they need a replacement. In order for the process to be more efficient and for more people to receive aid, you can put yourself in the position of authority that makes those decisions. Unlike other volunteers I met during the period I spent in the camp, Red Cross employees regularly took the position of authority by deciding who can or cannot get something.<sup>13</sup> Regardless of the individual motives for such behaviour, I later realized that it was largely systemically conditioned. After witnessing a conversation with the shift leader from the Centre of Peace Studies with the head of the Croatian Red Cross, I found out that, from his perspective, the primary goal at that moment was to enable people “mere survival until they reach Germany”. Such a framework of action that cares exclusively for physical and biological needs requires an instrumental and authoritative approach to people that renders their voice irrelevant. Refugees are thus again reduced to “voiceless emissaries” (Malkki 1996), silent mute bodies that just come and go in silence.

The very observation of silent bodies contains something deeply estranging, the look itself materializes a voiceless image, a spectacle of raw

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<sup>11</sup> Kant (1957: 64) describes that satisfaction as compassion that arises from a momentary obstacle and a stronger surge of life force that follows.

<sup>12</sup> It thus becomes clear why contemporary asylum policies fluctuate between two seemingly mutually exclusive principles, compassion and repression (Fassin 2005). Both, in fact, mutually support and lead to one another and make a dialectic pair.

<sup>13</sup> Other volunteers I talked to reached the same conclusion. Some of them had months of experience working with Red Cross employees.

corporeality. In this way, the pictorial form, the spectacle, creates a distance, a non-relationship, capturing those who observe and those who are observed in that non-relationship. In fact, that “pictorial form” is complement to and a requirement for the survival of the described bureaucratic apparatus that “regulates” the non-existence of the relationship.

Those are surprising images that also circulated the media, a seemingly confusing mix of compassion and cruelty expressed through lack of action and mute observation of lines of people passing through in anonymity and without a voice. That mute observation of silent, mostly tired, suffering rows of people passing by and leaving, I believe, also contains a fraction of voyeuristic pleasure that usually arises in observing the suffering of people who, at least presumed, came close to death, but who escaped, survived and are now on the road. And “we” are going to help them by taking care of their suffering and endangered bodies, their children, the elderly and the weak. We will “not” let them in too closely, because who has use of people reduced to bodies merely surviving. Somehow, it is like the majority of people observing feels that the road from suffering bodies to full-fledged citizens who take care of themselves and others is too long. Moreover because the “bursts of those crowds of people” are often seen as a source of constant risk and danger for the “domestic population”,<sup>14</sup> so care was mixed with calling on and calling out the army and police that should certainly limit and prevent their arrival and crossing the borders of sovereign states. From state to state, the countries have certainly tried to prevent their arrival, if not completely, then by limiting entry and flow of people, fearing an excess of people who could arrive or find themselves on state territory. In the process, an increasing number of people joined the narrative with the excuse that these are not refugees but so-called economic migrants. In that context, control and surveillance mechanisms were created even before the described practice of determining the national origin of “migrants”. This only means that refugee policies that try to limit the arrival of so-called economic migrants are based on the essentialization of the national state and belonging to a nation-state. These factors become crucial in awarding refugee status because they bind nationality to rights. Exclusively binding nationality and not some universal principle to rights is at the centre of each nationalist policy. Inherent unchallenged national-

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<sup>14</sup> One of the reasons for applying security mechanisms in managing refugee groups is the fact that the public and public policy creators increasingly see asylum seekers and refugees as a security threat (cf. e.g. Pozniak and Petrović 2014).

ism of such policies showed its head during origin control along the humanitarian corridor. The suspects were often recognized “at first glance” by their skin colour, their way of talking and the like. Inherent racism and nationalism reveal the scope and the hidden face of “generous” humanitarianism. In other words, preventing entry for so-called economic migrants shows that economic deprivation is not recognized as an objective difficulty and a reason for justified border crossing, while nationality as interpreted within essentialism is seen as sufficient. In this way, the denying economization of refugee policies, the failure to acknowledge poverty and economic inequality, confirms nationalism and racism. At the core of that opinion that negates poverty is today’s value system that privileges economic well-being and steady growth of wealth, reducing political values to being exclusively economic.<sup>15</sup> If growth of wealth is expressed in a political language, we are actually talking about strength and superiority as core values. When that value system becomes the dominant political principle of communities, we experience confirmation of superiority and hierarchy at the border, strengthened by racisms and nationalism.

It is apparent from the above that, in the approach to and handling of people who travel and cross borders for various reasons, *security humanitarianism* is the dominant framework that conditions the creation of management practices and dominant perceptions. In creating transit centres and camps where special management techniques for handling and efficiently transporting people from one border to another, something that can be called a humanitarian corridor or humanitarian space with a special status beyond the usual social and legal frameworks was also created.<sup>16</sup> There are several essential features of that space: 1. It crossed borders and territories of sovereign states. 2. Within that space authorities imple-

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<sup>15</sup> In that context, it is important to note that, for Foucault (1994), encouraging economic processes is inseparable from encouraging vital processes at the level of the body and population, or the emergence of power over life, biopower and related politics – biopolitics. For that reason, the connection between denying economization of refugee policies, the essentialization of national origin and racism and the care for body and life in the humanitarian space is not coincidental. It is a biologization of politics in various forms.

<sup>16</sup> “It never happened to anyone. It is impossible to carry out border closure because a humanitarian corridor must exist,” said minister Ranko Ostojić. “Croatia had to take measures, it stabilized the channel, and we achieved what we wanted. The total amount spent by Croatia is not something I know right now. These investments are worth a lot more than all migrants remaining here,” he stressed. “If the EU is helping Serbia and Greece, of course a Member State is also seeking a cost refund, and we were promised that. Those are not small costs, but it was above all important to defend Croatia,” said the minister (HRT1, *Nedjeljom u dva*, 4 October 2015).



mented special systems of rules, management, surveillance and increased control that are not common for the so-called normal social space. It was entirely defined as a controlled space. In other words, it does not even exist without bureaucratic management techniques. 3. It was defined as a temporary flow that crosses borders and territories of national states. 4. It was a space where rights were partially and temporarily suspended (humanitarian exceptionalism) for people who found themselves in that space, i.e. the legal status of most people was unclear. 5. It was dominated by care for the body (health, nutrition, physical suffering of people) and life of groups and individuals who found themselves there.

### Security humanitarianism of the corridor

I already noted that security-humanitarian refugee policies, with regard to their content and structure, belong to a type of contemporary biopolitics and are a result of broader social processes. A qualitatively new aspect of contemporary biopolitical humanitarianism is the “penetration” of humanitarian policies from the international scene to the national level, more precisely, the key influence of humanitarianism policies on the development of individual national policies, especially policies towards asylum seekers and refugees. In that context, Angela Merkel was able to say: “Accepting refugees is Germany’s humanitarian duty” (Paterson 2015). In that context, it becomes easy to understanding the ease with which certain national states on the so-called Balkan refugee route opened the borders of their national states, allowed large numbers of refugees to pass through and formed more or less organized humanitarian corridors and flows that crossed borders and territories of national states. In that sense, humanitarian spaces can be called biopolitical spaces where the fundamental characteristic of contemporary refugee biopolitics is manifested, the fluctuation between two extremes, humanitarian compassion and repression (Fassin 2005), or more precisely, between humanitarianism and increased surveillance and control, humanitarianism and securitization.

Depoliticisation of the refugee and asylum regime is at the heart of contemporary humanitarianism. Specifically, it is a system in which the difference between political and humanitarian spheres is lost. However, the effect is not the repoliticisation of the refugee regime, i.e. the discovery of hidden political assumptions in humanitarian efforts, but the

humanization of politics (Fassin 2005, 2007, 2009) wherein the political dimension in particular is lost.

Thus, a discourse that would refer to some concept of law or justice was noticeably absent during the recent arrival of a large number of refugees from war-torn countries of Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan. In countries recipients of those refugee groups, those war conflicts did not initiate a stronger ideological and political discussion on warring parties, political stakes in the conflict and on the assessment of justness of each warring party. For that reason, arriving refugees were dominantly perceived as politically and ideologically colourless, or as a crowd of suffering bodies that needed to be taken care of, a mass, a universal humanitarian subject (Mallki 1996) whose main trait is biological existence.

I have already demonstrated that humanitarianism is an expression of contemporary biopolitics that reduce human rights politics to the right to life politics. Reference to the “sacredness” of life is at the heart of biopolitics, while their action is reduced to care about that life and life processes. Insistence on biological life as the fundamental principle of establishing human rights politics leads to the reduction of human rights and the instrumentalisation of law for the purposes of management, control and security. Slavonski Brod camp was a good example of such practices where care and control coexist and complement each other.

Humanitarian activity interpreted in such a way encourages and implies restriction of rights and potential suspension of laws that opens the way to normalisation of violence. The aforementioned humanitarian exceptionalism in the camp’s humanitarian area is a good example of suspension of law that is normalized, i.e. becomes a long-term phenomenon and part of refugeeness policies. Even though Croatia enabled refugees to cross the border and provided them with unhindered and organized passage, from the legal point of view, the arriving groups were not treated as refugees but as strangers in transit who must leave the state’s territory within a certain time and whose movement is extremely limited and controlled. Specifically, they were “refugees” without rights or freedoms that must be guaranteed to them as refugees. For this reason, the care for their physical suffering and the aid they received on the road took the form of organized management of a body of numbers that takes away their dignity and in the form of dosed violence that occasionally exceeds the allowed limit. Likewise, such “lawless” framework allowed for groups and individuals to be subjected to occasional control due to doubts regarding

their identity and refugee status. Police officers examined their appearance and race with racial profiling, and translators tested their knowledge of language and geographical details. Likewise, activists recorded cases of forced return without the possibility of seeking asylum (Banich et al. 2016). An insufficiently established legal framework enabled systemic distrust in the status of arriving refugees, but also arbitrary border closure in the event of unplanned stay of a larger number of refugees or a proclamation of the need to protect sovereign territory, as well as mass undocumented deportations or push-backs and increased use of protective force in the event the authorities assessed that the situation was a security risk. The Slavonski Brod complex and the associated organization of the refugee flow allowed a fast response to those situations and, in that sense, represented the continuation of the refugee securitisation policy.

In conclusion, Slavonski Brod camp created a biopolitical humanitarian space on the territory of the national state with the main purpose of encouraging and controlling the flow of people with the use of controlled violence and care for their bodies and biological life. The functioning of that space was based on the suspension of law and normalisation of humanitarian exceptionalism. At first glance, the existence of a humanitarian area of exceptionalism could confirm the view of Giorgio Agamben (1998) that contemporary politics is biopoliticised with the introduction of bare biological life to the centre of a political community by normalising the state of emergency. However, that is not entirely the case. Unlike Agamben's thesis that the confirmation of state sovereignty imposes a complete suspension of law, the suspension of law in Slavonski Brod was not complete nor was humanitarian exemption the result of a sovereign publicized decision. The creation of humanitarian space was the result of administrative management tactics with the use of management technology, while the suspension of law took place at the level of administrative practices and exceptionalism rules introduced *ad hoc*. The entire situation may be better described by combining theoretical insights of Giorgio Agamben with those of Michel Foucault or with the descriptions of practices that Judith Butler (2004) called indefinite detention, with the difference that closing instruments were used to control and create humanitarian flows of refugee groups that are more similar to Castells' (2010) spaces of flows of a network society.

The very formation of a humanitarian corridor was an attempt at introducing control over migratory movements by creating a refugee "flow" and confirming sovereignty with administrative control wherein care for

refugees was mixed with the suspension of legal framework with the use of humanitarian exceptionalism. In other words, such politics are used to confirm state and national power and to create centralised authoritarian control without long-term accountability from granting rights. Moreover, control is confirmed with the suspension of law. The purpose of establishing control is the normalisation of relationships in the receiving social community and its security. It can therefore be said that security-humanitarian policy discussed here, with care for biological life at its centre, indirectly essentialises national and racial identities. Therefore, in a paradoxical way, humanitarian compassion, care, surveillance and racism meet within security-humanitarian policy and coexist in humanitarian space.

Translated by Nikolina Vujnović

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Iva Grubiša

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## *Us and Them?* Cultural Anthropological Rethinking of the Fieldwork Experience in Slavonia

### Introduction

At the end of August 2015, I visited the EXPO 2015 World Exhibition in Milan with my family.<sup>1</sup> Although, by then we had already passed through several countries on our family trip, ironically, or expectedly, at the EXPO entrance terminal, whose size and appearance was reminiscent of global airport terminals, we were faced with a “border control” for the first time. All personal bags had to go through an x-ray machine and all people through a metal detector; anything suspicious showing up on the x-ray, or the sound of the metal detector, meant that an additional, more detailed check of people and things was in order. We passed the control, suffering minor losses (we were not allowed to take a glass bottle of water with us), and we found ourselves in a 110-hectare exhibition space, where 145 countries of the world were presenting their visions and ideas on how to feed humanity.<sup>2</sup> However, there were also countless interactive possibilities for visitors, who could taste or buy gastronomic specialties from all parts of the world, climb a net above the Brazilian rainforest, see the folklore of “exotic” countries, walk around gardens and temples, enjoy light shows and many other attractions that, at least for a moment, invoke a feeling of being a cosmopolitan, global citizen. This was the world in miniature,

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<sup>1</sup> A slightly different English language variant of this article was published in 2017 in a special issue of *Narodna umjetnost: Croatian Journal of Ethnology and Folklore Research* (54/1), announcing the publication of the collection *Kamp, koridor, granica: studije izbjeglištva u suvremenom hrvatskom kontekstu*, i.e. the Croatian edition of this book.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. <http://www.expo2015.orH/en/participants>.

which expected 20 million visitors in a 6-month period; a world in miniature which was, symptomatically for that very same globalized world, guarded by 2000 surveillance cameras.<sup>3</sup>

Visiting the EXPO 2015 was the last stop in our travel, during which we spent few days in Switzerland, with one day trips to Austria and Lichtenstein. During those days our primary source of information were television news. But not any news; the only program that we could watch because of the language barrier was CNN, which, at the time, had around-the-clock reports about the events on the Greek-Macedonian border.<sup>4</sup> Although the condition at the border was really difficult, the news that we watched generally repeated the same footage and photographs of the chaos for days, frequently without compelling arguments and well-founded information: the reports showed vast crowds, “masses” of people trying to break through police barriers, panic, breaking through the so-called green borders and corn fields, armed police, women and children crying; whereas the words that the reporters used to describe what we saw in the footage and the photos frequently included expressions like: “human flood of refugees”.<sup>5</sup>

In the days that followed, on 16 September 2015, the “refugee crisis” entered Croatia<sup>6</sup> after Hungary closed its border with the Republic of Serbia

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Silvije Tomašević, “At Expo almost whole world except Croatia”, 1 May 2015, <http://www.vecernji.hr/svijet/na-expo-2015-hotovo-cijeli-svijet-osim-hrvatske-1003259>.

<sup>4</sup> On 19 August 2015, Macedonia declared a state of emergency in the northern and southern border regions, as a result of which thousands of people remained “stranded” on the so-called no man’s land on the Greek and Macedonian border, waiting for the Macedonian police to let them pass. (cf. Beznec et al. 2016: 19–20).

<sup>5</sup> See the video reports from August, 2015: <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/08/21/europe/europe-migrant-crisis/index.html> and <http://edition.cnn.com/videos/world/2015/08/23/misery-at-europes-gate-damon-pkg.cnn/video/playlists/arwa-damon-reports-on-migrant-crisis/>.

<sup>6</sup> “Refugee crisis” (sometimes “migrant crisis”) is a common term used particularly in the media to refer to an increase in the entrance of refugees into the European Union in 2015 and 2016 (cf. <http://data.unhcr.org/H/mediterranean/reHional.php>). Numerous experts criticized the use of the term “crisis” (e.g. New Keywords Collective 2016: 15–21; Emina Bužinkić, “Critique of media, political and other representations of refugees”, 30 September 2015, <https://vimeo.com/145841213>). By using the expression “the crisis enters”, I want to point to the creation of the public discourse and the approach taken by the Croatian media (which will be discussed later), which started to report on the crisis with more intensity only directly before the first refugees entered the Republic of Croatia. In this sense, I want to emphasize that, at least according to the reports by the Croatian media, the “refugee crisis” (and/or the “migrant crisis”) entered Croatia on the same day as the first refugees did, on 16 September 2015.



on 15 September 2015, thus preventing entry of refugees into their country. During the first several days, people entered Croatia in Slavonia (first through the border areas near Šid-Tovarnik, and then Berkasovo-Bapska); they were transported to the reception centers in Ježevo, Sisak, Kutina, Beli Manastir and Zagreb, and then on to the border with Slovenia, which had also temporarily closed its border, preventing the passage of people. Still, by 21 September, anyone who reached the Croatia-Slovenia border, also managed to cross it. On that very day, 21 September, the Opatovac temporary reception center (also known as “the Opatovac camp”), which was some twenty kilometers from the above-mentioned border crossings, was opened, and from there people were transported further on to the border crossings with Hungary.<sup>7</sup> Initially, there were significant organizational problems and deficiencies here as well. For instance, transfer from Bapska to Opatovac was not organized until 23 September, so people had to walk some twenty kilometers to the Opatovac reception center.<sup>8</sup> Also, people who were coming were not given key information about where they were (for instance some were uncertain which country they were in), which purpose the Opatovac temporary reception center served and how long they would have to stay there, where they would be taken next, or whether they would be allowed to leave Croatia and continue their journey, which European Union member countries closed their borders, whether the Dublin Regulation was still enforced, which data they would be required to present at registration in Opatovac, whether their fingerprints would be taken and if so, whether the prints would be entered into the EURODAC database, as well as a number of other pieces of information. Not providing timely and clear information led to misunderstandings and an atmosphere of fear, thus causing conflicts between the refugees and the police in the camp, one of which in particular escalated on 23 September, when the police in the camp, among other things, used “pepper spray”.<sup>9</sup> The organization of the reception and the transit of people, as

<sup>7</sup> Cf. <http://vijesti.hrt.hr/299204/prihvat-i-smjestaj-miHranata-u-hrvatskoj>, and <http://www.mup.hr/main.aspx?id=220928>.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. <http://welcome.cms.hr/index.php/hr/2015/09/23/ljudi-neprestano-stizu-u-bapsku/> and <http://welcome.cms.hr/index.php/hr/2015/09/23/nasi-volonteri-nalaze-se-u-bapskoj-i-opatovcu/>.

<sup>9</sup> Welcome! Initiative also cautioned about the importance of providing information in their public reports: <http://welcome.cms.hr/index.php/hr/2015/09/23/informiranje-izbjeglica-moze-sprijeciti-tenzije-na-terenu/>. The news about the conflict was also published in the media. For instance, some of the media reported that tear gas (which is more intensive than “pepper spray”) was used. However, this was denied by the Ministry

well as of the Opatovac center itself, improved with time: buses that took people from the reception center to the border crossings became regular (with minor interruptions, mostly during the night, when the number of available drivers and buses was not commensurate with the number of people that needed transport). Also, its capacity was raised to 5,000 people, so that the temporary reception center in Opatovac started functioning nearly smoothly. The Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Croatia played the main role in the organization of work at the border crossings and the reception center, whereas the Croatian Red Cross was the main coordinator of humanitarian support. Because of increasingly worse weather conditions, on 3 November 2015, The Winter Reception and Transit Center in Slavonski Brod was open, which took over the function of the temporary center in Opatovac, and remained active until mid-April 2016. The Ministry of the Interior and the Red Cross played the key role in Slavonski Brod as well.<sup>10</sup> Numerous non-governmental organizations, initiatives, associations and freelancer or independent volunteers from Croatia and abroad joined them from the very beginning, from September 2015, in more or less coordinated activities. One such initiative that I myself joined was the Welcome! Initiative / Inicijativa Dobrodošli!<sup>11</sup>

### Accessing the field: interweaving the volunteer and research role

As part of the Welcome! Initiative's volunteer team, I stayed in Opatovac, Bapska and Tovarnik in the period from 25 until 28 September and from 2 until 6 October 2015, whereas, in the Winter Reception and Transit Center

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of the Interior, which confirmed only the use of "pepper spray", explaining that it was an exceptional situation, when the agent used was meant to calm the tensions and bring order and security back into the camp (cf. e.g. Hina, "Bikić: Police did not use tear gas but pepper spray", 23 September 2015, <http://www.nacional.hr/bikic-policija-nije-upotrijebila-suzavac-neHo-pepper-sprej/> and N. A., "Conflicts between refugees in Opatovac. The Police used tear gas", 23 September 2015, <http://24sata.info/vijesti/regija/240648-sukob-izbjeHlica-u-opatovcu-policija-upotrijebila-suzavac.html>).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. <http://welcome.cms.hr/index.php/hr/2015/11/02/od-bapske-preko-tovarnika-i-opatovca-do-slavonskog-broda/>.

<sup>11</sup> More about the Welcome! Initiative i.e. "Welcome" Refugee Support Initiative see at: <http://welcome.cms.hr/index.php/en/>. For other initiatives and organizations active in that period see for example Are You Serious? ([https://www.facebook.com/areyouserious/info/?tab=page\\_info](https://www.facebook.com/areyouserious/info/?tab=page_info)) and Individuals on the field: international group (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1471413449832894/>).

in Slavonski Brod, I volunteered from 6 until 10 December of the same year. The role of the volunteer at times included helping in organized distribution of humanitarian aid (food, clothing, blankets and the like), occasionally it meant socializing with and talking to the refugees and providing information available at the time, sometimes it meant observing the situation in the camp and the border crossings and pointing at the deficiencies and opportunities for better organization and approach to the refugees, but mostly it meant the simultaneous blend of all the mentioned “jobs”, as well as some others, depending on the context of the situation.

I engaged in direct work with the refugees, in the temporary reception center in Opatovac, at the Bapska and Tovarnik border crossings, and at the Winter Reception and Transit Center in Slavonski Brod primarily as a volunteer. During my short but intensive stays in the field, I was one of the many people who, driven by various motives, involved in direct work with the refugees. Furthermore, throughout my volunteer activities I followed the instructions given by the coordinator of the Welcome! Initiative that I joined, and did my utmost to respect the basic principles of the Initiative, including approaching the refugees with solidarity, which, among other things, meant solidarizing with their experiences, while respecting their human dignity. Still, my motivation to engage in fieldwork was also infused with my professional interests and the cultural-anthropological and sociological “worldview”, which had become an inseparable part of my personality and identity already during my college education. This cultural-anthropological and sociological habitus (cf. Bourdieu 1990), as a specific body of theoretical and methodological knowledge and skills, necessarily had an effect on *what* and *how* I perceived in the field, and how I interpreted it. In other words, as explained by Nevena Škrbić Alempijević, Sanja Potkonjak and Tihana Rubić “when ethnology and cultural anthropology become your life’s calling, the tendency to observe things in depth and to understand the world around you becomes an urge that we cannot resist, and that becomes almost automatic after a certain point” (2016: 19). Thus, the mentioned centers and border areas, in addition to being the places of my volunteer experience, the first one of such intensity, also began to actualize as a research field where, in the pauses between volunteer shifts, I would take notes about the events that day, about what I noticed and experienced. Later, returning to and going through them, now also with some temporal and spatial distance, I continued to ruminate on my lived experience and the data I gathered, as well as the ways in which I could

analyze and present it. However, I would frequently ask myself where is the limit beyond which I should not go (and if there is one) when analyzing my experience at the border crossings and in the temporary reception centers, and analyzing their organization and functioning. The issues of solidarity, active inclusion and self-organization of people into initiatives and organizations, securitization of the “refugee crisis”, humanitarianization of the “refugee crisis”, spatial organization of the reception centers, media representation of the events at the border crossings and the reception centers, the issue of “real” and “non-real” refugees and the relationship of Us and Them, were only some of the numerous questions that occurred to me. Any of these questions could, on its own, provide the basis for a research topic. I believed, and I still do, that it is important to write and talk about this subject matter, but I wondered how to do it, so as to offer a different perspective and provide new insights that would differ from the, frequently, sensationalist media reports about ongoing (forced) migratory movements. In other words, was there a way that I, as an ethnologist, cultural anthropologist and sociologist, could contribute to the discussion, and if so, how?

Hence, how can one study different aspects of refugeeness: lives, practices and experiences of people forced to migrate? How can one analyze the processes that frequently prevent people from (legal) access to the territory of the European Union, the processes of reception and management of their temporary accommodation, and the organization of their further transfer? Moreover, what is the role that we as researchers have in the lives of those whom we are researching? Do we leave a trace in their lives? What is it that we offer our narrators in return? Whose story are we telling by writing ethnographic texts – those of our narrators, or, at least in part, our own? All these questions make a constituent part of rethinking any anthropological fieldwork, research process, presentation and interpretation of collected ethnographic data. However, it seems that they become more intensive when we study socially marginalized groups, and when the life circumstances of the researched and the researchers are not only radically different, but also frequently go to the benefit of the researchers. I believe that none of these questions have a single correct and final answer, while the asymmetrical relations of power are part and parcel of nearly any cultural-anthropological study and any other similar studies in the social sciences and humanities. The researcher will always have a certain authority and his/her voice will always have priority in a

text that s/he is creating, while the ethical dilemmas that s/he encounters in the course of the research and presentation of results, no matter how much s/he strives to disentangle them, will always remain open and susceptible to criticism. These dilemmas are frequently exacerbated by the fact that different roles and relations are entangled in the field, whereby the researcher, in addition to his/her professional role, may also have the role of a friend, advisor, advocate, activist and many others. The boundary between the researcher and the narrator often becomes very vague, sometimes almost completely disappearing, while at other times it remains very clear (cf. Kość-Ryżko 2012–2013). Because of these complex and parallel roles and relationships that we have while conducting research (and often much later too) with our narrators, it is important that those whom we are studying are aware that we are doing it. On the other hand, it is also important to become aware that, because of such intertwining of the different roles during fieldwork, the awareness of being a participant in a research can become lost or neglected in various contexts. It is frequently unclear when our collocutor is addressing us as a researcher collecting his/her data, and when as a friend or a volunteer offering humanitarian aid; as well as it can remain uncertain when researchers throughout their fieldwork take on the role of researchers, and when that of friends, volunteers, etc., including whether these roles can and should exclude one another. This is why rethinking one's own role both in the field and in the lives of those being researched is an indispensable part of any self-reflection about one's own field experience.

It is precisely self-reflection that is in the basis of autoethnography as a research method, which Škrbić Alempijević, Potkonjak and Rubić describe as “a retrospective method” (2016: 99). This is because “one's own lived experience, using the theoretical and conceptual framework of ethnology and cultural anthropology, is analytically and critically connected with broader social processes, on a synchronic and diachronic level” (Škrbić Alempijević et al. 2016: 99). Autoethnographic use of lived experience can go far into the author's past, but it may also boil down to very recent experiences, such as was my volunteering at the reception centers and border crossings. In doing so, as stated by Škrbić Alempijević, Potkonjak and Rubić, the author/researcher is engaged on multiple levels – emotionally, intellectually and activistically, “communicating one's own experience in public, with the aim and idea of social change” (2016: 99). Still, autoethnography, like any other method, does not come without its set of potential

traps, some of which are “overemphasis on narration rather than analysis and cultural interpretation [and] exclusive reliance on personal memory and recalling as a data source” (Chang 2008: 54). Furthermore, according to Heewon Chang, the benefit of autoethnography lies in the potential to present the extensive, detailed, intimate and frequently emotionally charged autoethnographic data, that we would otherwise not have access to using a different method, while relying on “critical, analytical and interpretive eyes” (Chang 2008: 49) so as to detect latent cultural patterns of lived experience.

Therefore, based upon this sort of self-reflection about my fieldwork experience and my own role in the field (whether I was a volunteer, a researcher or whether I could be both at the same time), I decided to write this article. Taking into consideration that the circumstances on the ground frequently did not leave much room for explanation that I was, in addition to being a volunteer of the Welcome! Initiative, a cultural anthropologist and a sociologist, I decided to write a text based upon my personal experience which serves as the guiding principle. Thus, had the circumstances been different, I would have certainly devoted a significant part of the text to the voices of the refugees with whom I spent a short but intensive time in the field; however I have not done so in this paper, not because I consider these voices irrelevant, but because this seemed to be the right decision in this particular situation, taking into account the described ethical dilemmas and problems in doing anthropological research and presenting the collected data, as well as the particular characteristics of this research.

Therefore, this article may also be considered as an autoethnographic text that took shape in several phases. Starting with “simply” writing down my experiences and emotions from the field that lacked elements of critical questioning and a theoretically-grounded analysis (cf. Chang 2008: 54), I gradually built up the text by including into the analysis some media sources that were presenting “the refugee crisis” and news from the field, so as to contextualize my fieldwork experience. Here I primarily relied on the official webpage of the Welcome! Initiative since it provides reports from the field and other information, systematically starting with 18 September 2015 onwards.<sup>12</sup> I also used the webpages of three Croatian broadcasters: HRT or Croatian Radiotelevision, RTL television and Nova

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. <http://welcome.cms.hr/index.php/en/>.

TV, which were devoted to the “refugee crisis”,<sup>13</sup> as well as some other online news portals, where I found texts dealing with the “refugee crisis” in the period starting from mid-September until the end of November 2015. Choosing the latter was mostly spontaneous: while routinely going through the daily news, I would come across some of the articles, while the aforementioned webpages have been selected since these are the three biggest Croatian television broadcasters, which provided news and information both on TV news and on its webpages. Given that the aim of this paper is not to provide a systematic analysis of the “refugee crisis” representation in the Croatian media, this source-selection is necessarily partial, however, in the context of this article, it may be helpful in understanding the ways in which the public discourse on “refugee crisis” was being constructed, as well as how the “refugee crisis” was represented in the Croatian media. My experience and knowledge of the topic, in addition to my fieldwork experience and media analysis, was created and/or complemented through several public forums organized to discuss the ongoing events at the time; this includes, for instance, the Forum organized by the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research, held on 30 September 2015, entitled: *Pravo na goli život, pravo na bolji život? O izbjegličkoj krizi iz istraživačke i aktivističke perspective (The right to a bare existence, the right to a better existence? On the refugee crisis from a research and activist perspective)*,<sup>14</sup> and the Forum organized by the Third Program of the Croatian Radio: *Jesu li izbjeglice naša braća ili civilizacijska prijetnja? (Are the refugees our brothers or a civilizational threat?)*<sup>15</sup> held on 27 October 2015. The scholarly literature that I used enabled me to establish a relationship between ethnographic and autoethnographic data and the rethinking of the refugeness phenomenon from the perspective of cultural anthropology.

Given all this, while analyzing my own fieldwork experience on the one hand and the selected media sources on the other, in the remaining text I will place an emphasis on the problem of the construction of refugees as *radical Others*, or the *refugee Others*, and on the problem of the represen-

<sup>13</sup> Cf. <http://izbjeglice.hrt.hr/>; <http://www.vijesti.rtl.hr/pretrazivanje/?upit=izbjeglice>; [http://dnevnik.hr/bin/search\\_result.php?sort=date&query=izbjeglice](http://dnevnik.hr/bin/search_result.php?sort=date&query=izbjeglice).

<sup>14</sup> Cf. <http://www.ief.hr/Novosti/Digitalnabazadoga%C4%91anja/TribinaIEFa/tabid/542/language/hr-HR/Default.aspx>.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. <http://radio.hrt.hr/ep/jesu-li-izbjeglice-nasa-braca-ili-civilizacijska-prijetnja/133582/>.

tation of, the relationship towards and the approach to the refugees on the one hand, as well as the construction and self-perception of Us (the West, volunteers, etc.) on the other. Finally, in the last section of the text, I turn to the issue of power inscribed into the spaces of temporary reception centers and border crossings, and to the ways of managing temporary accommodation of refugees in Croatian context.

### Who are *We* and who are *They*?<sup>16</sup>

In her speech at the Forum organized in Zagreb by the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research, Emina Bužinkić from the Center for Peace Studies, pointed at the construction of the “refugee threat” in the political and media discourse. Above all, refugees are seen as a “phenomenon” that upsets us every day through the media where we see images of chaos, disorder and despair, and regardless of being shocked by these images, the refugees, according to Bužinkić, remain a great unknown, thus also remaining a threat. An important part in the creation of the “refugee threat” is played by politicians, who, from the outset of the “crisis”, explicitly talked about the necessity to protect Croatian borders and Croatian territory and population from potential terrorists.<sup>17</sup> President Kolinda Grabar Kitarović, for instance, strongly criticized the politics of the Croatian Government towards refugees, frequently saying that Croatia “failed the test of safeguarding borders”,<sup>18</sup> whereas the then Minister of the Interior, Ranko Ostojić, pointed out that in addition to organized and humane reception of the refugees, the Croatian government is primarily working to preserve national security.<sup>19</sup> By emphasizing terms such as “protection”,

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<sup>16</sup> I briefly discussed the relationship between securitarian and humanitarian discourse, that I will be looking into in this section, in my diploma thesis entitled *Integracija migranata u prostor grada: studija slučaja kulinarsko jezičnog kolektiva Okus doma (Integration of Migrants in the City: A Case Study on Culinary-cultural Collective Taste of Home)* (2016: 8–11).

<sup>17</sup> Emina Bužinkić, “Critique of media, political and other representations of refugees”, 30 September 2015, <https://vimeo.com/145841213>.

<sup>18</sup> “The President attacks Government refugee politics. We fall at the test of the border surveillance”, 9 October 2015, <http://www.vijesti.rtl.hr/novosti/hrvatska/1786686/predsjednica-ostro-kritizirala-vladinu-politiku-o-izbjeglicama-pali-smo-na-ispitu-cuvanjan-granice/>.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Ranko Ostojić, HRT1, *Otvoreno*, 15 September 2015, <http://vijesti.hrt.hr/298887/otvoreno-hoce-li-rijeka-izbjeglica-skrenuti-prema-hrvatskoj>.



“national security”, “safeguarding borders” or “threat”, the idea of refugees as a menace from which one should protect oneself was implicitly formed in the public.

Securitarian discourse, thus, was in the forefront. Refugees (and migrants in general) were and still are primarily an issue of national, international and global security. Distrust towards the refugees, both by the local population whose villages they passed through or where they settled down and by the European Union in general, is becoming more intense. Refugees are increasingly perceived as a security threat, and are seen as “false [asylum] seekers and hidden economic (illegal) immigrants” (Petrović 2013: 130). The issues of protecting national borders, particularly protecting the outer borders of the European Union, including questions of keeping territorial sovereignty and protecting from terrorism, are only some of the central points in international political discussions about the “refugee question”. Intensification of the securitarian discourse was reflected in media representations of these issues, and particularly deepened after the terrorist attacks in Paris on 13 November 2015, when, frequently, the growing number of refugees into the European Union was connected with or even claimed to be causally linked with the attacks.<sup>20</sup>

Securitarian-discourse-infused media representations of the refugee crisis suggest that the refugees are radically different than Us – the citizens of the European Union; that they are those from whom we must protect ourselves by putting up wires and building fences defending the so-called Fortress Europe. In this dichotomy, We as the citizens of the European Union, represent the “developed” part of the world, the powerful West and “civilization values”, whereas, on the scale of “development”, we have placed refugees and migrants, the “Others”, somewhere far below. In this regard, They are presented as “primitive” people from an “undeveloped” part of the world, people who have “strange” and “different” values and customs, and are thus a “threat” to the presumed “European”

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Goran Latković, “Many are connecting Paris terrorist attacks with refugees. We have asked refugees in Slavonski Brod about their opinion”, 14 November 2015, <http://www.vijesti.rtl.hr/novosti/hrvatska/1828405/mnogi-terorizam-u-parizu-povezali-s-izbjeglicama-sto-izbjeglice-u-kampu-u-slavonskom-brodu-kazu-na-to/>; “Ostojić: Terrorism is a threat for everyone”, 15 November 2015, <http://www.hrt.hr/308681/vijesti/ostojic-terorizam-prijeti-svima>; Ivana Domitrović, “Refugees are crossing through Croatia: How to recognise who is suspicious?”, 15 November 2015, <http://dnevnik.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/izbjeHlice-prolaze-kroz-hrvatsku-kako-ustvrditi-je-li-osoba-sumnjiva---416337.html>.

culture and way of life.<sup>21</sup> There was almost no time in the reception centers or at the border crossings that this dichotomy was not obvious. The symbolic demarcation into *Us*, as an imagined union of an allegedly homogenous Europe and its full-fledged citizens, and *Them* as a threat to this presumed European cultural, religious and political community, was embodied in specific practices and situations in the field. For instance, the volunteers wore fluorescent vests to be as visible and recognizable as possible, and to stand out from the otherwise *chaotic mass of bodies* (cf. Malkki 1996: 386–387), which is how the refugees are frequently presented in the public. Face masks worn by the majority of police officers and some of the volunteers were an even more striking illustration of the embodied practice of symbolic separation. The masks, according to the protocol, are meant to ensure hygiene requirements (for instance when giving medical assistance or when handling food), but were mostly worn in situations when ensuring hygiene standards and regulations were not an issue. A police officer standing erect wearing a uniform, armed with a standard issue pistol and police baton, and wearing a mask covering most of his/her face, is not only a presentation of the careful concern for the highest hygienic standards in the area where refugees pass and are temporarily detained. On the contrary, this was frequently no representation of hygienic standards, but a technique of delimiting between those maintaining order and security (but, let us leave aside the issue of whose security for now) and those who are helping distribute humanitarian aid, as well as those, on the other hand, who are getting this aid, but from whom one should be protected, as from a “virus”. For instance, at the beginning of one night shift at the Opatovac reception center, a volunteer approached me holding a box of face masks and a box of plastic gloves. She had been working there for a few days as well, but since we had not met before, she assumed that it was my first shift, and gave me several pieces of advice. She recommended that the mask would help, because there were places that *stank*, and advised me that, in the case of a riot breaking out at the Center, I should go outside as soon as possible until the police reestablished order, explaining that the Opatovac center was not safe, i.e. that the people in it were *dangerous*. A similar attitude was evident in a comment given by a police officer that I witnessed. On one occasion in the Opatovac center,

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. B. V., “Because of the migrants EU could fall as Roman Empire”, 27 November 2015, <http://dnevnik.hr/vijesti/svijet/eu-zbog-migranata-prijeti-propast-poput-rimskog-carstva---417875.html>.

as I, along with other volunteers, was distributing blankets to the people who would spend the night in the camp before continuing their journey, one of the police officers commented with several volunteers who worked for a large international organization that he wondered whether, several years from then, when *They* “would be throwing bombs on us”, they would remember the “generous aid” that they had received. I have no intention of generalizing on the basis of the mentioned individual examples. I am sure that there were many other similar examples, as well as others that stood in opposition to them. However, I do not consider the presented examples irrelevant, but on the contrary, I believe they should be taken into consideration when we think about the ways in which we approach the *refugee Other*. However, before I move on, I would like to turn to the other side of the problem, seemingly directly opposed to securitarian discourse – the issue of humanitarianization. Given that, especially at the beginning of the “refugee crisis” in Croatia, narratives that were usually imposed through media representations were those of particular humanity, hospitality, compassion and empathy of the local people through whose villages the refugees passed, which were often connected with their recent war and exile experience of the 1990s (cf. Čapo 2015), humanitarian discourse also turns out to be an important part of this analysis.

Although the refugees are usually perceived within the framework of threat and danger, they are also globally presented as desperate and helpless victims. The refugees, thus, become “‘problematic’ social category in the national order of things, an exception made familiar through the media and through humanitarian appeals on behalf of their ‘bare humanity’” (Malkki 2002: 356). These people stop being individuals and become symbols of a universal victim “whose judgment and reason had been compromised by his or her experiences” (Malkki 1996: 384), whilst the idea of helplessness, dependence on international humanitarian organizations and absolute despair (cf. Haddad 2004) become globally recognizable images of the refugee experience. Humanitarianization, then, “implies a depoliticization of the refugee and asylum regime” (Petrović 2013: 130), and constructs the refugee as an ahistorical, universal humanitarian subject, or a speechless and passive victim (cf. Malkki 1996). But, it is precisely the very image of the victim, according to Haddad, that will provide funds, and thus enable the work of international humanitarian organizations which will, furthermore, continue to work on the protection of a victim perceived in this way. The globally known photograph of a boy who drowned, Alyan

Kurdi, is a prime example of the way in which the idea of the victim can be used for such purposes. Thus, including the concept of a victim in the definition of refugeeness is “necessary for the survival of the concept in theory and the survival of the individual in practice. The definition of the refugee, therefore, frequently becomes merely ‘an abstraction, a category which qualifies a person [...] to become eligible for UNHCR aid’” (Haddad 2004: 16).

Let me reflect a little longer on the process of humanitarization of the “refugee crisis”. As part of the ahistorical depoliticized and speechless *mass of otherness*, the refugee and/or the migrant is usually not offered a possibility for auto-representation in the public. This role is played by the media on their behalf. But how do they do it? Let us remember Alyan Kurdi, a boy who drowned; more specifically, let us remember the photograph of a deceased Alyan Kurdi. In his text “Što sa fotografijom mrtvog djeteta?” (“What to do with a photograph of a dead child?”), Davor Konjikušić criticizes how the morbid stage was set in an acontextual and sensationalist manner, by putting on stage those who not only cannot resist this type of representation, but, faced with their life circumstances, consent to, and sometimes even condone recording, photographing and reproducing their most intimate suffering, which at least allows their voice to be heard, thus, unfortunately, becoming part of the media spectacle. Konjikušić (2015) says:

As opposed to the Western countries, where it would be nearly impossible to release a photograph of a killed child without protecting his/her identity, unless it was a case of the yellow press of the worst kind, migrants, the “others”, are filmed with no permission on all sorts of occasions, and their photographs are released and distributed without obstacles. We do not have to take into account their privacy or pain, or their dignity [...], the father of the drowned boy said, go ahead, record, let the world see what is happening to us.

Similarly, the documentary *Balkanska ruta* (*The Balkan Route*, 2015) directed by Saša Kosanović,<sup>22</sup> although it offers a chronological review of events from mid-August 2015, and gives a translocal view, encompassing Macedonia, Serbia, Hungary, Croatia, and Slovenia, also succumbs to sensationalism. For instance, there are at least two ethically problematic

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<sup>22</sup> Available on: <https://vimeo.com/181317798>.

scenes, as seen from the cultural-anthropological perspective on the representation of others. However, they are not problematized as such in the film, but are instead presented as scenes which, accompanied by dramatic music in the background, make the film suspenseful, and keep the viewer riveted to the screen. For instance, there is a close-up scene of a man being resuscitated when he collapsed in Tovarnik – his face, naked upper body, a woman sitting next to him and crying in fear were all filmed. Similarly, there is footage of a young man who, grasping for air, collapsed in Preševo – his face was zoomed in on when he was unconscious, his body twitching captured on film, as well as the moment when the young man, having regained consciousness, but still visibly scared, kissed the hands of the soldier who helped him. Did they know that they were being filmed at the time? No. Were they later asked for permission to release the footage? Most probably not. Were they given a chance to say something? No. Their bodies on the screen said everything. There are very few occasions when refugees are approached as active individuals, as people *doing something*, and even more infrequently as people *saying something*, as Marko Valenta, Drago Župarić-Iljić and Tea Vidović (2015) caution in their paper on asylum seekers in Croatia, their experiences, wishes and plans for the future. On the contrary, moments when they are being represented as people *to whom something is happening* come in abundance. Moreover, they are “hardly ever figured as a person but [were] part of an amorphous mass, faceless and speechless (Soguk 1999 as cited in Haddad 2006: 16). If, however, they are granted voice, these are mostly selected distressing stories that fit in the predetermined media picture of the “refugee chaos” or the image of refugees as universal victims.

If we consider “our refugee crisis” as a humanitarian crisis, the crux of the problem shifts to intervention, collection, and distribution of humanitarian aid. My experience from the field showed that the very way in which humanitarian support was provided sometimes served to reproduce the mentioned gap between *Us* and *Them*. Humanitarization is also visible in great passivization and depoliticization of the refugees as individuals as well as the refugee phenomenon in general. The volunteers in the field would frequently approach the people going through the refugee experience with pity, directed particularly at the women and children, who “fit” the described concept of a helpless victim, thus contributing to, consciously or not, the further perpetuation of the delimitation between “*Us* who are helping” and “*Them* who need the help” in order to survive.

Furthermore, the trap of the humanitarian approach is also discussed by Emina Bužinkić, who claims that the humanitarian action in its core epitomizes the unequal relationships of power between *those who are helping* and *those who are being helped*.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, some scientists have already shown that “the ethos of humanitarian work [is] one in which the victims are too often treated as villains, with the helpers assuming the role of figures of authority” (Harrell-Bond and Voutira 1992: 8), drawing ever closer to the securitization perspective.

There are many individual examples from the field exemplifying the features of the interaction between the refugees on the one hand and the police and/or volunteers on the other. They are, of course, varied, and depend on the individuals who participate in the interaction, but can be positioned between two poles. On one end of the continuum are individuals (police officers, volunteers, representatives of institutions, etc.) who take a particularly humanitarian approach, where the figure of the refugee as a speechless and passive victim, primarily needing humanitarian aid, is at the forefront. On the other end of the continuum we can place those individuals who take a particularly negative attitude towards the refugees and migrants, mostly being led by the already mentioned idea that these are drastically different people, leading to the conclusion that they are “strange” and “dangerous”. In this case, the figure of the refugee is interpreted as a threat – the refugee takes on the role of a potential terrorist. At first sight, the humanitarian and the securitarian discourse are two opposed models of approaching refugees, with no common ground. However, if we focus on the question how we approach refugees, these discourses take on an important common feature.

What is common to both the pole that strongly emphasizes the humanitarian approach, and the pole with a heavy emphasis on the securitarian discourse, is approaching refugees as *radical Others*. In the former case, the image of the refugee is completely victimized, so we do not see a refugee as an individual with a name, history, reason, experience, knowledge and voice (cf. Malkki 1996: 387), but rather as part of a depoliticized mass, without agency, a desperate and helpless Other who is in need of our help. In the latter case too, the refugees are deprived of their specific personal identity, but rather than being victims, they become part

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<sup>23</sup> Emina Bužinkić, “The responsibility of the European union, exit strategies and messages”. 30 September 2015, <https://vimeo.com/145842782>.

of a hyper-politicized mass realized as a terrorist security threat. Both the humanitarian and the securitarian discourse originate from the same common initial idea – the refugee as a *radical Other*. In this sense, it is less important whether one feels pity for refugees and talks to them as if they were children, consciously or unconsciously taking away their ability of self-articulation, or constructs such a negative approach towards refugees so as to be afraid of the “bombs that they would drop on us in a few years”, because both of these poles see in a refugee someone completely different than oneself. If we consider “the crisis” from a strictly humanitarian or securitarian perspective, sooner or later we will have to face the described poles that necessarily imply the idea of refugees as *radical Others*.

However, if we focus our attention on the concept of solidarity, i.e. on giving support to the refugees, solidarizing with their experiences and showing respect but not pity, new possibilities for volunteer engagement in the field open up, as well as for alternative research approaches. In revitalizing the idea of solidarity, Bužinkić sees the potential for gradual but long-term social changes, as well as the opportunity for high quality integration of those people who will not only pass through Croatia on their journey towards the EU, but will stay here as well.<sup>24</sup> A more detailed questioning of the concept of solidarity and the connection between the cultural-anthropological and activist practice is beyond the scope of this work, which is why I leave a critical rethinking of the possible advantages and the potential traps of such a perspective for another occasion.

### Power, space and refugees

Admittedly, it is questionable whether solidarization with refugees is even possible in its totality, especially in refugee camps and centers which are, as it is often visible even from their spatial organization, based upon the assumed difference between *Us* and *Them*.

Initially, when the “crisis” had just entered Croatia, people were transported to the reception centers in Ježevo, Sisak, Kutina, Beli Manastir and Zagreb, from where they were taken to the border crossings with Slovenia within a period of several days. Soon, however, on 21 September, a tem-

<sup>24</sup> Emina Bužinkić, “Critique of media, political and other representations of refugees”, 30 September 2015, <https://vimeo.com/145841213>.

porary reception center was opened in Opatovac, Slavonia, situated some twenty kilometers from the Bapska and Tovarnik border crossings, which refugees used to enter Croatia. The relocation of the reception centers from the capital to isolated border areas of the national territory, although a practical solution, was no symbolic coincidence – this was a way to move the camp out of the reach of the public, and leave the marginalized people on the edges of the society, thus preventing, or at least hindering, unhampered contact between the local community and the people in transit. This is also evident from numerous media stories, where the journalists themselves or the interviewed representatives of the institutions, pointed out that the local population have no reason for fear or concern, because the police was present wherever refugees were passing or temporarily stopping, to make sure that there was no direct, and obviously undesirable, contact.<sup>25</sup> Once again, securitarian discourse comes into the forefront. Refugee camps, both for international humanitarian organizations and for security institutions, were a practical solution to establish control where otherwise, judging by the public political discourse, chaos would ensue (cf. Schechter 2000: 160). The refugee camp, as claimed by Malkki, has become a vital instrument of power: “the spatial concentration and ordering of people that it enabled, as well as the administrative and bureaucratic processes it facilitated within its boundaries, had far-reaching consequences” (Malkki 1995: 498), which is particularly true in establishing control over peoples’ movements.

The spatial organization of the Opatovac and Slavonski Brod reception centers was also no coincidence; it was designed so as to make the relations of power between those monitoring and managing the centers and those who temporarily stayed in them clear at every point in time. For instance, the Opatovac temporary reception center was organized in several sectors. Each sector contained tents for temporary accommodation, and points for the distribution of food and clothing. The sectors were separated by earthen embankments, approximately two meters tall; tall enough to prevent seeing outside a sector and beyond the embankment when standing inside the sector, as well as tall enough to allow seeing

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Zoran Šprajc, “Minister Ostojić in RTL direct”, 28 October 2015, <http://www.vijesti.rtl.hr/novosti/hrvatska/1808396/kada-hrvatska-nije-imala-ni-postene-puske-uspjela-se-obraniti-obranit-cemo-se-i-ubuduće-nitko-se-ne-treba-plasiti-napada/> and Hina, “Milanović tries to calm down the situation”, 19 October 2015, <http://www.vijesti.rtl.hr/novosti/hrvatska/1797135/vlada-drzi-pod-kontrolom-izbjeglicku-krizu-ucinit-cemo-sve-da-nasi-ljudi-budu-mirni/>.



most of the sector or most of the whole center, when standing on top of the embankment. Police officers standing guard were posted at several locations on each of the embankments, working in several shifts, surveilling the people in the sectors. On the other hand, the people temporarily staying in the camp were not permitted to climb onto the embankment and look at the center from the same vantage point as the members of national security institutions. As a volunteer, I was allowed to cross the embankments in designated areas to go from one sector into the next, but neither were we permitted to spend time on the embankments which, for instance, police officers could do. In addition to pointing to a strict hierarchy in managing the “refugee crisis”, where the representatives of security and the state apparatus are at the top, and the individuals temporarily staying in the center at the bottom, such management of movement frequently made it difficult to coordinate volunteers in different sectors in the center, who sometimes did not know what was happening in the other parts of the reception center, limiting volunteers’ ability to react to the situation in the field in a timely manner.

While volunteering in the area of the reception centers, my movements were also monitored and strictly controlled. For instance, after I first came to the “Opatovac camp”, which had been in operation for only a few days at that time, no volunteer permits were necessary to enter the center,<sup>26</sup> however during one night shift, a new Decision of the Ministry of the Interior came into force: *starting the next morning at 8 am, in order to enter the center, one had to have an appropriate permit issued by the Ministry of the Interior.* At the time when the decision came into force, several minutes before 8 am, I was at one of the center exits, watching people entering buses that would take them to the border. I was standing a few meters away from several police officers, whom I had talked to a moment ago, but as I turned to return to the center, given that the clock had just struck 8, I was no longer allowed to enter. Despite the fact that they had just talked to me, and that they knew “whose” volunteer I was, and the fact that I had spent the entire night volunteering in the center and had no opportunity to obtain my accreditation until then, I had to wait for my volunteer colleagues in front of the center.

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<sup>26</sup> This in no way means that the access to the center was free and uncontrolled. All organizations operating within the center were required to present a list of volunteers to the Ministry of the Interior, and obtain permission to carry out their activities in the center.

The logic of spatial organization of The Winter Reception and Transit Center in Slavonski Brod mirrored the one in Opatovac. Surveillance over movement (cf. Foucault 1978) was additionally visible here, because people were brought directly into the reception center by bus or train,<sup>27</sup> where they would be allocated into sectors awaiting further transit, or would be directed back to the buses immediately upon registration, which would take them on to the border crossings. In any case, their movement through and stay at the center were under constant control, with strict, although frequently inconsistent rules about what is (not) permitted and where. Moreover, surveillance over volunteer movements was also implemented. For instance, most organizations were not allowed to have volunteers in or in front of the tent where the people who had just arrived were being registered.

The organization and functioning of the reception centers include elements characteristic of prisons and similar spaces of the repressive apparatus (cf. Foucault 1978). For instance, in Opatovac, in addition to being monitored from earthen embankments, the entire space of the center was under constant video surveillance, giving security services constant and complete control. In Slavonski Brod people exited the train or the bus in front of the space designated for registration, and were then either directed towards the sectors where they would be temporarily accommodated, or back to the buses and trains headed for border crossings directly after registration, passing through, on their way, the tent for the distribution of humanitarian aid. Such organization of space and transit left very little time and opportunity to use the space other than the intended and strictly monitored route. Moreover, the fact that people who were temporarily accommodated in the centers could not move about freely within them, could not leave them if they wanted to, could not go around them or even not pass through them at all, ties these centers with jails and other similar spaces. Finally, just like jails are frequently situated outside or on the very edges of towns and settlements, both reception centers were also situated

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<sup>27</sup> Arrival to Opatovac was also organized, but people crossed the border with the Republic of Serbia on foot (mostly in the Berkasovo – Bapska and Šid – Tovarnik border areas), and upon entering Croatia they would be taken to the entrance of the Opatovac center by buses. On the other hand, the arrival in the Slavonski Brod center was jointly coordinated by the Republic of Serbia and the Republic of Croatia, and people were taken by train (sometimes, because of works on certain parts of the railway, they were taken by bus one part of the way) from Serbia directly to The Winter Reception and Transit Center in Slavonski Brod.

in isolated locations (at the exit from Opatovac, on the edge of Slavonski Brod) to systematically make it impossible, or at least significantly limit, the possibility of interaction between local population and the people who passed through the centers or were temporarily situated there.

Moreover, along the entire route through Croatia, people were under strict surveillance of the police, without whose orders and rules they were not allowed to move freely nor at border areas nor in the reception centers. For example, upon arrival at the Bapska border crossing, the police organized people into groups of 50 to 60 individuals, roughly as many as can fit in a single bus, and they would then be taken to the temporary reception center in Opatovac, sometimes without knowing where they were being taken and why. Upon exiting the bus, and on entrance to the center, the police formed queues of two people in a line waiting for registration, and then again formed a line of two people following registration. People were not allowed to break out of the line, while there was at least one police officer per queue, most frequently there being two – one at the beginning of the line, and one at its end, who controlled that no one broke the line during the wait, the walk to the sectors or boarding into the bus. The formation of lines was accompanied by a simple imperative sentence: *two in line!* or *two lines!* that had been said to them so many times, it seems, even before they entered Croatia, that people knew the *procedure* and would fall in lines themselves. Boarding the trains or buses functioned very similarly in Slavonski Brod as well.

Strictly controlled walking of two people in line, accompanied by police instructions and rules that put the refugees' bodies under control, complete surveillance over movement in the camps and their surroundings as well as at border crossings, many police officers patrolling wherever refugees went, erasure of personality and the individual's agency, are only some of the common practices used in the centers and border crossings, legitimated by the perspective that this was a way to preserve order and security. Still, the question remains: whose security are we concerned about?

### Concluding remarks

In this paper I dealt with the issue of constructing refugees as *radical Others*, the problem of the representation of refugees in the media, and the issue of power relations, particularly the power inscribed into the spaces

of reception centers, border areas, and the ways of managing movement and temporary accommodation of the refugees.

At this juncture, I would like to underscore the problems with two of the most common discourses of representing and approaching refugees: the humanitarian and the securitarian discourse. If we observe refugees only as a humanitarian subject, they become universal and passive victims. In this case, their experiences and personal histories are neglected, and no importance is given to rethinking their agency. A refugee, seen exclusively as a humanitarian subject, does not exist as an individual, but only as part of a depoliticized mass. On the other hand, the securitarian discourse emphasizes the threat that the refugees supposedly pose – in this case, these people are perceived as potential extremists and terrorists, violators of presupposed European culture and security, those who one should be protected and defended from. Both of these discourses, although they originate from opposed starting points – the universal victim on the one hand, and the universal threat on the other, meet at the point of establishing relationships between *Us* and *Them* – in both approaches *They* are perceived as radically different than *Us*. In that sense, both humanitarian and securitarian discourse arise from the common initial idea of refugee as the *radical Other* which reflects both on micro levels of situations in the field and on the macro levels of the mass media and political actions. Lastly, I believe that if we move from this approach to the “refugee crisis” and towards the idea of solidarity with the refugees, new perspectives and possibilities arise, both for direct work with the refugees, and for cultural-anthropological rethinking of these topics, which is yet to follow.

Translated by Mateusz-Milan Stanojević

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Tea Škokić and Renata Jambrešić Kirin

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## The Shopping Center of Abnormal Normality: Ethnography of the Distribution Tent in the Refugee Camp in Slavonski Brod

Camp: general and specific, global and local

The aim of this paper is to analyze the dual experience of volunteering and ethnographic observation in the Winter Reception and Transit Center in Slavonski Brod in January and February 2016, and transform it into anthropological categories at the meeting point of refugee studies, autoethnography, anthropology of place and space and commodity.<sup>1</sup> Although it may seem that autoethnographic reflection on multiplying positions of volunteers and their participatory and observatory perspectives would be most productive in this research situation (which is new to us, although not completely),<sup>2</sup> autoethnography will only be part of our scholarly interest. The paper focuses on several premises about the general and specific characteristics of the Slavonski Brod transit camp, more specifically its

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<sup>1</sup> A slightly different English language variant of this article was published in 2017 in a special issue of *Narodna umjetnost: Croatian Journal of Ethnology and Folklore Research* (54/1), announcing the publication of the collection *Kamp, koridor, granica: studije izbjeglištva u suvremenom hrvatskom kontekstu*, i.e. the Croatian edition of this book.

<sup>2</sup> Both co-authors worked as researchers during the war in Croatia 1991–1995. Within the scope of war ethnography at the Institute of Ethnography and Folklore Research, both authors visited temporary places to talk to refugees and collect open-structured interviews about the war and their refugee experience, and in the period after the war both were involved in women's nongovernmental organizations and in feminist activities aiming at (intercultural and inter-ethnic) understanding, acceptance, empowerment and integration of women victims of war (and domestic) violence. The result of this ethnography of the war and refugees were the following articles and publications: Škrabalo and Trkulja (1992), Škokić (2000), Jambrešić (1995), Jambrešić Kirin and Povržanović (1996), Jambrešić Kirin (1999).

distribution tent, which we will try to illustrate and explain. Following in the footsteps of authors offering a critical anthropological reflection of the role of refugee camps in the political order, and of types of social, cultural and political life in them – such as Elizabeth Colson (2003), Michel Agier (2011), Adam Ramadan (2012), Simon Turner (2015) and others – we too will attempt to point at the specific characteristics of the Slavonski Brod camp, keeping in mind three regimes – the spatial, the temporal and the political.

The Slavonski Brod transit camp,<sup>3</sup> like many other refugee camps, functioned as a distinct space of “humanitarian government” (Agier 2011), with main activities being carried out cooperatively between international and local humanitarian organizations, social services and the police, with logistical support of the army; whereas the refugees represented a “disquieting element” (Agamben 1998: 77), human beings whose free will, freedom of movement and speech and expression of their personality was reduced to a minimum. The particularity of this camp was the result of its function of “channeling”, “profiling”, transferring and “servicing” people on their way to their final destination, rather than caring for or housing them.<sup>4</sup> That is why the constant shifts from an empty to a full camp, anticipation of trains’ arrival and seeing them leave, and the uncertain fate of those who were not allowed to continue their journey, created an experience of a fluctuating *assemblage* of space, time, relations and practices of diverse actors and institutions in the camp (cf. Ramadan 2012: 70–72).

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<sup>3</sup> In text we will use the term the Slavonski Brod camp, the transit camp etc. The camp was open on 3 November 2015, and was officially closed on 15 April 2016, several days after the last refugees were moved from it. As volunteers of the Centar za mirovne studije Center for Peace Studies / the Welcome! Initiative / Inicijativa Dobrodošli!, we stayed in the camp on three occasions: from 18 to 22 January, from 5 to 7 February and from 11 to 14 February 2016. Most of our volunteer work took place in the distribution tent and around it. Even when we were given police passes to do research in the camp, we decided to keep our volunteer passes and continue taking part in the distribution of clothing and footwear, because we considered a “purely” observation-research position among the people who needed our help then and there unethical. Organizations that we volunteered for considered volunteering to exclude independent, public, journalistic, research or similar activity, but they were acquainted with our dual volunteer and research position.

<sup>4</sup> However, the volunteers of the Croatian Red Cross (CRC) and some twenty other humanitarian organizations, as well as the doctors in the camp, stressed their endeavors to make the camp a “warm place” of refugee reception, where they would be able to satisfy their own basic existential needs, but also feel the empathy and caring of those helping them. Some volunteers were able to achieve high-quality human contact, as seen from the fact that they kept in touch with the refugees over social networks as long as a year after giving them aid (as seen in the testimony of CRC volunteers in Olja Terzić’s documentary *Strah od nepoznatog, Fear of the Unknown*, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lG9DmYG0d5E>).



Paradoxically, in the camp, it was the refugees who had a defined (although uncertain) goal of their journey and life plans, whereas the local workers in the camp were anxious about the precariousness of their job, and about the camp being moved or closed down. As we were told during a cigarette break by one of the women employed in public works, when “surplus workers” from the camp were made redundant, the management did not do it humanely or transparently, but would “dismiss people at random, according to their eye color”.<sup>5</sup>

The distribution tent was, from our perspective, the central place of humanitarian distribution of clothes and footwear to refugees in the camp, where the impression of a *bazaar* creates an illusion of “abnormal normality” of the refugee everyday life. It has been selected for analysis because, during the period we were present in the camp, people in it would linger for longer periods of time and communicate more frequently, since they managed their time and space more freely, and because the humanitarian principle of satisfying one’s most basic needs and the principle of distributive justice (the *per capita* criterion)<sup>6</sup> was replaced here with a practice of (limited) free choice.

Our interpretation is largely a consequence of a “thick description” of the experience of volunteering in the distribution tent and our mixed feelings about the speed of supplying people with what they need in between two trains, as well as the conflicting requirements of volunteering and critically reflecting on the practice in a wider sociopolitical context. This paper is based on an anthropological reading of the camp reality, which

<sup>5</sup> A newspaper article about the closure of the camp author stresses that the camp brought about the internationalization of the town and an improvement in its economic situation: “Companies and people from the Slavonski Brod area also worked in the construction of the Slavonski Brod transit center. The refugee crisis, as it seems now, was also an indirect way to help the stumbling economy of Slavonski Brod, because, given the overnight stays of numerous journal crews, restaurants had a higher turnover, and the shops sold more” (Marija Radošević, “Last refugee leaves the transit center in Slavonski Brod...”, 13 April 2016, <http://www.glas-slavonije.hr/298827/1/lz-tranzitnog-centra-u-Slavonskom-Brodu-otisla-i-zadnja-izbjeglica>).

<sup>6</sup> The idea of fair distribution, theoretically giving everyone equal opportunities of survival, regardless of the health status, age, gender and education of the refugees, is based on the *per capita* criterion of distribution of humanitarian aid. However, anthropologists caution that fairness is a subjective category, dependent on personal moral concepts and the power asymmetry between recipients and givers. As humanitarian aid is, in the long-term, always insufficient to satisfy the needs of the people who are not self-sufficient, the person deciding who deserves a meal, a medicine or shoes has great power of decision which is “highly seductive and brings out the best or the worst in us” (Harrell-Bond as cited in Bonis 2016).

encompasses at least two registers (Ramadan 2012) – the external, macro-structural one, which is political and juridical, mediated by the media and social networks, and the internal, microstructural one where we, alongside other actors, facilitated the efficiency of the camp, measured by the number of trains which came and left, i.e. the number of men, women and children who passed through this transit station in the shortest time possible.<sup>7</sup> As the scope of information and insights about the external register increases and becomes more complex, and as our own experience becomes more porous, partially recorded in our memory, and in part in our fieldnotes, photographs, mailboxes and other collected materials, the need for their anthropological examination grows. An analysis of surveillance and control, as well as of distancing from and labeling the other, which appears in both registers (Colson 2003: 1), is less challenging than a description of practices that, based on the need for mutual relationships and understanding, developed in direct contact with the other. We can only roughly describe these practices as processes of intercultural negotiation of needs, fears and expectations. This is because our work has been inspired by the ethical and scholarly imperative to describe and explain our participation in a “humanitarian bazaar” which aspires to make the distribution tent into a place of supply, refreshment and meeting of those who, maybe more than food or clothes, need acceptance, human contact and recognition of the interdependence between the first and third world marked by the “dispensable and bare life” (Mignolo 2009) i.e. the production of “redundant people” (Bauman 2015).<sup>8</sup> We did not collect or interpret personal and collective experience narratives, not only because of the language barrier and working in shifts in the distribution tent, but because we realized that opening of numerous testimonies of recent trauma would jeopardize the humanitarian action and destroy the spatio-temporal framework in which it took place.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The data concerning the number of refugees and their characteristics vary, depending on the source. According to the data presented in already mentioned Olja Terzić’s documentary *Strah od nepoznatog* (*Fear of the Unknown*), there were 175,008 men, 75,669 women and 96,475 children, out of which six children were born in the Slavonski Brod hospital.

<sup>8</sup> “Massive migration is by no means a novel phenomenon [...] – as our ‘modern way of life’ it includes the production of ‘redundant people’ (locally ‘inutile’ – excessive and unemployable – owing to economic progress, or locally intolerable – rejected in the effect of unrest, conflicts and strife caused by social/political transformations and subsequent power struggles)” (Bauman 2015).

<sup>9</sup> We can say that our volunteering relied on, on the one hand, the experiences of war ethnography from the 1990s, and on the other, on the counter-discourses which do not recognize the distinction between “legal” and “illegal migrants”, and their militarized and

In contrast to most refugee camps, some of which we are familiar with from the period of the 1990s war in Croatia, the adapted industrial railway in Slavonski Brod, which resembles a classification yard,<sup>10</sup> was a well-organized transit station for triage of the refugee “human contingent”; also signifying the last point of the transition of Slavonski Brod from an industrial into a post-industrial urban center. From a socialist industrial center with full employment, through the ravages of war and the (post) war base of KBR (Kellogg Brown & Root), an American outsourcing company for logistical support of NATO operations, Slavonski Brod has come to realize that someone else’s misfortune is a (business) opportunity for foreign corporations and humanitarian agencies. In addition to Ireland as the “promised land” for new Slavonian migrants of both sexes, in their comments on social networks, unemployed young men on both sides of the Sava River recommend risky jobs (drivers, technicians, and the like) in war zones and NATO bases, as the quickest way to make money and economic empowerment. In our informal conversations with Slavonski Brod inhabitants, we could gather that some individuals feel particular empathy for war victims from the Middle East, recognizing their own war scars in them, as well as that many people consider the camp in their hometown a proof of passivity, hopelessness and lack of concern for the local population, forced to emigrate for economic reasons. This example is yet another proof that the process of humanitarian “exceptional inclusion” of refugees and migrants into the European social and economic system is achieved by temporarily including the “socially excluded”, long-term unemployed people in public works and humanitarian projects that can be considered a part of the “humanitarian business” (cf. Weiss 2013).<sup>11</sup> In this

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bureaucratized reception with controlled policies of “integration”, but promote a concept of *autonomy of migration*: “‘Autonomy of migration’ focuses on the migrating subjects and the projects in their life, constituted and articulated in their trans-border mobility and in the social fights during this mobility” (Marvakis 2012: 70).

<sup>10</sup> It is a historical sarcasm that an abandoned industrial railway which resembles a classification yard, *ranžirni kolodvor* in Croatian, (once intended to “make up trains and shunt them”) should in a postindustrial “humanitarian business” turn into a place of “classification” and “triaging” immigrants into those who are not entitled to continue their (train) journey as asylum and work permit seekers. The etymology of the Croatian expression *ranžiranje* ‘switching [in railway operation]’ comes from German and French *rang* (1. rank, class; 2. relative rank in a group; 3. position and status in a society; 4. position in a hierarchy) and from French *triage* (1. screening of piece or grainy goods, 2. classification of patients according to type and emergency of medical assistance required).

<sup>11</sup> Thomas G. Weiss (2013) showed that “humanitarian business” is a constituent part of contemporary neoliberal economy, with around 37,000 international organizations. Contemporary political economy places the agencies and organizations that provide various types of assistance side by side with for-profit industry, including private military and

way, the general precarity and uncertainty of the lives of those who serve the camp and those for whom the camp exists becomes the epitome of the neoliberal condition that some theoreticians consider a “decompression space” for the undesirable members of the society (Mezzadra according to Tsianos et al. 2009: 8), a space of “social dissolution” (Turner 2015: 139) and a place where new forms of “depoliticized life” are created, which, paradoxically, “also produces a hyper-politicized space where nothing is taken for granted and everything is contested” (Turner 2015: 139).

### Distribution of things, words and emotions

Rather than using the toolkit of refugee and security studies that appropriate and build on the Agambenian concept of the “state of exception” – the humanitarian exemption from the legal and political order – it seems to us to be more purposeful to return to Foucault’s dichotomy of normal and abnormal in order to take stock of the microstructure of the Slavonski Brod camp. According to Foucault (1995), abnormal could be interpreted as a “departure” from a behavioral norm, with institutional practices of surveillance and discipline being used to attempt to “restore to the state of order”. In this definition of the dichotomy, the refugees are those who “departed” from the norm and normality. They were “evacuated” from their own sociopolitical and cultural pre-life, and, based on procedures of hierarchized surveillance through camp architecture and police control in conjunction with humanitarian help, they were being “restored” to order, norm and normality. In the case of humanitarian government and monitoring of the Slavonski Brod refugee camp, the hierarchized surveillance was additionally laden with the suspension of international and national law (for instance the right of all refugees to asylum or the rights of unaccompanied minors), changes in administrative norms and *ad hoc* agreements between political subjects of the neighboring countries. The normal and abnormal of the camp everyday life changed under the not always clear and rational dictate of sovereign actors, based on volunteer practices that gradually formalized “informal” procedures or identified the degrading effect of “normalizing” humanitarian procedures, and because of continual

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security companies, as well as illegal arms and opiates market. Moreover, warring parties condition and charge access to victims of war in different way, so it seems that everything has a price – from access to moral authority and human life.

expectation of the unexpected and of incidents.<sup>12</sup> The imagined normative order in the Slavonski Brod transit camp collapsed as soon as people entered it, as soon as it became a living space where existing informal practices would be tried out and new ones created, where new communicative situations would appear, where the knowledge acquired “along the way” would be enriched, and where new interpersonal relations in direct face-to-face contact would be established.<sup>13</sup> People who brought *disorder* into the camp, and especially those who never entered the camp, i.e. who managed to cross Croatia in different way, validated the statement that migration is an autonomous movement “that possesses knowledge, follows its own rules, and collectively organizes its own praxis” (Boutand according to Tsianos et al. 2009: 3); they confirmed how “normal they were in an abnormal situation”, and that abnormality and unexpectedness were becoming permanent characteristics of their refugee experience.

Our ethnographic study starts from debates about normality and abnormality, formal and informal procedures in the camp and develops through the reflection of our work as volunteers. At the time of our research and volunteering in January and February 2016, the refugees did not stay in the transit camp for long, but walked along a circular route, which started with exiting one train and ended in entering another, going through three stations or points along the way: the registration tent, the distribution tent and the limited space where they could take packages of dry food and water without stopping. The average time spent at the camp was four hours. During their unvarying circular route monitored by the police, disturbed only by visits to the doctor or to the nursing tents and family reunion tents, the distribution tent offered a spacious, mostly heated place where the refugees could move about more freely and linger. This was a place with seemingly less control and surveillance in relation to standing in lines enclosed by security fences, and with police interrogations. The main purpose of the distribution tent was to donate used or

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<sup>12</sup> Both the creators of the camp and the volunteers generally stated that it represents a positive exception, a humane and civilizational step forward, the only organized station on the uncertain so-called Balkan route. However, the very moment that stories from Germany and Austria about the borders closing soon came, the Croatian government and its crisis unit changed their rhetoric, and rather than emphasizing humanity, they stressed the temporary nature of the camp: “This is not nor will it become a hotspot, it is just a temporary refuge” (Konjikušić and Dragojević 2015).

<sup>13</sup> According to Lévinas (1991), only this type of direct “proximity of the other” causes an ethical response and invokes the ethical principle of responsibility for the other, which is an attempt to overcome any violence, death and nothingness, and shows the value of the other.

new clothing and footwear, blankets, hygienic packages for women, basic packages for small children and to serve hot tea. One corner of the tent had an enclosed space devoted to family reconnection, with printed photographs of missing or lost family members or friends, as well as a desk where one could seek asylum in Croatia, where we had never seen anyone sitting. Given that the distribution tent was a place that all registered travelers from the train had to pass through, it abounded in examples of direct face to face communication, and was an exceptional micro-location for the analysis of actors, practices and interactions in the camp.

Given de Certeau's (1984) claim that *place* is a current order where rather fixed elements and positions coexist, and *space* is "composed of intersections of mobile elements" where mobile bodies intersect in constantly new relationships, the distribution tent can be theorized as a "space [that] is a practiced place" (1984: 117). Although it was planned as a place where refugees would be given donations through a fence and would go through quickly, it became a place of various multidirectional communications, narratives and emotions, and of serious human drama. Every single day, starting anew during every shift, cooperation between volunteers from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the Croatian Red Cross (CRC) would be established here, including negotiations and consultations as to which clothing items were lacking, who was allowed to visit whose part of the tent and give out whose donation, as to the (lack of) compliance with the rules agreed upon in the morning briefings between the coordinators and leaders of NGOs and the CRC, as to how amicable and helpful one should be towards the refugees. We recorded some of our experiences and reflections in our fieldnotes journals. These Fieldnotes we use in the text as an autoethnographic contribution to the practice of thick description.

The camp is excellently organized, although my first impression is of a concentration camp. The distribution tent, where clothes and other supplies are distributed, is where most of the NGOs are stationed. The tent has a very unpleasant smell of moisture and musty clothing,<sup>14</sup> but you get

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<sup>14</sup> In her study of humanitarian aid as "an aspect of global moral and political order that affected local sociocultural orders", and determined the identity, attitudes and values of the recipients in the long-term, Maja Povrzanović Frykman (2016) cites a statement of a Sarajevo resident about the feeling of nausea caused by the odor of donated clothes from a Red Cross warehouse: "I still have memories of stinking clothes at the Red Cross... Well, that part, of the clothes that were arriving - with the best intention of those people who were giving away second-hand clothes - for me, that smell, I still seem to have it in my nose [she laughs tensely]. The mountains of clothes that I rummaged through in order to

used to it quickly. The space is cold, although it is heated with warm air, but I got warm from working very quickly. Still, I felt that my hands were constantly freezing. [...] The CRC, by arrangement with the other NGOs, has 12 people distributing clothes in a single shift, but there were situations when there were more of us, which unnerved the people from the CRC. They considered the tent to be primarily theirs, and thought that we were “pushing them out”. They were angry that we were giving too much attention to the refugees, satisfying their wishes as to the type, design and number of clothing items. There is considerable tension between the German organization IHA which is running the NGO warehouse, and the CRC. It is odd that no one at the CRC is doing any selection of clothing being shipped to the tent, and we get packed boxes that contain Bermuda shorts, windbreakers and other inappropriate clothing. Over the last two days there have been fewer volunteers handing out clothes, and it is really easier to work like this and pass through the narrow passage, and the volunteers are actually cooperating excellently, and helping each other. NGO volunteers are generally younger, whereas there are people of different ages at the CRC. There is a gender diversity, with only slightly more women. Part of the volunteers visit with the refugees in the tent or in front of it, talk to them, help them, etc. Impressive because of their enthusiasm and communication skills were an Iranian man, Puja, who graduated from college and then worked in a bank in Dubai and is now, after he quit his job, traveling and volunteering, as well as Alice, a Canadian woman following the refugee route and volunteering from camp to camp. Both are independent volunteers, and were registered in Slavonski Brod as HSUST. Other volunteers include UNHCR, Rode, Adventists, Samaritans, IHA, CMS, Care, Caritas, Slavonski Brod Volunteer Center, doctors from Slovakian Magna, Save the Children... (Fieldnotes, 18–22 January 2016, Tea).<sup>15</sup>

The space at the entry and exit from the distribution tent was frequently the only place where communication between volunteers and the police was possible, where volunteers could get various pieces of information about the movement of the refugees, about the time of arrival of the next train, about the number of children who were registered that day, etc.

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find something suitable for my children.... it was very humiliating” (2016: 91). On the other hand, individuals who grew up during the war in the 1990s “tend to talk about the excitement and joy of getting sweets, toys or a pair of secondhand jeans that were ‘just perfect’ and so dear that it was ‘impossible’ to throw them away after the war” (2016: 96).

<sup>15</sup> The abbreviations in the article refer to the non-governmental and other organizations and agencies present in the camp. Sometimes the official acronyms are used (for example IHA for the InterEuropean Humanitarian Aid Association), and sometimes informal contractions (for example, Samaritanci i.e. Samaritarian for Samaritan’s Purse).

These were spontaneous conversations over a cigarette, where episodes from private lives would be exchanged, and where people would make joint assessments as to “how long this will last” and “who these people are”. In our conversations with the other volunteers and the police, we frequently witnessed informal but culturally significant ethnical triage from below, where the refugees were assessed according to the subjectively defined notions of urbanity and civilizedness, knowledge of English, civility, gratitude, etc. These first-hand impressions and judgments would frequently be repeated as stereotypes in conversations with the people of Slavonski Brod, and with many others that we had a chance to talk to. The process of transformation of impressions into stereotypes is particularly interesting in the following statement of a riot policeman who worked as train escort:

For instance, the Syrians, I like them the most. I mean, they have had most problems. Sometimes I talk to them on the train. Someone might tell you, for instance, that he studied at a university, someone might show you a picture of a house at the coast, someone's Mom was left behind, or sister or brother, or loved one. And he shows destroyed streets, his university is destroyed. That's why I like them the most and I like talking to them. But these Afghans, Iranians, they are not much, not much for talking, you cannot communicate with them because they are reserved, they just keep quiet.

Finally, the distribution tent was also a space of communication between volunteers and refugees about where they came from and where they were going, whether they were sick, what clothes and footwear they needed, if they wanted to change their child's diaper. The communication was verbal and non-verbal, more or less focused on a particular problem or request; it depended on how well-equipped people on a certain train were, on the time of day or night, weather conditions, the mood, tiredness and character of those involved in it. The distribution tent also turned out to be the space of our frustration and anger over a lack of clothes of appropriate size, a chronic lack of footwear, unclear criteria as to how many of the needed items would be brought from the warehouse, because of summer clothing in January and February, torn clothes and footwear to be handed out, muddy and mismatched footwear, clothing that was moist and had a musty smell, because of the fact that you did not have the answer to most requests and questions, because of the inability to understand Arabic, Pashtu or Farsi, because police officers sometimes used to enter the tent and shouting *jala, jala* (faster, faster), and the train would still be at the platform for another two good hours:



The clothes that the CRC is bringing is in a bad condition, old shoes are often torn and unusable, and caked with mud. Some clothes are torn and dirty, while others are inadequate because they are summer clothes (Fieldnotes, 18–22 January 2016, Tea).

A man hands me back a synthetic blanket that he got in a previous country, thanks me and says he does not need it; an elderly woman complains about her new German shoes that she got in Macedonia, they are stiff, uncomfortable and cold, she wants to exchange them for used but more comfortable shoes, and we follow the instruction to give shoes away sparingly, and to keep them as a “treasure” to be given only to those who are “most in need” (Fieldnotes, 18–22 January 2016, Renata).

The awareness of cultural conditioning of certain clothing practices and habits was most evident in the choice of – in our opinion – clothes that were too small or inadequate for the winter conditions. We would share our frustration with the other volunteers because the refugees did not want to take warm clothing that we offered them, frequently because of an imperative, which was not understandable to us, to have clothing items *small and tight*, if possible *jeans* and *pyjama* (tracksuit). One attempt to rationalize this frustration was offered by a coordinator of a Croatian NGO, who was employed at the camp from the beginning as part of public works:

The reason why we are missing things is because the crisis is now four and a half or four months long. In my personal opinion over 60 percent of the people are men, and Arabs are in my opinion also smaller than us. So that after four and a half months it is difficult to get donations from other people. [...] Now these larger NGOs, they probably have the funds for this and they can buy them, but you should see that this is now really... very long. So now it is no longer so simple to get so many small or medium trousers or shoes sizes 40 to 44. On the other hand, similarly, this whole thing about the lack of clothes, this is partly a result of the fact that we, as non-governmental organizations which had no experience in working with refugees or distributing humanitarian aid or volunteers in general who came here because of pure enthusiasm, in my opinion and experience come here wearing rose-colored spectacles, as they say. Where it is believed that anyone asking for clothes needs it. So, we were completely uneducated as to the fact that you should check someone what he..., he asks you to give him shoes, and his shoes are completely okay. This is why many things are thrown away, for instance by the refugees. Why they ask for these things, I cannot say. On the other hand, as far as I have heard, but I haven't checked it, there is a cultural difference, where in

their world if something is being given, you are required to accept it. So that people were given things that they do not really need, so that this lack of clothes... is a very complex thing, right.

We felt particular discomfort over the prohibition of distributing clothing and footwear to domicile people employed in public works, who sometimes came to the camp wearing clothing that was completely inadequate for the winter conditions. The absurdity of the “humanitarian regime” where the poor domestic people are not entitled to aid, and not even necessary work clothes, and they simultaneously see pieces of clothing and food being thrown away. Their discomfort could hardly be alleviated by us telling them to talk to the local Red Cross, or by our explanation that by exchanging clothes the refugees are maintaining their hygiene and that they are throwing away shoes because they cannot afford to wear uncomfortable shoes, no matter how new they are. Finding ourselves in a position of “cultural translators” of refugee needs and practices we contributed to yet another absurdity of humanitarization not only of refugees, but also of the socially deprived residents of Slavonski Brod.

However, the distribution tent was also a place of satisfaction, fulfillment and even joy, when we would, after sifting through half-empty shelves, find an appropriate piece of clothing with an exchange of smiles and thumbs up. As noticed by Duško Petrović in his description of the interactions in the distribution tent of the Slavonski Brod camp, we approached the infinite line of anonymous faces and unknown individual destinies “in the same way, and with friendliness”. We were sharing similar “emotion that you feel towards an ‘innocent’ life that is suffering, and the satisfaction at the possible release from suffering after providing aid. This fact shows that compassion can be generated from a violent reduction of personality” (Petrović 2016: 408-409). On the other hand, we are more inclined to embrace the premise expressed by Lévinas (1991) that the closeness of the face of another human being necessarily puts us in an ethical relationship with the other.<sup>16</sup> This ethical relation can have an advantage over knowledge and cultural or ideological judgments, and is manifested through “expression” and “sensible appearance” of the Other’s face, even if this face is “at the limit of holiness and caricature” (1991: 198). One example of the coexistence of these opposites

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<sup>16</sup> “The face resists possession, resists my powers. In its epiphany, in expression, the sensible, still graspable, turns into total resistance to the grasp. [...] The face, still a thing among things, breaks through the form that nevertheless delimits it. This means concretely: the face speaks to me and thereby invites me to a relation incommensurate with a power exercised, be it enjoyment or knowledge” (Lévinas 1991: 197-198).

in non-verbal communication was provided to us by a father of a family who, satisfied with what he was given, as a sign of gratitude, lined up his daughters, and looking us in the eye, gestured with his arm to show what/ who the driving force of his life choices was. Anthropologically speaking, Lévinas (1991) points out that the face of the other, especially in existentially borderline situations, has the power to tear down established and conventional forms of interpersonal relations, and that the infinity contained in the wealth of human phenomena makes the foundation of the search for the transcendental in all human societies.

### Between humanitarian and consumerist dynamic

Surrounded by feelings of uncertainty, tiredness, sorrow and pain at being in exile, at the death of friends or family members, and at the separation of families, the distribution tent would sometimes turn into a refuge and a place of rest, where families would gather on the floor waiting for a family member to choose footwear or clothing. This was a chance to hold their child, happy because of a toy or a sweet that they were given, to take their bag to the train, to bring them an extra backpack, to give them another pair of socks or gloves, to convince them to go to “Roda’s tent”.<sup>17</sup> In the liminal temporariness of the camp, in a dry and heated space of the distribution tent, it was more about “regulation of time” than “regulation of space”, because its visitors could, at least to some extent, decide for themselves how long they would stay, and how they would move about the tent. This was a way to establish provisional normality, and the distribution tent could be imagined and experienced as a rudimentary *bazaar*<sup>18</sup> or a shopping cent-

<sup>17</sup> RODA: Roditelji u akciji (Parents in action) is a non-governmental organization advocating dignified pregnancy, responsible parenting and safe childhood in Croatia (for details see <http://www.roda.hr/>). Breast-feeding councilors and volunteers from RODA were active in the Opatovac camp, where the refugees arrived first, and upon opening the Slavonski Brod camp, in cooperation with UNICEF, they developed a model of 24-hour support for breastfeeding, and provided support for mothers with small children. The tent of the organization was located next to the distribution tent, and there was a separate fence around it. Mothers with small children who needed to be breastfed or whose diapers needed to be changed, who needed clean clothes and medication were “triaged” by the volunteers as soon as they arrived in the distribution tent. Often, women would use their time in the RODA tent as a time to rest, despite the impatient family who had to wait in front, or crowded in the miniature, improvised “waiting room” inside the tent.

<sup>18</sup> It is worth to mention that it was migrants from the former Soviet Union and the Far East (China, Vietnam, Pakistan, India etc.) who were the main creators of popular open

er, where situations from everyday urban life are being repeated, where one talks about trivial things like one's taste in fashion, where people flock to bargain over good shoes or high-quality blankets, where there is lively communication on both sides of the stand, intimate body touch, which is not procedural or related to surveillance. The distribution tent contained elements of the familiar – getting into the familiar characters of buyers and sellers, into the dynamics of a shop where you choose, refuse, and always expect something different. However, the refugees could not move about the boxes and shelves freely, mostly second-hand clothes were on offer, and trying on clothes was reduced to an improvised and rarely used fitting room. This was certainly not a consumerist spectacle typical of shopping centers in the West, but the distribution tent with stalls of several humanitarian organizations, did to some extent follow the rules “of contiguity and association at work to assist you to make a selection” that Meaghan Morris used to describe the movement and activity in a shopping center (1999: 393). Although a comparison of consumption practices with practices of selecting donated clothes in a limited space where the expression of one's personality (both of the refugees and the volunteers) was reduced to a minimum may seem ethically inappropriate, our experience provides us with an interpretative lens for this and further anthropological analyses. We interpret refugees who keep showing us (an imaginary or a real) object of their desire in a pile of donated clothes as those who are not passive recipients/receivers of aid devoid of will, taste or wishes of their own. Many of them were, until not very long ago, inhabitants of cities with a long tradition of trading and cultural negotiation, adopting and combining what is best from the cultures of the East and the West.

During our three successive stays at the camp, the tract where we volunteered kept changing, resembling a shop more and more. Starting with piles of boxes overflowing with clothes, through new shelving to shop-like hangers, the space made us think more and more of a shopping center adapting to the needs of its users and servers, and people's search for a specific article was becoming more profiled.

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markets in Central Europe (the SAPA market in Prague, bazaars in Warsaw, the Dong Xuan market in Berlin), which are well known socioeconomic forms that oppose the new shopping centers and enable “people with fluid social statuses and complicated identities [to] navigate the global challenge of living lives in changing political systems and uncertain economic conditions” (Uherek 2015: 76).



18 - 21 January 2016



5 - 7 February 2016



11 - 14 February 2016  
Photographs by Tea Škokić.

The appearance of our “shopping center” has changed, new shelving and hangers came, the clothes are more neatly arranged, the articles are labeled, and the “menu” of clothing is neatly printed out in the form of a picture dictionary. But the arrangement of things is new and unfamiliar to us, so we can no longer find things as quickly as before. UNHCR has clearly separated its part and forbidden access to the things that they were distributing (the volunteers of the CRC work there). IHA volunteers have become sparse, and most things donated by the IHA (new shoes and jackets) are now “managed” by UNHCR and the Red Cross... Some things such as gloves, socks and blankets are now displayed in front of the fence (but with a clear UNHCR label), and people can take what they need themselves, although this, on the other hand, prevents them from coming closer to the fence with volunteers and asking directly what they need, sometimes openly and “teasingly” (tight jeans), and sometimes shyly and with lot of discomfort – when they ask for underwear (Fieldnotes, 5 February 2016, Renata).

On the whole, the transit camp could hardly become a residence and a place of “preparation for a new life”, a place of imagining a new existence and a place where, through “textile forms” (North 2016: 95), we reshape our personality, where true relationships within the camp community or the camp and the local community are created. However, the distribution tent did enable the recognition of at least fragments of refugees’ projection of their own life, through clothing and the non-verbal language that the actors used to renew and negotiate their identity and symbolically relate their past, present and future. This was “commodity semiosis”, when clothes turned into signs, and signs into clothes (Morris 1999: 406), as “dress communicates identity and dress practices reflect agentic processes that are situated within the flow of time” (Huisman and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2004: 2).<sup>19</sup> The sense of style which is always “a way of being in the present, a way of explaining visually to yourself, via the past (or many pasts) what the present is” (North 2016: 101), was also part of the “fashion taste” of the refugees, that partly conveyed their gender, ethnicity, religion, age or class. Thus, older women mainly refused light colors

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<sup>19</sup> In their research of clothing practices of Bosnian refugees in the American town of Burlington, Vermont, Kimberley Huisman and Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo (2005) concluded that “refugee women oriented toward the present” when using their traditional dress in America “to teach others about their Bosnian identities and origins”, but that they “oriented towards the future” when preparing to return to Bosnia for a visit (cf. Huisman and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2005: 58, 61).

and tight models and asked for comfortable tracksuits, whereas girls and young women, in contrast, looked for tights and tight jeans, sports jackets and sports footwear.

I experienced several cases when young, intelligent and amiable people, who did not know whether to take a comfortable warm jacket or not, and who looked well-dressed and dressed with “style” (the young man had a ponytail and a tubular mini scarf around his neck and a relaxed style of communication, the girl had a black scarf which covered her hair and a small black fur coat) took note of my compliment about their new look, which was what made them decide to take the sports jackets, just like in a real shop. Just like others, I use the argument that the fact that the jacket is of slightly larger in size is only an advantage because they can wear layered clothing underneath, and that the weather in Slovenia and Austria is much colder; usually this type of persuasion does not work, what is more important is the compliment about looking good (“it fits you very well!”). We have a chronic lack of underwear for both sexes, people ask for it slightly reluctantly, men show the edge of their undershirt, women the line of their bra... A cultural puzzle was caused by a reaction of an older man who used a bottle to pour water on his feet wearing socks, and then put on his shoes over his wet socks, this was certainly not washing one’s feet wearing socks, cold weather and lack of comfort is an unsatisfactory explanation, perhaps he had blisters because of his new or uncomfortable shoes; on another occasion Tea was told by a man that he did not want to take off his shoes in front of the ramp and try on new ones because his feet smelled bad, he did not want to “hurt” her (Fieldnotes, 5 February 2016, Renata).

Clothes as the most visible material part of politics of “cultural transgression” and cultural “amalgamation” from the very first meetings of the East and the West, was also evidence of the eclectic imagining of oneself in the future, of the capacity of imitating styles that the refugees supposed would best represent them in their new environment. Whereas men, especially young men, seemed not to use clothes to mark their social status, ethnicity or religion, intercultural imagining was particularly visible in women’s choice of clothing in wish to harmonize their clothing practices with “past habits, future possibilities, and emergent events” (cf. Huisman and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2004: 20). If, as Morris claims, the shopping center is “a mirror to utopian desire” (1999: 397), then the distribution tent was at least a shard of that mirror, a reflection of the desire to find a happier home in an imaginary culture of plenty.

## Conclusion



13 February 2016. Photograph by Tea Škokić.

Today, several months later, we can equally talk about our frustration because of the political solution for the “refugee crisis”, the inhumane living conditions of refugees living on the streets, in parks, tents, containers, etc., as well as the uneasiness we felt both as human beings and researchers due to inadequately interpreting signs that pointed to “unequal power relations and other ‘dangerous’ subjects” (Bourgeois 1990: 43). Not to mention the not necessarily always conscious frustration with the fact that we are citizens of a country that even superficially

informed refugees considered a highly undesirable destination.<sup>20</sup> We were aware of the fact that humanized, but deeply ideological, limited and monitored process of supplying the refugees and their transit, was mimicry for biopolitical “triage” and separation of people into refugees and migrants, into “legal” and “illegal” migrants, into those who are entitled to be protected and received in Europe and those who are not. Moreover, the experience of contested and oftentimes irreconcilable demands of voluntary engagement and critical reflection on our participation in the process of “normalizing abnormality” of the precarious humanitarian regime confronted us with challenges that were both close to and remote from the usual anthropological practice. Having in mind the ethical burden of

<sup>20</sup> Refugees as citizens “rating with their feet”, do not see Croatia or the other Balkan countries as their destination but as “disqualifying countries that they deem to be not sufficiently ‘European’ – not fulfilling their ideal of ‘Europe’ as an obscure object of desire” (New Keywords Collective 2016: 15). A recent study into attitudes and preferences of asylum seekers in Croatia showed that these are most frequently migrants who “due to circumstances beyond their control [...] become reluctant asylum-seekers who feel trapped in the country and aspire to leave” (Valenta et al. 2015: 95).



such demanding human and research situation, we were grateful for every moment of “epiphany” – like the one captured in the photograph of 13 February 2016, where mother and daughter, with a dombura, are waiting for an injured brother and son – that transcended the everyday normal and the camp normalizing experience. If, as considered by the “radical anthropologist” David Graeber – the ontological capacity of imagining and pursuing more egalitarian forms of sociality is the most revolutionary tool we have (2015: 65), then we can say that our imagining and pursuing of a more humane rather than humanitarian relationship is what we consider more valuable than our anthropological record of it. As opposed to our culturally produced understanding of economical, practical and purposeful dressing in the winter months, our embodied volunteer practice of the “welcoming ethos” in the restrictive camp environment resulted in rare, but invaluable glimpses of true human contact.

Moreover, many ethically and emotionally challenging interactions that we found ourselves in a direct encounter with the “ungraspable face of the Other” (Lévinas 1991) undermined our understanding of ab/normality, in/acceptability and in/appropriateness, and probably had a long-term effect on our understanding of the human destiny. A smile, a touch, a fleeting experience of closeness and recognition brought about the power of co-creating the spirit of the “culture of the bazaar”, the humanity and immediacy which – regardless how short and fleeting it may be – suggested a peace-time everyday life where, as described by writer Aleš Šteger “there is a time where [refugees] will be able to grow old and die in peace, and where their offspring will be able to grow up freely and with dignity” (2015: 51).

Translated by Mateusz-Milan Stanojević

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## Winter Reception and Transit Center in the Republic of Croatia: An Ethnographic Research in the Slavonski Brod Refugee Camp

In September 2015, the European *long summer of migration* metaphorically crossed into the long migration autumn.<sup>1</sup> This is the time when Hungary closed its borders with Serbia for refugees, redirecting the transcontinental refuge of men, women and children (from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan and other countries stricken by wars and conflicts, suffering and devastation) from Serbia through Croatia.<sup>2</sup> After the initial period, when the journey of smaller or larger dispersed groups of people through Croatia towards Western Europe was partially organized by state services and partially individual (in part with the help of Croatian citizens), the first Croatian refugee transit center was opened in Opatovac, making it yet another European station for assembling, classifying and directing people (cf. e.g. New Keywords Collective 2016). A month later the Winter Reception and Transit Center, i.e. the Slavonski Brod refugee camp was opened. The Slavonski Brod camp became the central spot of the Croatian section of the Balkan corridor, which had been essentially established in

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<sup>1</sup> A slightly different English language variant of this article was published in 2017 in a special issue of *Narodna umjetnost: Croatian Journal of Ethnology and Folklore Research* (54/1), announcing the publication of the collection *Kamp, koridor, granica: studije izbjeglištva u suvremenom hrvatskom kontekstu*, i.e. the Croatian edition of this book.

<sup>2</sup> The countries of origin are mentioned on the basis of data presented in the International Organization for Migration annual report for 2015: <http://doe.iom.int/docs/Flows%20Compilation%202015%20Overview.pdf>. These and other statistical data are generally empirical and ideologically debatable on multiple grounds (cf. e.g. New Keywords Collective 2016: 21–25), and we mention them here without pretensions of representativeness or precision, so as to provide some basic parameters on the topic.

the meantime. The corridor can be described as a mobile form of contemporary humanitarian-securitarian migration management regime, based on territorial and administrative externalization and internalization of border controls, and declaratively depoliticized policies of humanitarian protection (cf. e.g. Cobarrubias et al. 2015; Hameršak and Pleše 2017; Kasperek 2016; Scheel et al. 2015).<sup>3</sup>

Starting with the very first days and weeks of that autumn, we were handing out clothes, sandwiches, or sometimes simply being there at the various refugee transit points, among other things, constantly asking ourselves how our disciplines could help in understanding the event that we were witnessing: an exodus transforming the concepts of geographical distance, human strength, compassion, solidarity, coercion and cruelty, wars, their causes, consequences and victims before our very eyes. Long-term, field-based research emerged as a way to try to join in through our disciplines. As a result, in January of 2016, alongside our colleagues from the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research (Zagreb), we came to the Slavonski Brod camp as researchers for the first time. At the time, this was the only place in Croatia designed to be a stopover for refugees and the only part of the Croatian section of the corridor we could access.<sup>4</sup> We kept

<sup>3</sup> A retrospective insight into different daily dynamics of migrations that are dealt with in this text can partially be obtained through notifications regularly published by the Ministry of the Interior on its website from 16 September 2015 until the end of January 2016 in the category *Obavijesti o prihvatu i smještaju migranata u RH* (Notifications about the reception and accommodation of migrants in the Republic of Croatia), from daily reports that the Welcome! Initiative / *Inicijativa Dobrodošli!* published online from 26 September 2015, and through daily reports of the organization *Are you Syrious? (AYS Daily News Digest)* that have been regularly published online since September 2015. Other reports from a variety of sources, differing in levels of reliability, scopes and interests may also serve as a way to reconstruct the dynamics of the corridor, as well as connections between the political context, decisions, actions taken and others issues, cf. e.g. Banich et al. 2016a and 2016b; *Documenta* [2015]; *Hrvatski Crveni križ* 2016; *Inicijativa Dobrodošli* 2016; *Martinović Džamonja et al.* 2016; *Mouzourakis and Taylor* 2016; *Moving Europe* 2016; *Sigurnosno-obavještajna agencija* 2016; *Šelo Šabić and Borić* 2016; *Ured pučke pravobraniteljice* 2016 and 2017.

<sup>4</sup> According to the data made publically available by the Ministry of the Interior, a total of 374,148 persons arrived in the camp, which is an approximate number, because it is not publicly known whether and, if so, to what extent, this number includes, for example, people who were returned to the camp after their entry into Slovenia was denied, etc. Several hundred to several thousand people arrived every day, with the number decreasing over the length of the period. For instance, according to the questionable official data, the arrival of approximately 3,000 people were registered during one day in January 2016, whereas during another day of the same month, approximately 500 persons were registered. On 5 March 2016 the last train arrived in the camp, with approximately 250 people. This was the only train that arrived in the camp that day.

coming back to the camp until the spring, and the last time we were there was immediately before 13 April 2016 when the last group of refugees was taken from the camp and the camp was closed.

Our ethnographic research in the camp proved to be fraught with methodological dilemmas, problems and obstacles, which we were able to anticipate to a certain extent based on the literature describing ethnographic research of state borders, the humanitarian sector, security and refugees, and which concern limited access, entry permits and research logistics in general, confidentiality, the language barrier, etc. (cf. e.g. Donnan and Wilson 2010; Düvell et al. 2009; Harrell-Bond and Voutira 2007; Hopkins 1993; Jacobsen and Landau 2003; Kość-Ryżko 2012–2013; Smith 2009). We were confronted with new issues when writing up the texts; and the one we found most critical was how to avoid normalization generated by the scholarly language and apparatus, i.e. how to, at least to some extent, preserve the gravity of what we witnessed in the text. In this paper, we deal with methodological issues, research methods and procedures that we were employing and testing during our stay at the camp and which we consider an important segment in understanding the camp itself. Doing that we will consciously discipline our feelings of insecurity, surprise, shock, and constant improvising, fear and helplessness which were our constant companions during the entire period.

## Entry?

Bus stations and other places of refugees' gathering in the autumn of 2015 were sites where Croatia's inhabitants could come and go as they pleased. This was even true of green borders where, in response to the immediate situation, border restrictions were largely suspended. In contrast, entry into the Slavonski Brod camp was only possible with official authorization and after multiple checks by the Ministry of the Interior.<sup>5</sup> Thus, to enter

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<sup>5</sup> The Minister of Interior (or, later, deputy of Minister) was the head of the so-called Crisis Unit, actually the Unit for the Coordination of Activities Related to the Arrival of Migrants in the Republic of Croatia. The Crisis Unit was founded by the Government of the Republic of Croatia on 17 September 2015, and its aim was to ensure "coordinated action of all responsible bodies and institutions, with the aim of humanitarian reception and care of migrants" (Vlada Republike Hrvatske 2015; cf. Vlada Republike Hrvatske 2016). According to the Government's decision (Vlada Republike Hrvatske 2015), the Crisis Unit included representatives of the Ministry of Social Policy and Youth, the Ministry of For-

the camp as, for instance, a volunteer, a person was required to be a member of, or be affiliated with, an organization that was supposed to obtain prior authorization to be present at the camp, and which could, based on that authorization, submit individual applications for its volunteers. One of us volunteered at the camp in accordance with this procedure in the first weeks upon its opening in mid-November 2015. Not long after that, when a decision was made to conduct research in the camp, the Institute formally requested permission from the Ministry of the Interior for a group of researchers, as stated in the letter, to be granted “entry, movement research conducting privileges in the Reception Center in Slavonski Brod”. The application was essentially approved on the same day, and formally approved six weeks later, when the Ministry requested our names, personal identification numbers and photographs to issue accreditation cards for us. Different categories of accreditation cards were being issued at the camp (for public works personnel, volunteers and employees of the Croatian Red Cross, volunteers from non-governmental organizations, etc.). Certain groups and individuals that did not have a role in the camp itself, such as the media or delegations, were given non-personalized daily, so-called one-time accreditation cards. Given the fact that we announced that our research would be of longer duration, which some approaches rightly consider a precondition for ethnography (e.g. Atkinson 2015: 3, 12 et passim; cf. Clifford 1983: 121–126; Potkonjak 2014: 21–22, 80), we were given personalized, permanent accreditations. However, our accreditation cards, given that there was no special category for researchers, in addition to our names, photographs and numbers, had the label “volunteer”.

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eign and European Affairs, the Ministry of Labor and the Pension System, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Defense, more specifically of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Croatia and the National Protection and Rescue Directorate. All these participants, indirectly or directly, to a greater or smaller extent depending on the phase, took part in the operation of the Slavonski Brod camp. However, the Ministry of the Interior played a key role in the functioning of the camp, alongside the Ministry of Health, and the National Protection and Rescue Directorate, which was in charge of the logistical and technical support. Moreover, based on the mentioned Decision which provided for other state bodies and institutions to be part of the Crisis Unit, they were joined by the Croatian Red Cross (cf. Larsen et al. 2016: 12–14), which “took care of distributing food, water, clothes and hygienic products and provided psychosocial support and reconnecting families services” (Hrvatski Crveni križ 2016: 6). The Croatian Red Cross was also in charge of “coordinating all organizations that provided humanitarian aid to the refugees and migrants” (Hrvatski Crveni križ 2016: 6), which included intergovernmental, international and Croatian agencies and non-governmental organizations present at the camp.



Fixed classification of accreditations, which was based on the logic of responsibilities and the authorities that certain groups and organizations had, was the first indication of the mechanistic division of labor in the camp, which we discuss further in the text, while our application for institutional approval was the first instance where this ethnographic study was different from others dominating the Croatian context. Institutional research approval is, admittedly, provided for in the discipline, and it has been as an option integrated as part of research ethical guidelines (cf. e.g. *Etički kodeks 2013: II/2*), but in practice it is not always sought, because in Croatia, among other things, comparatively few studies are done in institutions. In relation to some other studies which might also involve seeking institutional approvals, seeking approval to conduct research in a camp involved comparatively higher level of uncertainty, as the camp is a closed-type institution under the Ministry of the Interior jurisdiction (cf. e.g. Wacquant 2002: 387). Similar research is rare in the Croatian context; one example relevant in the context of institutional approval is the research into the Lepoglava Panopticon, the Lepoglava prison, where the permission from the competent ministry was also sought (Đurin 2011). The application of the researcher, Sanja Đurin, was not approved, and she conducted her research, which consisted of “interviews with two prisoners” and observation “based on visiting one of the prisoners”, “without any official approval” (Đurin 2011: 270). Personal acquaintance with one of the prisoners and obtaining his consent for participation enabled Đurin to conduct the study which, only if viewed from a bureaucratized and institutional perspective, could related to covert research familiar from ethnographic literature (cf. e.g. Allu Davies 2001: 53–58).

In order to understand the similarities as well as the differences in the degree of inaccessibility between the prison and the camp, one should note that “institutionally covert” research in the prison was possible because the researcher could take on the role of a visitor, whereas, in order to conduct a similar type of study in the refugee camp, one should secure a practical function such as a volunteer, interpreter or some other, which is what some researchers resorted to in other countries having been faced with the difficulties of obtaining an institutional permission (e.g. Agier 2015: 65–66; see also e.g. Harrell-Bond and Voutira 2007: 283–288).<sup>6</sup> As has

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<sup>6</sup> In their works on refugee camps and similar places, Croatian ethnologists do not address institution access, as is the case, for instance, in the research concerning the Reception Center for Asylum Seekers in Zagreb, the so-called Porin Hotel (cf. Petrović and

been said, we conducted our research in the camp for a longer period of time with institutional approval, and we mostly formally entered the camp as researchers.

Given that our initial motivation was to support refugees and their movement, and given ethnographic methodological inclination towards “participant observation” (cf. e.g. Atkinson 2015: 34–35, 39–41 et passim; Potkonjak 2014: 68–71; Spradley 1980: 53–62), the ethnographic participant role that we adopted in the camp was that of volunteers of one of the organizations in the camp.<sup>7</sup> Our decision to volunteer was not motivated only by the research itself. Our roles in the camp, one as volunteers and the other as researchers, remained intertwined even when we acted as “pure researchers” i.e. when we conducted scheduled interviews with camp employees, when we used a camera or when we openly took notes as we observed (cf. e.g. Emerson et al. 1995: 20–26).

## Observation?

In accordance with the contemporary migraton regime based on the “politics of insecurity”, which categorize “undesired” foreigners as asylum seekers, foreigners residing illegally on the territory of a certain country, asylees, etc., and which physically separate them from the other population (Huysmans 2006; also cf. e.g. Walters 2004; Wilsher 2012: 171–206), Croatia at that time, just like today, was striving to minimize contact between refugees and Croatian citizens. The argumentation for this in the public discourse, which was adapted to the initial public reactions which were, nevertheless, empathic, was based on the standard images of refugees as a potential health and safety threat, as well as the premise of

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Pozniak 2014; also cf. Petrović 2016: 400–416), or when they do address it, as for instance in the case of the Opatovac camp (cf. Čapo 2015a: 391), the provided permission is “a permit for entry and brief stays at the reception center over several days” (Čapo 2015a: 391), which means not for longterm ethnographic research, but for “guided tours” like those organized for media crews (cf e.g. Hina, “Opatovac. They do not give us anything, but God sees all”, 30 October 2015, <http://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/reportaza-iz-opatovca-nista-namne-daju-ali-neka-znaju-da-bog-sve-ovo-vidi/852662.aspx>).

<sup>7</sup> Given that we were authorized by the competent Ministry to do research in the camp, we were exempt from the norms of the organization that we volunteered for, according to which volunteering in the camp included only supporting the refugees and working within the framework of the organization, but not doing independent or public work, as journalists, researchers or in any other similar way.

refugees as a potential infrastructural (e.g. traffic-related) threat, or some sort of obstacle.<sup>8</sup> The results of this endeavor, echoing the statements by some politicians, were emphasized as one of the unquestionable signs of the success of Croatian refugee politics. As initial preparations were made for the opening of the Slavonski Brod transit center, the then Minister of the Interior, in an effort to placate the local community by promising that the camp will not cause any changes, made the following statement: “This means that there was not a single person at any time, except for those suffering from hallucinations, who has ever seen a single refugee in Croatia other than in Opatovac, and no one will see them in Slavonski Brod either.”<sup>9</sup> With the Slavonski Brod camp, this ambition and promise was fulfilled. When we talked about the reactions of the local community to the news about camp construction, our interlocutors said:

People do not see the migrants at all. They are simply in passing here, they leave by train, nobody, I do not know if anybody has ever seen them, and then said: yes, I did see them. Perhaps someone saw the train with the migrants, but that is nothing special. [...] [The railway line], you could say, goes through the town, it actually goes through the town, but there is no contact with people, really. [...] so that this is, really ideal, convenient.

As mentioned by Duško Petrović in the chapters where he interprets the Slavonski Brod camp in the context of securitarian humanitarianism (2016: 391-416), the camp was outside the town, in the industrial zone, on the grounds of the former refinery, outside the main town street grid and beyond the reach of public transport. Even when taking into consideration the railway line – which seemed like a direct connection to its surroundings – the camp was, in fact, isolated. The railway line ended in the camp with a dead-end track, and only trains with refugees under a police escort would go there. Enclosed by natural and man-made obstacles, a river and a fence, the camp was connected with, and additionally isolated from, the environment via the accreditation system, as well as entry checks, which changed through time depending on a variety of subjective and objective

<sup>8</sup> For recent studies into attitudes about, for instance, asylum seekers in Croatia, for the period before the one addressed here, cf. e.g. Gregurović et al. 2016, Župarić-Iljić and Gregurović 2013, Župarić-Iljić 2013, Petrović and Pozniak 2014.

<sup>9</sup> Hina, “Ostojić refuses all accusations from Slavonski Brod. Those who see refugees outside Opatovac are hallucinating”, 14 October 2015, <http://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/ostojic-odbacio-kritike-iz-slavonskog-broda-haluciniraju-oni-koji-izbjeglice-vide-van-opatovca/848146.aspx>.

circumstances. Government officials, employees, volunteers and others entered the camp through the central road entrance where, in the shade of the building which was police and camp headquarters, there was a container where the accreditation cards were checked and an X-ray and metal detection inspection were performed. Starting in February 2016, when the camp was less and less a place of transit, and more and more a place of incarceration and confinement, i.e. *ad hoc* detention (cf. Banich et al. 2016a, 2016b; Hameršak and Pleše 2017), this was the place where written records of entry and exit were kept. Starting with 18 March when the camp manager granted all organizations access to the closed detention sectors of the camp the organizations had to give individual names of the already accredited employees/volunteers, who, in addition to being registered on entering the camp, were also registered when entering particular sectors, not only by the Ministry of the Interior employees, but also in the container of the Red Cross.

Moreover, the camp was crisscrossed by numerous physical and visible as well as invisible borders on the inside, which separated accessible from inaccessible areas. The accessibility of certain parts of the camp to volunteers, employees and others depended on which group they belonged to and, particularly in the case of larger organizations, the function they had in the organization. As researchers, when we were given permission to conduct research in the camp, we did not receive any guidelines or instructions as to access or lack of access to certain parts of the camp, as to the use of audio-visual equipment, etc. The field guide of the organization that we volunteered for (Inicijativa Dobrodošli 2015) said that its volunteers had no access to the “pre-registration section” during transit, and given that one of us had volunteered in November 2015, we knew that, like most volunteers and employees of humanitarian and related organizations, we had no access to the registration tents or the inside of the train. Shortly before our first visit to the camp as researchers, we heard whispers, which later turned out to be true, that there are “guarded areas” in the camp, which included areas “from registration to the infamous sector” where refugees who were temporarily or permanently forbidden further travel were being detained i. e. who did not pass the so-called profiling, selection and discrimination control measures used by the police of the countries along the corridor from November 2015 until its closure.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> So-called profiling was done systematically starting from the second half of November 2015 when Slovenia (15 November), Croatia (18 November) and other countries started

With the exception of the restrictions from the field guide, and signs forbidding photography and video recording, which became more numerous and noticeable with time, we largely learned about the other restrictions in the camp gradually, by word of mouth. In early February, upon leaving the fifth sector – a part of the camp that we had regularly visited until then, accommodating people who temporarily stopped their journey to, for example, wait for a family member kept for medical treatment – we were given the following instruction in a chance encounter with a volunteer of another organization: “You may enter the fifth sector only if accompanied by a Red Cross volunteer, and you may not enter the third sector at all.” Restrictions on entering the third sector i. e. the parts of the camp where refugees who had not passed the so-called profiling were continually detained, were given verbally and informally for weeks, and were officially formulated in mid-February. The following message was given at a coordination meeting between the Croatian Red Cross, non-governmental organizations and similar organizations in the camp: “The third sector is open only to the police and the Red Cross, all others who approach it will be arrested and their accreditations will be taken away.” This was worded a bit more moderately in the Notes from the Coordination Meeting of the NGO/INGO/IO in the Winter Transit Reception Center in Slavonski Brod of 8 February 2016: “CRC [Croatian Red Cross] is allowed to enter the sector 3 by the call of the Police, and no other organisation can enter the sector 3. If anyone tries to enter the sector 3, he will be processed by the Police.”

Furthermore, knowledge concerning restrictions would often be transmitted by imitation and indirectly, which was the case when, during our first tour of the camp, we were shown places where volunteers of non-governmental organizations stayed and worked during transit, simultaneously suggesting that we had no business being in any other places. This type of regulation of movement through space, but to a much

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to exclude the first groups of refugees that did not come from Syria, Iraq or Afghanistan (cf. Inicijativa Dobrodošli, “It is unacceptable to separate refugees into those coming from war zones and others”, 19 November 2016, <http://welcome.cms.hr/index.php/hr/2015/11/19/odvajanje-izbjeglica-na-one-koje-su-iz-tzv-ratnih-zona-i-na-ostale/>; Moving Europe, “Restrictions and segregation on the Balkanroute: Fences, Detention and Push-Backs”, 21 January 2016, [http://moving-europe.org/restrictions-and-segregation-on-the-balkan-route-fences-detention-and-push-backs/#\\_ftnref1](http://moving-europe.org/restrictions-and-segregation-on-the-balkan-route-fences-detention-and-push-backs/#_ftnref1)). To find out about the chronology, ways and effects of ethnic, linguistic and other type of profiling, i.e. segregation along the corridor, see the reports: Banich et al. 2016a and 2016b; Inicijativa Dobrodošli 2016 and Moving Europe 2016, as well as in Hameršak and Pleše 2017.

greater degree, also applied to the refugees. Following the instructions issued over the megaphone and the verbal or nonverbal directions given by police officers and volunteers, as well as only sporadic signs and circular pathway formed by the entrances, exits, fences and the physical positions of police officers, the refugees moved through the camp by imitating each other. Police officers, sometimes with yelling and a certain hostility for having to “state the obvious”, would warn them that they were breaking the unwritten rules of the circulation of the people in the camp.

Thus, although we were faced with a growing number of bans and restricted areas, some of these areas, although they were out of bounds, were becoming less of a total mystery with time. We constructed our images of and insights into these spaces in different ways, including, in a manner of speaking, direct observation, but having to significantly modify this ethnographic method (cf. e.g. Potkonjak 2014: 69). For instance, one of us was part of a group being given a tour of the camp organized for the new Minister of the Interior, and went through the registration tent, the place where key activities for the continuation of the refugees’ journey,<sup>11</sup> took place, which was not operational at the time. Given the great speed with which the Minister and his entourage went through the camp, including the registration tent, it was impossible to get a good look of the inside of the tent. This is why, in this particular case, rather than using the technique of longer unobstructed observation where one tries to notice details from the specific research point of view (cf. e.g. Emerson et al. 1995: 26–27; Potkonjak 2014: 70), we could only apply techniques of rapid scanning of the area, which could literally take only several seconds, the time it took to walk through the tent.

Similarly briefly entering railroad cars, which we were granted ad hoc permissions for on several occasions, also included rapid, in this case prominently participatory, rather than observational scanning, which differed from the previous case also because of its, tentatively speaking,

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<sup>11</sup> According to its key characteristics, primarily the practices of registration, control, selection, reception, admission or expulsion that were operationalized in registration tents, the Slavonski Brod camp is partially comparable to other contemporary places where refugees are concentrated, more specifically with the type of places that Michel Agier (2015: 46–52) refers to as refugee sorting centers. Such places, in contrast to self-organized “camps”, are under direct control and management of national administrations, the police or UN agencies and/or humanitarian non-governmental organizations. They are transit spaces where the mentioned practices of selection are carried out, and staying in them implies shorter or longer periods of immobility, waiting and coercion.

ethnographic insight potential (cf. e.g. Atkinson 2015). As opposed to the hurried protocolary “visit” to the registration tent, which was reduced to a mere stage set at the time, our short visits to railroad cars generated strong impressions, and had a significant impact on our understanding of the camp and the transit of refugees. The image of the overcrowded railroad car, completely blocked by people, which was, as we could sometimes hear, “being loaded” with double or nearly double the number of passengers than was standard in regular transport, for us became a visual synecdoche for the policy of dehumanized efficient transit.

In addition to the special cases, like the ones mentioned, where certain spaces were accessible by permission, some other areas, where we could not enter, were accessible through what we will refer to as external observation. Occasionally, albeit rarely, during registration procedures, the entryways to some registration tents were left open, which made the inside of the tent, as well as the events that took place there, relatively accessible to us as external observers. Our fieldnotes show how partial an insight this sort of research situation provided:

registration tent is open (tent flap up) and you can see inside, but the sunlight is strong and I cannot see very well; a police officer exited the tent, he has a mask on, there is a wheelchair inside, I can see a woman holding a child on her sitting in a chair in front of a desk (I cannot see the police officer interrogating her on the other side of the desk because my view is blocked), several police officers are walking around the tent, I see one Red Cross uniform.

Similarly, both times that we were allowed to photograph and record the arrival and departure of the refugee train, with an unobtrusive but present accompaniment of a police officer, when walking around those parts of the camp that were normally accessible to visitors (journalists), we used zoom to try to take photos of the spaces that we had no access to otherwise, such as the area in front of the entrance to the registration tents, as well as people who we could not access in person because they were detained in one of the camp sectors.

External observation, including taking photographs, was not as time-restricted as scanning the inside of the registration tent or the train, but it was interrupted by other actions meant to camouflage our primary purpose to see what was attempted to be hidden from view. Rather than making this seem like careful observation, looking towards the tent and

its interior was meant to seem coincidental. Rather than seeming like targeted, focused recording and photography of areas and people that we had no access to, this was meant to look like recording “permitted” scenes.

What was at play here, like in some other cases, was to some extent interiorization of prohibitions central to the camp’s functioning. Although looking towards the tent or zooming in were not prohibited, we perceived the prohibition as being there or as being conceivable. Similarly, although the orally transmitted prohibition to enter registration tents did not specify time (whether it only related to the occasions when registration took place, or was meant to be absolute), we perceived it as constant, and we entered the tent only several times, exclusively under police escort or with police permission.

This unwritten nature of the rules and prohibitions was accompanied by a considerable dose of uncertainty as to what was allowed and what was not (which meant that sometimes things might have been perceived as not allowed, whereas they might have been), however it equally allowed transgressing some boundaries which would have been difficult to cross if restrictions had been given in writing. For instance, the platform where the trains arrived and departed from, and which was divided from the rest of a camp by a fence as a clear border sign visible to all those in the camp, was the place of minor but constant disagreements when the trains were leaving. Every now and then, volunteers from some organizations would cross the border, when helping people to carry their luggage or when taking blankets to those who were waiting to depart, sometimes for hours, in the unheated trains. After this process repeated several times, camp management responsible for the humanitarian support of the camp would issue an instruction or a prohibition not to approach the platform. The volunteers would abide by the instruction for a while, and would again, at one point, go to the platform, which could be described as a moment of small rebellion against camp rules, and then the entire process would repeat.

The interiorization of prohibitions and rules is also evident from some methodological decisions we made and steps we followed, including sound recording. Experimenting with note-taking methods which could be considered somewhat alternative in the Croatian context, wanting to reach different levels of the camp, we used a sound-recording device several times to overtly record the sounds in the camp (cf. Atkinson 2015: 146–147 *et passim*; Ehn et al. 2016: 85), particularly the first several minutes of the arrival and departure of the train. However, in mid-March, in the weeks be-



fore the camp was closed, when several hundred persons were detained in the camp and when only a handful of volunteers and employees had access to them, we used a sound recorder in different manner. One of us recorded the distressing sounds of nearly one-hour-long screams and shouts of a young man who resisted collective transfer of “single men” from the third to the first sector of the camp, by keeping the recorder running in a jacket pocket. In our daily report from the camp to the organization that we volunteered for and to another organization that published daily reports about the situation in the field, one of us gave the following description:

After the police led twenty or so men, forming two lines, from Sector 3, they literally carried a younger man out [...]. Holding him by his arms and legs, they carried him in a vertical position from Sector 3 to [...] the first tent in Sector 1. [...] Those of us who do not have access to the sector could not see what went on in the tent, but loud screams, shouts and intermittent knocking sounds were a sufficient indicator of the state the man was in. Although one could not understand the meaning of the shouts, it was clear that they were a call for help. Many referred to his behavior as a nervous breakdown.

Although we had not come upon an explicit or implicit prohibition of sound recording in the camp, and although we had indeed, as we said, made overt recordings using a voice recorder on some occasions, we did not consider overt recording to be a viable option under these circumstances, to some degree as a result of a previous research situation. To wit, some ten days earlier, we had decided to walk around the entire perimeter fence of the camp and make notes about the camp from this perspective. When we walked around the camp, i.e. outside the perimeter fence, where there were no signs whatsoever prohibiting photography, we also took photographs, which is why a police officer on duty in that area demanded to see our ID cards and sent us, as we were told, to the camp manager. The police officer did not take us inside the building, but we stood in front of the building, next to him and alongside other people who happened to be there, when higher-ranking police officials, who did not identify themselves to us, addressed us with a dose of mockery, followed by accusatory and threatening remarks. We deleted the photographs at the request of one of them, and then, after we had been vouched for by a colleague of his over the phone, we were let go with a warning: “This is the first and the last time you do that. Do it one more time, and you will lose your accreditation.” On this occasion we very directly experienced the camp, from the

perspective of a researcher, as a place of uncertainty and fear, and the suspension of one's rights. From a research/volunteer perspective, having one's accreditation revoked was the most extreme suspension possible, but chance had it that we for a second witnessed a glimpse of its true scale with regard to the refugees at the very same occasion for the first time. As the police officer took us to the police building via a shortcut that we had normally no access to, we had the opportunity to quickly "externally observe" the third detention sector, that we only had sketchy information about. "In sector 3 all containers full, lights on. The face of a woman, some 20 years of age, looking towards us, as the policeman leads us on. there are also people in the white tent in sector 3."

### Interviews?

Since the opening of the camp until the official closure of the corridor on the night of 8 to 9 March 2016, the Slavonski Brod camp primarily had a transit character. This is the period when the refugees were brought to the camp escorted by the Croatian police, mostly by train, from Šid, Serbia. They underwent the process of registration in the camp, and would then be returned to the train that would go on its way to Slovenia. Occasionally, more frequently at the very beginnings of the camp's operation, they would be held for several hours in those sectors intended for accommodation.

In order to make transit as quick and efficient as possible, contact between the refugees and the volunteers in the camp was limited, even during the short period of several hours when the refugees stayed at the camp or, rather, went through it. As opposed to the previously mentioned attempts to minimize contact between refugees and the citizens of Croatia, clear and highlighted in political statements, no explicit mention of this was made in official statements or interviews that we conducted with camp management representatives. However, attempts to minimize interaction between refugees, volunteers and others in the camp were evident from the organizational characteristics of the camp, primarily its clear division into areas, such as refugee sectors, stock areas, management and volunteer headquarters and the like,<sup>12</sup> as well as from the

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<sup>12</sup> The Slavonski Brod camp spanned an area of about 40,000 square meters, and was divided into six sectors designed for the accommodation of refugees (cf. e.g. Lada Puljizević,

strict circular route that the refugees in transit were supposed to take in the camp. During the time that we were at the camp, this route began with the refugees exiting the train, continued with their passing through registration and distribution tents, with possible hold-ups, for instance, in the mother-and-baby tent or at the kiosk, and then through the access road to the platform, ending in their entering the train. Each of the mentioned points was connected with a separate type of activity, and a separate group of volunteers or employees worked at each of the points, e.g. helping to get off the train, checking things and personal data (i.e. registration), distributing clothes and footwear, distributing food, helping to get on the train, etc. Fragmentation and automatization of activities, where each individual dealt with a single segment in the entire process, created an impression of working on a conveyor belt. As far as volunteers from non-governmental organizations were concerned – which was the group that we belonged to – the only place designed to meet with the refugees during transit was the distribution tent, which was, however, given its purpose to distribute clothes and footwear as quickly as possible, never intended as a point where interactions other than those of supply and demand would take place, which did not imply that other interactions could not develop on some occasions (cf. Škokić and Jambrešić Kirin 2017). This organization of transit meant that there were very few opportunities for ethnographic research directed towards the thoughts and experiences of refugees, that would be based on in-depth interviews as the basic technique of their “collection” (cf. e.g. Potkonjak 2014: 71–76; Sherman Heyl 2007). Such interviews, had there not been for access restrictions, could have been conducted with the refugees in the closed sectors, where they were held for shorter or longer periods of time.

However, even when all volunteers and employees were given access to the closed sections under special conditions (this was during the exclusively detention period, but not until the second half of March, as already

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“Building of the winter camp for refugees”, 22 October 2015, <https://hrvatski-vojn timer.hr/godina-2015-menu/item/1197-izgradnja-zimskog-kampa-za-izbjeglice.html>), with a tent and container infrastructure which could house 5,000 people (Larsen et al. 2016: 10), and the main building, infirmary, tents for the army, tents of the National Protection and Rescue Directorate, a brick-built Croatian Red Cross warehouse, a tent warehouse, containers with offices of non-governmental, inter-governmental and other organizations, a tent mess for volunteers and employees, registration tents, tents for vulnerable groups or special types of assistance, distribution tents, etc. The layout of the mobile objects and their purpose changed several times.

mentioned), we did not conduct interviews for numerous interrelated reasons, many of which would have applied to the previous, largely transit, period. The reasons varied from the impossibility of clearly presenting our role as researchers, and complete inequality in the potential relationship between the researchers and “the researched”, through our lack of knowledge of the languages relevant for such research (Kurdish, Arabic, Persian etc.), our unwillingness to dedicate the very short time that we had at our disposal in the detention sectors to documenting ethnographic statements, to the fear of secondary traumatization of the refugees and the likely devastating consequences this might have for them in their present environment. If we had been able to surmount any of these obstacles, and if we had decided to do in-depth interviews, we believe that we would not have recorded them, primarily because of the hazard of endangering the detained persons simply through their participation in recorded interviews, and particularly because of the danger of potential unauthorized access to them, which is a topic that crosses over into general problems of ethnographic methodology, ranging from the confidentiality between the researcher and “the researched” (cf. e.g. Allu Davies 2001: 51–53), to the problem of research topics that contain elements of illegal activities (cf. e.g. Potkonjak 2014: 37).

Given all this, we conducted recorded interviews in the camp only with people on “our” side of the ramp that divided the refugees from all the others, which almost exclusively included persons in official positions, generally of high rank or uniquely connected with the functioning of the camp: police employees, Croatian Red Cross and army employees, health-care workers and employees providing other services in the camp. These interviews were meant to familiarize us with the operational management visions of the camp, its conceptual design in terms of its construction and operation, its organization, structure, management structure, etc.; i.e. those segments of the camp that were not available to us on the experiential level from our volunteer-participant position (cf. Hammersley and Atkinson 1996: 125). These interviews, it should be mentioned, were not preceded by getting to know our interlocutors or building some sort of rapport or even intimacy with them, and the interviews themselves, to some extent because of this, did not have a pronounced personal level, i.e. they did not have some of the characteristics that are commonly associated with the ethnographic interview (cf. Potkonjak 2014: 73; Sherman Heyl 2007: 369). Given that, as far as the management aspect of the camp

is concerned, our participant position was absent, and insights from observation were reduced to a minimum, some would claim that these interviews could not even be referred to as ethnographic (cf. Atkinson 2015: 12, 92–94 et passim). This means that the very act that most clearly defined us as researchers to others, and that we ourselves saw as a sort of confirmation of our role as researchers to the management structures, had much less ethnographic value for us in comparison to the other methods that we used.

In line with the roles that our interlocutors had in the camp, and in line with their prevailing status of official representatives of their institutions, their positions voiced in the interviews had a spokesperson-like quality to varying degrees. Some of them officially held the function of spokespeople, and others implicitly presented themselves as the spokespeople for their institution or the entire camp, and even as spokespeople for Croatia, a country that, according to the interpretations dominating in these interviews, proved to be particularly humane, and even the most humane country in its treatment of the refugees.<sup>13</sup> For instance:

In every group that arrives here at the camp all you can hear is the following: Thank you, Croatia, thank you for the love, for the support, for the help, etc. [...] Croatia, this small country with a small number of inhabitants in relation to any other country, but a country where the people are warm and willing to help.

According to these statements, humanity was reflected on two levels: the level of the treatment of refugees by the people of Croatia, where, like in numerous media and other statements (cf. e.g. Čapo 2015b: 16–17), the Croatian refugee experience was stereotypically mentioned as the source of such treatment, and the level of the functioning of the national govern-

<sup>13</sup> This discourse can be seen even today when the highest state representatives comment on the living conditions in the Zagreb center for asylum seekers in the following manner: “They have better conditions than 90% of the schools in Croatia. The accommodation is more comfortable and with better furnishings than many student dormitories. Like the EU, we are investing significant amounts of money to give them the same standards of living as the Croatian citizens have. There is a significant number of Croatian citizens who live in worse conditions than migrants” (<http://www.dw.com/hr/orepi%C4%87-krijum%C4%8Dari-ljudi-iskori%C5%A1tavaju-nevladine-udruge/a-37467291>). However, everyone visiting the Zagreb center can see that the accommodation is poor and dehumanized and the Center is overcrowded, devastated and isolated. This figure of generous hospitality is also used elsewhere. For example, in August 2015, the Serbian Prime Minister said: “I am proud that Serbia is their best refugee and the safest place, on their way to Europe” (Vučić according to Beznec et al. 2016: 46).

ment, which, as it was stated in the interviews, was most clearly visible in the nearly flawless functioning of the camp itself. For instance:

We have a heap of newspapers, delegations, this or the other every day, and to be honest, all those who were here were at a loss for words at how well all this is organized, structured, made [...] no other country on the route has anything similar to this [...].

“Flawless functioning” of the camp was also one of the first things, which may have been left unsaid or only hinted at in our conversations, where we disagreed with our interlocutors. Apart from the fundamental disagreement in seeing camps as, on the one hand, an expression of humanity, and on the other as humanitarian oppression, these disagreements were related to the fact that, in the camp, we witnessed behaviors such as pushing, shouting, unnecessarily stopping people or making them move faster, separating families or groups that traveled together, forceful, sometimes several hour-long detainment on the train before its departure, overcrowding railroad cars, not giving assistance to the freezing people in the unheated train waiting for its departure, withholding information, verbal insults that remain insults even if the person at whom they were directed did not understand them. After all, rather than “Thank you, Croatia” that we mentioned above, several times in the camp we heard statements like the one recorded in our fieldnotes: “We are not animals. Why do you treat us like that?”

In our interviews, we only minimally questioned the image that our interlocutors created in their answers, which was also the foundation of the media image in Croatia, that some of our interlocutors also actively participated in creating, given the function they had. Not only did we not come into conflict with our interlocutors, we also avoided some sub-questions and moved on to other topics when we started seeing cracks in the nearly perfect images of the Slavonski Brod camp and the Croatian version of refugee reception, even in those cases where, on the basis of our participatory research experience, we could see that what had been said did not correspond to reality. This was not only a matter of following the fieldwork manual instruction, which is the result of the nature of the ethnographic interview, where the researcher should not come into conflict with his/her interlocutors, and should let them talk about what they consider relevant, in a way that they want, and not to talk about what they do not wish to, cannot, or are not permitted to discuss (cf. e.g. Potkonjak

2014: 73–75). From a post-hoc perspective, it can be said that our behavior was also influenced by our fear that our open reactions and questions during the interview could jeopardize our future stay at the camp, by, for instance, restricting or interfering with some of our activities, either as volunteers or researchers (cf. e.g. Hopkins 1993: 125; Kość-Ryżko 2013: 238). The explanation of our, as we see it today, servility towards our interlocutors, could be applicable on a higher level, that of the behavior of the organizations in the camp. According to our insights, they came only into minimal conflict with the management of the camp, or avoided conflict altogether, which we – in the case of organizations which were not part of standard humanitarian intervention teams – attribute to the continued fear that their reaction could result in loss of access to the camp, and, conversely, the prerequisite for providing direct aid to the refugees, and the prerequisite for – at least to some extent – monitoring what was going on in the camp, giving them at least some – however slight – opportunity to intervene (usp. Bužinkić 2017).

The fact that, in the end, we only conducted interviews with official and institutionally appointed camp representatives, but not with people who were excluded from the decision-making process, and who were only minimally familiar with it, such as volunteers and lower-ranking officials, was also influenced by some factors other than our interest in management and other dimensions of the camp that we – in contrast to the dimensions that we had access to as participants and observers – could not discover through participation.

This primarily refers to the combination of what we identified as the unwillingness of our potential interlocutors to share their thoughts with us in a formal recorded interview, and the real implicit or explicit negative reactions of those few that we had our first contacts with. In addition to an entire array of possible purely individual causes for such reactions, well known from other ethnographic research (cf. e.g. Bošković-Stulli 1998: 273), other causes, which are well known in ethnographic research into business organizations, etc., could be mentioned (cf. e.g. Hammersley and Atkinson 1996: 127–128). Some of the organizations present in the camp, as we were told, had their employees sign contracts stipulating that they were not allowed to give statements about their work or the work of the organization in question. According to some information, this rule was sometimes only given orally or was tacit, i.e. it was the volunteer or employee who inferred that their statements could in some way cause dam-

age to themselves or to the organization they worked for. For instance, this is suggested by the reaction of a volunteer, whose volunteer status was supposed to change to that of an employee when we were at the camp, which may not be insignificant in itself. Although we preliminarily scheduled a conversation with her during our first stay at the camp, when we suggested to meet again, she texted us – although we had not ask for this piece of information – the name and mobile phone number of her superior that we could or should talk to, thus letting us know not only that she did not want to take part in a recorded interview, but that she wished to avoid any meeting or potential conversation whatsoever. An agitated and even angry response from a manager of one of the organizations in the camp, upon finding out in casual conversation that one of the lower-ranking employees had talked to the researchers, was also indicative of the management's attitude towards the possibility of unmonitored transfer of information or attitudes of people working in the camp (or transfer that was not agreed through the so-called official channels). In summ, just as the camp was replete with visible and invisible borders, it was replete with visible and invisible gatekeepers (Hammersley and Atkinson 1996: 63–67, 133–135; Potkonjak 2014: 94). Just as the borders blocked access to certain areas and ethnographic observations, gatekeepers, in one way or another, explicitly or implicitly, blocked access to people and interviewing them.

On the other hand, as far as accessing volunteer perspectives in the camp or about the camp is concerned, it is true that we could have conducted recorded interviews with the volunteers of those rare non-governmental organizations in the camp which were not primarily involved in so-called humanitarian business (cf. e.g. Belloni 2007; Weiss 2013). We assume that at least some of these volunteers, given their independence of financial or other specific obligations to the institutions, and depending on their general openness to sharing and disclosing information and perspectives, would have shared with us their thoughts in recorded interviews, just like they had done in everyday communication in the camp. However, the growing complexity of our insights into the camp and what was happening in it, the final closure of the borders and the conversion of the camp into a detention camp in the basic sense, led to a shift in our priorities towards other research focuses (particularly towards parts of the camp used for detention), other interlocutors and other methods. This led to leaving out the planned recorded interviews with non-governmental organization volunteers focusing on their experience and understanding



of the camp and their work in it, as well as recorded interviews with persons who did not work in the camp but had indirect insights and opinions about the camp or about its position in the life of the town, for instance because of the fact that they lived in Slavonski Brod.

In conclusion, if we look at our interviews overall, both those that we conducted and those that we did not, one can observe a fact which may seem paradoxical at first sight, and which is significant for the understanding of the camp and the possibilities of conducting ethnographic research in it. On the one hand, as researchers in the camp, we had relatively unobstructed access to the environment of the humanitarian, and, to some extent securitarian, let us call it proletariat and precariat (volunteers, translators, police officers, etc.), but we basically had no access to documenting their statements through recording them. On the other hand, the entire humanitarian securitarian management of the camp was largely outside our observational scope, but access to documenting the institutionally verified statements from this aspect was basically easy. Therefore, it could be said that in our case the permission to conduct research in the camp was in fact a permission to enter the camp, but not to freely access all its spaces and structures (cf. e.g. Harrell-Bond and Voutira 2007: 288), in the case of the former, at least not through interviews.

### Participant observation?

Although we did not conduct ethnographic interviews in the narrow sense in the camp, while we were there we participated in a number of communicative interactions of various durations, modes and languages, that were a constituent part of our ethnographic research, i.e. its key segment: participant observation (cf. e.g. Atkinson 2015: 39–41 et passim; Potkonjak 2014: 68–71; Spradley 1980), in the various nuances of its basic articulations (cf. e.g. Hammersley and Atkinson 1995: 99–113). Given the mentioned radically reduced possibilities of longer contact with refugees in transit, our communication primarily consisted of shorter spontaneous verbal exchanges. These included numerous very short or somewhat longer, although mostly only several-minutes long, conversations in English or in a combination of English and nonverbal signs, with several Persian or Arabic words. They were led during the short walk to the platform, at one of the points along the way or on the platform itself, and included exchanging

basic information, on the one hand, where from and where to a person was traveling, with whom, how long they were on the road, and on the other, about the procedure in the camp, the next country or stop along the way, the time it would take the train to get there, etc. We have forgotten the details of many of those conversations, or, more specifically, we remember them only as part of the overall spoken communication, and we remembered some of them, with more or less details, in the form of mental notes (cf. Ottenberg 1991: 144–146) or recorded them in jottings like the following: “Ibrahim and his sister – in front of the toilet. grandfather tells us that their parents were killed.” Dumbfounded at the very fieldnote, today we can only relate it to another fieldnote based on a short conversation, that indicates the extent of the suffering, danger, concern and uncertainty that the people running away from the war had to cope with on their way:

I am carrying a bag for a mom (Iraq) (she is young) – limited English, but enough to get by, holding her son by the hand, he is ill, he was running a fever last night, her husband has been in Germ. since Sept. I ask if they saw the doctor, no, *train, train* (as if they told her that), I tell her that she can stay until the next train, she says – her *family* is with her I say – *family* too can stay *no no* the boy (3–4 years of age) walking next to her, I come closer, he looks as if he’s staring into blank space. on the way to the platform she asks me several times if I think she will be able to get to her husband? *I hope so I hope so.*

This grim and chaotic verbal interaction, chaotically recorded, as a later multilingual, both Croatian and English<sup>14</sup> transcript of dialogic clips combining narration and direct and indirect speech (cf. Emerson et al. 1995: 74–77), but rather than this impeding understanding upon later reading, it rekindles (at least to some extent, like many of our other fieldnotes do in different ways) the chaos and the gravity of the situation that it represents.

Large concentration of speakers of different languages in a way encouraged everyone in the camp, including us, to communicate in a foreign language or completely (or at least partially) nonverbally, which was related to a relatively small number of interpreters hired to work in the camp. We asked for their assistance only when we assessed a situation as “a crisis”, i.e. when it was potentially related to a health issue, separation of

<sup>14</sup> This fieldnote was written in Croatian, with certain English words which are italicized in this translation.

the family or something similar, and when we could not establish at least minimal communication ourselves. Pointing to someone's luggage, rather than, or accompanied by, a verbal offer of help in carrying their things, pointing the way to the train, pointing to parts of the body to refer to clothing items or footwear that someone may need are only some of the examples of communication during transit, where the nonverbal component dominated over the verbal in communication.

Our "conversation" with an elderly man from Afghanistan whom we met in front of a container in the fifth sector is an excellent indication of how great the potential of nonverbal communication was. He shared with us, as we understood it, his frustration with the fact that he was detained in a camp and that he could not exit the small fenced-in space inside the sector, and shared part of his experience on his refugee "trip" before coming to the camp in Slavonski Brod. By combining different sources – what we were told by a police officer standing guard next to the fence, what we later learned from the translator, and our previous information about this sector – we found out, among other things, that our "interlocutor" was a member of a family that, like many other families during transit through the Slavonski Brod camp, was waiting in the enclosed and monitored sector for a member of his family to come back from the hospital in order to continue on their way. Our "interlocutor" "told us" – speaking in a language that we could not understand, but still using several words that we could catch here and there ([Yunan] for Greece), and using his hands and gaze to show the fence in front of him and the area surrounding the camp, the police officer that was "protecting" him, and, particularly, by scrolling on his mobile phone and showing photographs and video clips recorded earlier – that he and his family lived in Greece for a period of time, in an apartment owned by a Greek doctor and his family, that he was a guest there, that he could move freely, and that he was closed up here, without the possibility of moving even around the camp which was closed away from the outer world. The photographs and video recordings on his mobile phone were his travel (refugee) diary, where he finally added our photographs that he took after using a gesture to ask our permission, and this diary helped him, in spite of the language barrier, and with considerable effort, to convey to us what he wanted.

As opposed to communicative situations like the one just described, which we participated in during our entire stay at the camp, some communicative situations were more closely or exclusively related to the phase

when the dominant function of the camp was transit, and others were characteristic of the phase when the camp had an exclusive detention function. Upon the closure of the borders and the termination of transit through the camp, the short communication exchanges on the circular pathway break off completely, whereas other types of direct interactions between volunteers and refugees, because of no access to the closed sectors, did not start for days.

When we, and others in the camp, were given access to these sectors for several hours a day, after the publication of the *Izvešće o sustavnom kršenju ljudskih prava u zatvorenim dijelovima Zimskog prihvatno-tranzitnog centra u Slavonskom Brodu* Report on Systemic Human Rights Violations by the Croatian Authorities in the Closed Parts of the Winter Reception and Transit Centre in Slavonski Brod on 16 March 2016 (Banich et al. 2016b) and a day after “single men” were transferred from one closed sector into another, our communication patterns changed. From then until the closure of the camp, we communicated with a much narrower circle of interlocutors in relation to the transit period, but the communication became more complex with regard to its content and forms. At first it consisted of short conversations which boiled down to the informative level, regarding the conditions of return and detention, the options for leaving the camp and the Croatian and European system of asylum, and later we primarily talked about “everyday topics”, that related not only to our present and past, but also their future life outside the camp in Croatia or elsewhere, which was, at that point in time, completely uncertain.

These conversations generally took place “on the go” on a gravel plateau in front of the tents and containers, but we would also sometimes “visit with the people”, when we were invited for a conversation into one of the containers, or when people would move to provide room for us to sit on one of the benches in the sector. Although our conversations were still mainly fragmented, and based on specific, in the same time mostly both verbal and nonverbal exchanges, multilingual and in a foreign language, all of them – the shorter and the longer once – were generally not single-time affairs. Several words exchanged during one visit to the sector were built upon at a next visit, and one interlocutor or group of interlocutors would lead, as is usual, to other interlocutors, and would bring about new acquaintanceships, some of which lived on, and sometimes even deepened, after the closure of the camp. It was these very acquaintanceships – which we had a chance to continue – that indicated how basic our com-

munication in the camp was. For instance, it was months after the closure of the camp, that we learned that, in addition to people excluded from the corridor – those who were returned from Slovenia or detained in Croatia (cf. Banich et al. 2016b), there were also several people detained in the camp, who were previously deported to Slovenia from Austria.

As far as people “on this side” of the ramp are concerned, i.e. the group that we ourselves belonged to, we communicated with them daily during our stay at the camp, but with different intensity and with different focuses, that depended on the dominant function of the camp at the particular point. As far as the members of our group are concerned or volunteers that we established closer relationships with, our communication included longer conversations, and even discussions. Most other conversations, with other volunteers and employees, police officers and others, were short verbal exchanges of information and observations. They were, as is common in ethnographic research (cf. e.g. Hammersley and Atkinson 1996: 126–127), fleeting and related to concrete “everyday” situations in the field, encompassing various levels of life related to working at the camp, from the intimate and subjective to the material, and sometimes, although infrequently, relating to topics outside the camp. For example, after a short conversation with a police officer which revolved around the working conditions in the field, this is what we entered in our notes: “In Vinkovci, there are 25 of them to a room, 4 water boilers, 100 of them, 80 l boiler, he is showering in cold water.”

Sometimes during shorter fleeting conversations with volunteers and employees, we would touch upon controversial subjects about which, we presumed, our interlocutors knew more than we did. We would venture into these conversations with caution, limiting ourselves only to the surface of what was quietly talked about: why certain persons were boarded into railway cars after boarding had been finished and under police escort, whether there were people in the third sector, since when, how many of them, whether there were any children there, who was allowed to go there, etc. Similarly to the situation where we “covertly” recorded the shrieks of the young man who was being forcefully moved from one sector to another when we refrained from talking to other volunteers, in an effort to avoid covertly documenting their comments (cf. e.g. Lugosi 2008: 133), in this case we attempted not to mislead our interlocutors and to make them become informants unconsciously disloyal to their institutions or principles. From today’s point of view, we see that – by working accord-

ing to the ethnographic imperatives not to mislead, endanger or expose the other, and especially one's interlocutor through one's research (cf. e.g. Hammersley and Atkinson 1996: 264–273; Potkonjak 2014: 56) – we had, in a way, superimposed professional ethics to the ethics of solidarity with those whose lives were literally threatened and who were disempowered.

Volunteers and employees, moreover, were frequently uninformed about, or not interested in, broaching controversial or hidden subjects. Because of the automatized humanitarian support that created an environment of professionalism, as well as lack of interest for what went on beyond one's present task (cf. Harrell-Bond 2002), during the transit phase of the camp, the majority of employees and volunteers withdrew from their “workplace” after the train left the camp. After the closure of the borders in March 2016 and the discontinuation of transit, however, because of the very fact that there were no tasks for most of them, it was generally more difficult to ignore the fact that there were hundreds of detained people in the camp that one had no access to. But even then, for some organizations, employees and volunteers, “professionalism” remained the key imperative in camp activities. This is, for example, evident from a comment given at the end of a meeting of non-governmental and other organizations with camp management, when the problem of detention in the camp was explicitly addressed for the first time. This is what our fieldnotes say:

For instance, at the end of the meeting, the representative of Samaritan Purse made a motion from the floor to leave out similar discussions (about the freedom of movement etc.) from common meetings, because they were not of interest to many, as they were there to discuss some specific operational issues. He said that people who were not interested had been biting their nails for the past twenty minutes. Several people nodded their heads in support [...].

Because of the way in which the camp functioned and how work was organized in it, because of organization hierarchy, and because, as was mentioned, we did not want to obtain information at the expense of exposing others, we primarily had to rely on our own observations in the camp, that took on full meaning only in retrospect. For instance, when the first reports about the detainment of refugees in the Slavonski Brod camp were published in late January and in February 2016 (Banich et al. 2016a, Moving Europe 2016), the lights that we had seen in January in the supposedly

empty sectors of the camp and vans that took people and groups of people towards these sectors, rather than unclear fragments, now became signs of growing restrictions along the corridor, and the first clear signal of soon-to-be final closure of borders.

Our fieldwork observations, moreover, were nearly simultaneously complemented by the mentioned direct and indirect exchanges with volunteers of the organization that we volunteered for. As volunteers in the field, we were part of various online communication platforms, including group communication through mobile applications that we used to exchange largely operational information during our stay in the field. These chiefly very brief communication exchanges, which group coordinators used, among other things, as notes to write up daily reports from the field, became relevant research material only later, primarily as a source of chronology for the events and our being in the field. We transferred only few of them into our fieldnotes, notably those that related to a key event or incident, like the following one which came about before our research stay at the camp, in November 2015: “a police officer hit an elderly man, there was a report on whatsapp.”

Moreover, parallel to our stays at the camp, we kept in touch with volunteers and activists outside the camp, some of whom we knew personally, and others only through various social network groups. We placed particular emphasis on communication through social networks, email and mobile phone apps in the final, detention phase of the camp. This communication, in addition to exchanges with volunteers and activists, included mediated exchanges with persons detained in the camp. We were in contact with them during this period even when we were not physically present in the camp, which is common in contemporary research as a way to keep in touch after the researcher leaves the field (cf. e.g. Moran 2016: 71). This type of communication, which is also common in contemporary ethnographic research (cf. Jackson 2016: 43-44), was one of the components of our study. On particular occasions, it had clear participatory elements, as was the case, for instance, when the refugees were being transferred into the center for asylum seekers in Zagreb and the detention in Ježevo (Inicijativa Dobrodošli 2016). In an environment replete with contradictory information, the messages that one of us was exchanging with persons detained in the camp who faced the uncertainty of being moved, were directed at transmitting information (however partial), which were difficult to come by in the camp itself.

During this detention phase of the camp, one of us joined an online group established for the exchange of information about the isolation and detention of people in the Slavonski Brod camp. The group included, among others, people who had never been to the Slavonski Brod camp, but who had relevant information and knowledge about other camps, legislature etc. at their disposal, and people who were in contact with camp detainees or recent detainees. Among the numerous messages exchanged in the group, those which were primarily informative and operational prevailed, and they were of value in understanding the conditions of detention of the refugees in the camp. Those notes that were written and sent directly from the camp, for instance when the closed sectors were opened to the volunteers, were often similar to fieldnotes and jottings that ethnographers write directly in the field, generally in preparation for longer later notes (cf. e.g. Emerson et al. 1995: 30–35). A small part of those was more similar to ethnographic descriptions and contained detailed observations about a single or several events in the camp, e.g. about collective registration of detained refugees after the closure of the borders, which was a way to attempt to seemingly legalize their imprisonment, about the meeting with the camp manager, or about the transfer of “single men” from one sector to another.

Some internal working reports emailed in the first days after the sectors had been open to volunteers, which aimed at providing as much detail as possible to the organization that the volunteers worked for, also had the characteristics of ethnographic description. These reports, in addition to playing a significant role in informing the following group of volunteers, were also important as a tool of harmonizing opinions within the organization, in relation to its immediate activities in the field, and long-term advocacy. These detailed day or half-day reports, which seemed like a way to counterweigh the previous information vacuum concerning the closed sectors, were saturated with observations about people, their destinies and events in the closed sectors, as well as reflections on one’s own position as a person reporting about them.

We archived these field reports, and some of the exchanges in the online groups, both those with volunteers and activists and those with camp detainees, together with our notes, recognizing the research potential for understanding the camp, not only through our own notes and reports, but also through those written by others. Messages and reports that we received from the volunteers in the camp, and that, irrespective of whether we were



at the camp at the time or not, sometimes related to events that we ourselves had not seen, deepened our knowledge about the camp, and included the perspectives and experiences of others into them. With their help, and with the help of messages that we exchanged with persons detained in the camp, we were able to retain a connection with the field after we had physically left it, continuing, in a way “remote” fieldwork (Moran 2016: 66). In other words, they enabled us, even when we were not in the camp, to follow the everyday life of the camp and the key events in it, as well as, as had already been mentioned, and to intensely take part in them, in a way.

All these texts are part of our fieldnote corpus, as currently seen in considerations of ethnographic notes (cf. Jackson 2016: 43–44). This puts into question the generalized definition of fieldnotes as texts that ethnographers write for themselves (Emerson et al. 1995: 44), which is a topic that, like so many other methodological topics touched upon in this paper, could be further extended (cf. e.g. Nardi 2016). We would like to note here that the texts written by others still had a somewhat different status for us as researchers. In addition to those differences related primarily to their potential publishing, they had a special status for us with regard to how we felt about their potential loss. Concern over the possibility of losing one’s own notes, which the ethnographer uses to draw up the final text, and which is, therefore, latently or explicitly present in all ethnographic research in general (cf. e.g. Sanjek 1991: 35–38), took on additional dimensions in the context of our research in the camp. Our concern was deepened by our fear that the loss of fieldnotes would result in exposing the people mentioned in them, as well as the people who wrote some of them, and the fear about the potential and very tangible existential repercussions for all those involved, which was related to the camp environment and the wider securitarian and repressive framework of migration management.

### Reductionism and pluralism

In sum, our research in the Slavonski Brod camp was characterized by both methodological reductionism and methodological pluralism. Certain ethnographic methods, as we have tried to show, boiled down to their bare contours, however, upon taking a step away or combined with other ethnographic methods, they opened and created multiple doorways into the research field. Moreover, our research had many characteristics of

investigative work, evident, for instance, in our techniques of scanning inaccessible spaces, external observation, and the described networking with people who shared our interest in reconstructing events in the camp. In an environment where so much was hidden or inaccessible for various reasons, we continually had to discover the basic stratum of the world that we were studying, which the researchers in other contexts generally reach immediately, and without major difficulty. This is why we could not focus our research attention primarily to the interpretations, personal views and perspectives of other, i.e. on the level that ethnography is primarily concerned with, and we had to base our conclusions on partial, sparse and often mediated insights, which, in some circumstances, were almost the only ones possible in the camp environment, as we have shown above. Still, continued fieldwork based on a diversified ethnographic methodology, and the openness to problematize and question, resulted in a specific perspective, which, we believe, despite its limitations, opens places of difference in relation to the dominant views of what had been very broadly reduced to the common denominator of refugee crisis in Croatia.

Translated by Mateusz-Milan Stanojević

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Emina Bužinkić

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## *Welcome to vs. Welcome Through:* Crisis Mobilization and Solidarity with Refugees in Croatia as a Transit Country

It has been entirely clear since the late 1990s and early 2000s that Croatia is a transit country for most refugees who entered it (cf. e.g. Mavris 2002). Since forced migration in the early 1990s from neighbouring Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as Macedonia and Kosovo, due to civil wars and other war conflicts, when Croatia received and, in most cases, permanently provided for more than half a million refugees (cf. Lalić Novak 2010: 58; Župarić-Iljić 2013), Croatian borders have been gradually becoming less propulsive and more protected. The key factor in that was Croatia's accession to the European Union whose one of the primary objectives (cf. e.g. Kranjec 2013) is to protect EU territory along its external borders from the so-called irregular migration and to prevent a large number of refugees from arriving to safer and more democratic territories, where rigid asylum policies were simultaneously being shaped.

In the making of that rigid and exclusive "protection" system that provides access to only a few, and asylum to even fewer of them,<sup>1</sup> Croatian politics and bureaucracy constructed Croatia's identity as a transit state and modeled an image of refugees as people who do not wish to stay in Croatia. The construction of such an identity indicated a persistent un-

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. statistical data at: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3433488/5285137/KS-SF-07-110-EN.PDF/c95cc2ce-b50c-498e-95fb-cd507ef29e27>, [http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=migr\\_asyappctza&lang=en](http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=migr_asyappctza&lang=en), <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/asylum-and-managed-migration/data> and [www.unhcr.hr](http://www.unhcr.hr).

willingness of the political establishment to prepare and open its own society to inevitable global changes. On the one hand, that unwillingness is practised with regard to refugee issues, and on the other, there is intense pressure on Croatian citizens to emigrate in search of better education, economic and other opportunities.<sup>2</sup> In this overall plan, the Republic of Croatia agrees to its given role in global exclusion and enclosure processes with its daily-political moves, moving away from the ideal of a society of justice and equality.

The global dynamic economic and political power play in which the European Union is an active participant, as is Croatia as its Member State, requires an industry of war and suffering that results in the fleeing of civilian war victims, long-standing displacement and exile.<sup>3</sup> The current state of the world, abundant with war, civil, ethnic and other conflicts, threats of nuclear war, patriarchal and patrimonial violence, economic exploitation and systemic impoverishment practices, climate change and a number of other phenomena, inevitably leads to further refugee movement towards Europe and the Balkan states.

Over the last fifteen years, Croatia has been one of those European countries where people have not arrived with a strong intent to stay (cf. Coleridge 2013; Valenta et al. 2015), their movement has been directed towards more prosperous Western European countries. Those who came to Croatia in the 2000s and sought asylum, and there were only a few thousand compared to the immensely larger number of those who sought asylum<sup>4</sup> in Western and Central European countries, faced Croatia's reluctance to grant asylum and a national integration program which is not systematic nor comprehensive, alongside social exclusivity and xenophobia,<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> According to the Croatian Bureau of Statistics (cf. [http://www.dzs.hr/Hrv\\_Eng/publication/2015/07-01-02\\_01\\_2015.htm](http://www.dzs.hr/Hrv_Eng/publication/2015/07-01-02_01_2015.htm)), 20,858 people moved from Croatia to abroad in 2014, compared to 2005 when 6,012 people left.

<sup>3</sup> The Republic of Croatia takes part in peace missions and operations of NATO, UN and the CSDP (Common Security and Defence Policy), two of which are in Afghanistan and Somalia, countries of origin of numerous refugees in the world and in Croatia. Cf. <http://www.mvep.hr/hr/vanjska-politika/multilateralni-odnosi0/medunarodna-sigurnost/mirovne-misije/>.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. [http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=migr\\_asyappctza&lang=en](http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=migr_asyappctza&lang=en). Cf. UNHCR data ([www.unhcr.hr](http://www.unhcr.hr)) and the Ministry of the Interior data ([www.mup.hr](http://www.mup.hr)).

<sup>5</sup> The first refugee integration policy was adopted only within the document *Akcijski plan za uklanjanje prepreka u ostvarivanju pojedinih prava u području integracije stranaca za razdoblje od 2013. do 2015. godine* (Action Plan for the Removal of Obstacles to the Exer-



as well as manifestations of the restrictive framework for the development of the asylum system under the umbrella of joint European Union projects such as the Common European Asylum System and the Dublin Regulation (cf. e.g. Bužinkić 2010). According to estimates, since the official statistical data is unavailable, almost a third of those who managed to get asylum in Croatia by 2015 left the country in search of better living conditions – work and education opportunities.

The transition and transit factor is the key element of the Croatian political and bureaucratic hand that governs the national-territorial aspect of refugee-migratory movements. That identity and the transition factor are clearly reflected in the infrastructure for the initial refugee reception and care, specifically its limited capacity,<sup>6</sup> as well as in numerous other aspects of the so-called management of migration processes – primarily in rising securitisation or the increase in border surveillance and investments in the so-called security infrastructure, the training of police officers in control and surveillance but not in issues of human rights, trauma or support provision to refugee groups, as well as in the ease with which refugee labels and prejudices were construed in order to justify Croatia's identity as a transit state, and finally in the unlawfulness and immorality of political decisions shaped by transnational political agreements that directly harm human lives, their safety and dignity (cf. e.g. Cobarrubias et al. 2015). All of those elements came to the fore recently when Croatia became one of the points of mass refugee transit on the so-called Balkan route, more precisely, on a formalized corridor through Balkan and Central European countries.

The Balkan route, which is not a new phenomenon but has a “long history marked by successive changes”, was being transformed from the summer of 2015 into a unique formalized corridor that enabled “refugees to cross

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*cise of Particular Rights in the Area of Integration of Foreigners 2013 – 2015*, <https://pravamanjina.gov.hr/integracija-stranaca-u-hrvatsko-drustvo/643>). For examples of violence towards foreigners in that period, cf. “Two new racist attacks in Zagreb”, 8 August 2003, <http://www.vecernji.hr/hrvatska/dva-nova-rasisticka- napada-u-zagrebu-740047>. For examples of local population opposition to building a refugee reception centre, cf. “Locals do not want center for asylum seekers”, 16 April 2014, <http://www.vecernji.hr/hrvatska/mjestani-ne-zele-dom-za-azilate-n752761>. Also cf. Kranjec 2013.

<sup>6</sup> The first reception centre in Šašna Greda consisted of 12 prefabricated houses. In 2006, a second reception centre was opened in Kutina for approximately 80 people. In 2012, a Zagreb reception centre was opened at the former Porin Hotel with the estimated accommodation capacity for 500 people. Unaccompanied minors are placed in the so-called correctional homes together with children with behavioural disorders.

the Balkans from northern Greece to Western Europe in only two to three days in dedicated buses and trains (often without any charge)” (Bez nec et al. 2016: 4; cf. e.g. Mandić 2017). As opposed to earlier forms of transit that took place “illegally”, relied primarily on the resources, social, family and other networks of persons in migration and depended on smuggling “services”, the transit through Croatia that was established in the autumn of 2015 was facilitated and organized by the countries on route with the sole aim of transporting refugees to northern and western borders (originally primarily to Hungary, and then to Slovenia). The transit of approximately six hundred thousand refugees (cf. e.g. Selo Šabić and Borić 2016) that was carried out at the time and organized by Croatian authorities, the police, the army and a myriad of state public and civil services, almost without a single asylum application during the critical months of autumn and winter of 2015/2016 and without improving the infrastructure for quality reception, indicates that political and other structures were entirely focused on keeping transit as the only form of refugee “reception” on the territory of the Republic of Croatia. The questionability of this practice is even greater since that transit took place as part of the proclaimed show of Croatian humanitarianism and quality organization of the so-called refugee wave to the countries where refugees “wanted to go” or to which the Croatian state hastily transported them along the Balkan-European chain.

Despite the fact that the situation in Serbia and Macedonia indicated the eventuality of mass movement along the route at least a year before Croatia became a part of the transit corridor and despite the fact that refugee overcrowding in Greece and parts of Italy warned of a critical political and humanitarian state, as well as the fact that Mediterranean routes were largely blocked by the European Union’s Operation Triton, refugee border crossing in Eastern Mediterranean and resolute movement towards western and northern points of Europe came as a surprise (cf. Kasperek 2016: 1–2). Such a reaction is even more astonishing when one considers that the war in Syria, as the main reason for this movement of people, was in its fourth year at that time and that the neighbouring countries were, as compared to a natural disaster in the media, “flooded” with millions of refugees. Add to that an increasingly deeper destabilisation of Iraq and Afghanistan and the instability of Somali-Sudanese-Eritrean area.<sup>7</sup> In

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<sup>7</sup> These are countries with the highest numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons in the world. Cf. e.g. the documents and overviews provided by UNHCR on their website ([www.unhcr.org](http://www.unhcr.org)).

other words, much of what was happening on the political scene, and partially in the media, as well as on the level of information and experience exchange in international activist networks and other social circles, pointed to a need to prepare for an increased number of arrivals to Croatia, albeit with justified reservations due to the fact that Croatia is not part of the Schengen Area, which would significantly hinder or slow down movement towards the Schengen Area which the refugees entered through the Serbia-Hungary border until then.

From the beginning of the so-called massive inflow of refugees to Croatia in the second half of September 2015 until border closure in March 2016, Croatia had established a discourse of an organized and generous country that, in line with the initial responses of the high level state officials, provided transit for all those who sought safety in Western Europe.<sup>8</sup> Croatia established the discourse of a country that handled the refugee crisis well and deepened that problematic discourse with the narrative that, as a country of reception and transit, it bears the crisis at the expense of its own security, capacity and budget. Throughout this period, from the opening to the closing of the borders, the practice of transit was a clear representation of a political goal, or the activity of political institutions and their subordinate services on whose good will and “welcoming” attitude hundreds of thousands of people depended. In that context, “welcome to” was boiled down to “welcome through” and the culture of welcoming people to the country was transformed into a culture of welcoming them to pass through.<sup>9</sup>

### Organizing in crisis: establishing the Welcome! Initiative

Croatia engaged in direct organization of mass transit on 15 September 2015. On that day, three activists from the Centre of Peace Studies, in-

<sup>8</sup> Cf. e.g. Ranko Ostojić, HRT1, *Otvoreno*, 15 September 2015, <https://vijesti.hrt.hr/298887/otvoreno-hoce-li-rijeka-izbjeglica-skrenuti-prema-hrvatskoj>; M. G. “Everything is under control”, 21 October 2015, <http://dnevnik.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/izbjeglice-ranko-ostojic-situacija-s-izbjeglicama-je-pod-kontrolom---413253.html>.

<sup>9</sup> The term “welcome through” was created at a meeting of activist and trade union groups from Croatia and Slovenia held in Pula in October 2015. The aim of the meeting was to connect and coordinate the public-political and direct work with refugees carried out by civil societies of those two countries. During the meeting, the attendees held a press conference *Appeal to the Governments of the Region – Strengthen the Voice for a Solidary and Open Europe*.

cluding the author of this text, attended a meeting of civil society organizations, intergovernmental and international organizations held by the Ministry of the Interior. The then Minister Ranko Ostojić announced a potential crisis mobilisation of the army and the police if the “refugee wave” reaches Croatia and the organizations present at the meeting were asked to organize humanitarian aid at the planned transit points and camps coordinated by the Red Cross. The next day, the first group of several hundred refugees entered the territory of Tovarnik through the official border crossing and the green border. The following day, activists from the Centre for Peace Studies went there in order to assess the situation and organize humanitarian aid in cooperation with other organizations. The situation was clearly worrying and required the creation of different forms of work and approach than those we developed and applied until then.

Our work up to that point, alongside public advocacy for quality asylum and integration policies, included providing direct support in the integration of several dozens of refugees and was focused on raising public awareness and educating target social groups on refugee issues, social solidarity and the effectiveness of the legal and judicial apparatus. However, in the area of Tovarnik we were faced with a situation and scenes the likes of which we had not seen even during war in Croatia. This sharpened our senses and understanding of human needs, rules and freedoms, support and solidarity and motivated us to more strongly criticize global political arenas of bloodshed and bargaining with human lives on the one hand and to call for solidarity and resistance to cruelty, bureaucratization and repression of refugees on the other. Upon returning from Tovarnik and faced with the arrival of numerous refugees to Zagreb, to train and bus stations and other public spaces, we established the Welcome! Initiative / Inicijativa Dobrodošli!. Relying on the experience, knowledge and networks developed as part of previous citizen mobilisation in various campaigns,<sup>10</sup> work in this area, primarily in the field of finding volunteers who have supported refugees for over ten years,<sup>11</sup> we appealed to individuals, sympathetic groups and civil initiatives with which we previously

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<sup>10</sup> The Centre for Peace Studies had been a coorganiser and cofounder of numerous initiatives such as “Enough wars!”, “Not in My Name”, “Referendum on NATO” and others. More information is available at [www.cms.hr](http://www.cms.hr).

<sup>11</sup> Since 2013, the Centre for Peace Studies has been conducting a Croatian language course for asylum seekers in reception centres. In later years, it introduced legal aid and other forms of support that enable intensive meetings with asylum seekers.

cooperated or which expressed interest for solidary, humanitarian and political support while awaiting the redirection of the route to Croatia and the arrival of refugees.

Dear readers,

First and foremost, we would like to thank everyone who contacted us in the past days and weeks regarding the refugee crisis and offered support and ideas. After all of the stimulative conversations, responses to our calls and the encouraging action held on Saturday at Europe Square with messages “Refugees Welcome!” and “Open the Borders!” and after examining the entire situation with the humanitarian refugee crisis in Europe and the Middle East, we feel it is time to organize a larger meeting of interested parties.

We want to exchange information and ideas, and form a broader civil platform for:

- Humanitarian and other types of support for refugees,
- Activist and advocacy responses to state and EU policy, and
- A sensitization campaign.

The meeting will be held on Friday, 18 September, from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. at the Human Rights House hall (Selska 112c, Zagreb).

Please confirm your attendance by sending an e-mail to [cms@cms.hr](mailto:cms@cms.hr).

In solidarity,  
the Centre for Peace Studies.

An e-invitation sent on 16 September 2015 by activists of the Centre for Peace Studies

The meeting was attended by more than 120 people and it enabled the exchange of key information, as well as the consolidation and organization of a humanitarian support group on two largest “fields” (Zagreb and the surrounding area towards the Croatia-Slovenia border and the “east” field, the area of Tovarnik and Opatovac, as well as in other border areas to the east that were created over time, such as Bapska, Strošinci and finally Slavonski Brod as the location of the Winter Reception and Transit Centre), and the establishment of a public-advocacy group that brought together people from different fields and with different profiles of public activity. In the context of uncertainty with regard to future events and with the experience of other countries on the route such as Greece, Serbia and somewhat Hungary, whose capitals became gathering places for refugees on the route, we assumed that a similar situation would occur in Croatia’s capital, so we also established a work group whose task was to advocate for establishing a Direct Refugee Support Centre in Zagreb.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Letters asking for immediate establishment of the Direct Support Centre were sent to the City of Zagreb, the Ministry of the Interior and the State Agency for State Property Management.

Group for Direct Work and Humanitarian Aid (volunteer organisation for work on two fields and legal aid)  
Group for Establishing a Direct Refugee Support Centre  
Activist Group  
Advocacy Group  
Media Group

The work groups of the Welcome! Initiative according to the minutes of the initial meeting held on 18 September 2015

Other Initiative groups were formed at the meeting: an activist group for organising public actions and mobilising citizens and a media group for working on ethical and dignified media representation of refugees and objective informing. In addition to that, we appointed coordinators for each of those groups tasked with fast and efficient organisation of work. The coordinators of those groups, together with several interest contributors, formed the crisis coordination of the Welcome! Initiative. The coordination centre was at the office of the Centre for Peace Studies whose activists, along with those from other organisations such as the Right to the City (Pravo na grad and BRID and those not associated with a certain organisation, actively responded to the needs of refugees and of a large network of volunteers in the field, for several months on a daily and almost entire-day basis, and proactively built the Initiative's public communication in the given socio-political context. The Initiative's coordination changed with time depending on the changes in context. For example, at the beginning of 2016 and simultaneously with the reduced number of refugees entering Croatia and transit that was slowed down and eventually ended with the closure of borders and the Slavonski Brod camp, it was extended to include members from other civil society organisations such as the Green Action activists or independent intellectuals, journalists and activists who had experience working with refugees in camps and elsewhere. With that, the coordination strengthened its capacity for political analysis and sharper public communication.

Immediately after the meeting, we established a central base of contacts which was updated on a daily basis with names of volunteers, carriers, humanitarian aid providers, translators, journalists, experts in various areas and the like. In the first week, we build a Welcome! Initiative website ([welcome.cms.hr](http://welcome.cms.hr)), and the Initiative began the use the Facebook page *Dear Refugees: Welcome to Croatia*, in agreement and cooperation with the citizens who started it. We also established internal communication channels (e-mail lists) for each of the groups individually and a shared e-mail list as the central place for sharing information on the overall daily situation.

## Mobilisation and calls for solidarity with the refugees

The Welcome! Initiative built the foundations of its action on three objectives: evacuation of war victims from war zones into safe zones, ensuring safe and free passage of refugees to safe countries by air, sea and land and activation of all refugee protection mechanisms based on international humanitarian law. In order to clarify our objective, we published *Nacionalno stajalište u sjeni o politici EU spram izbjegličke krize povodom izvanrednog EU summita (National Standpoint in the Shadows on the EU Policy on the Refugee Crisis in the Wake of an Extraordinary EU Summit)* on 23 September 2015 in which we highlighted a clear discrepancy between Croatia's obligations in relation to EU law and international humanitarian law and its practices as part of the so-called Balkan route. It was a call for accountability of the Government of the Republic of Croatia as well as other European Union Member States. The standpoint that was created simultaneously with our first shifts at the camp, where we stayed until its closing, summarizes our objectives and requirements very well, as well as mechanisms for their implementation that we predicted and advocated for at the time, which is why they will be extensively presented herein:

The European Union is now faced with the task of designing a system that allows individual Member States to fulfil their obligations under international refugee law and primarily enables every refugee to be accepted in an EU Member State in which there is a family tie or, as far as possible, social and cultural tie, with utmost respect for personal dignity and all other internationally or regionally guaranteed human rights. [...] We call upon all EU Member States to **take responsibility and support the initiative to activate more effective and humane mechanisms of refugee crisis management at EU level** with mechanisms available under the European system of law and in accordance with the principles of international humanitarian law and human rights protection. The EU must address these issues by adopting a series of measures that, as a whole, address the short- and long-term challenges faced by the EU and its Member States. [...] In this sense, the EU must ensure the implementation of the following mechanisms: Emergency measures:

The EU must ensure **safe and protected air, land and sea corridors** to the refugee's destinations in order to reduce violations of refugee rights and the number of deaths that occur on a daily basis when moving on land, and particularly on sea. **In order to minimise the number of local humanitarian crises, safe corridors should be set up both on the route to the EU and within the Union.**

The EU must **initiate negotiations with international subjects** in order to establish secure corridors to its borders. The EU must also remind the UN and the Security Council of their basic peace-keeping mission and call for the activation of all available mechanisms for **proclaiming an international humanitarian crisis**. Coordinated action is the only systematic response to mass refugee flows whose end is nowhere in sight due to unresolved and complex causes behind the crisis.

The EU must also initiate and systematise other mechanisms whose purpose is safe passage to the European Union. **The abandonment or at least suspension of visa regimes** for a certain period and in relation to certain countries of origin of a large number of refugees would reduce the need for radical solutions forced on people, primarily perilous journeys to safe destinations. A significant obstacle for safe passage is also **the threat of sanctions against carriers**, which should be abolished. Private carriers may be punished if they transport a person without travel documents – or a visa, if necessary – unless it is subsequently established that the person needs international protection. Since carriers cannot, nor would it be appropriate for them to, assess the need for international protection, they often refuse to transport a refugee under threat of sanctions. Finally, the EU must **establish a mechanism for coordinating humanitarian evacuation**. It should be noted that humanitarian evacuation is a mechanism that the EU has used several times in order to rescue its citizens or third country nationals from areas of conflict.

**Member States must opt out of specific and unilateral border closure policies** that result in humanitarian disaster in outer EU Member States and countries bordering the EU and in continuing violations of the non-refoulement and family unity principles.

The Member States should suspend the application of the Dublin Regulation that is **not applicable to major refugee crises** and directly apply international humanitarian law, UN conventions for the protection of human rights and the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. The Dublin Regulation, originally conceived as a mere stop on the road to a common asylum system, is now transformed into a key obstacle to providing effective protection. The EU should take responsibility for effective protection throughout its territory and, if the Dublin Regulation prevents it, take measures to suspend it. [...]

In the event of a lack of solution that would involve a more just relocation and safe routes for refugees, **Member States should propose to the European Commission the activation of temporary protection mechanisms** in such a way that any **person coming from a conflict-affected**



**area** is automatically granted protection against violence, human trafficking and existential threats. The European Union and its Member States bear responsibility for previous failure to implement the aforementioned mechanism, whose role is precisely to regulate such situations of mass refugee influx with the aim of providing protection, safeguarding the dignity of the refugees and achieving the principle of solidarity.<sup>13</sup>

From today's point of view, all of these requests stress the necessity of activating all protection mechanisms arising out of international humanitarian law, and international practice of non-compliance with that framework clearly shows a complete deterioration of humanitarian law internationally and in the European Union, or the European-Balkan area which became a space of legal uncertainty *par excellence*. For example, temporary protection of Syrian refugees was never seen as a possible formal decision in any country on the so-called Balkan route nor in the European Union, despite obvious conditions for activating that mechanism being present. On the other hand, temporary protection is only minimal protection that does not guarantee long-term refugee safety nor the possibility of their integration. Additionally, transit was never set up as a humanitarian corridor with formal-legal foundation which would ultimately enable refugees to cross legally and access the asylum system. On the contrary, the corridor was set up under pressure of a large number of refugees, shaped as a space of crisis and extraordinary circumstances, temporary suspension of law and European Union regulations (such as the Dublin Regulation) which were applicable until then. With the awareness that all of the demands and goals we advocated for were being deeply neglected and pushed to political margins, we were determined to act critically and with solidarity, linking our strengths and capacities in Croatia with those on the international level.

The central message of our public work, activisms, advocacy and media work and the work on providing direct support to refugees who were passing or staying, was a welcoming message, expressed also during the *long summer of migration*, when mass movement did not yet affect Croatia.<sup>14</sup> The message was based on the potential for self-reflection on personal refugee experience that many Initiative members had or on

<sup>13</sup> Available at: [http://cms.hr/system/article\\_document/doc/201/Nacionalno\\_stajali\\_te\\_u\\_sjeni\\_o\\_politici\\_EU\\_spram\\_izbjegli\\_ke\\_krize.pdf](http://cms.hr/system/article_document/doc/201/Nacionalno_stajali_te_u_sjeni_o_politici_EU_spram_izbjegli_ke_krize.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> Cf. e.g. Matija Mraković and Tea Vidović, "We are expecting welcoming of refugees", 31 August 2015, <http://www.kulturpunkt.hr/content/ocekujemo-dobrodoslicu-izbjeglicama>.

the collective experience of war and fleeing in Croatia, as well as on the understanding of exile as an extremely complex and vulnerable state that requires human attention and solidarity. Welcome, as a key message of our mobilisation strategy, was embedded in the very name of the Initiative that brought together more than four hundred volunteers who, as mentioned above, provided humanitarian aid (occasionally other types of support – organising transport, legal aid, psychosocial support) day in and day out on the border of Croatia and Slovenia, in various places in Zagreb, on the border between Croatia and Serbia or eastern locations of first entry in the area of Tovarnik, Bapska, Strošinci and in camps in Opatovac and Slavonski Brod.<sup>15</sup> In addition to that, the central e-mail list through which we shared information included several hundred journalists and social activists who used it as a source of information and built new channels for sharing knowledge and welcoming messages. The “welcome” message was very important to us as counterbalance for the state proclaimed and implemented fast and efficient transit, or transit without “unnecessary” stay on Croatian territory.

From the very beginning, the work of the Welcome! Initiative had a very clear task of creating a counter-discourse to the “refugee crisis”. The dominant public representation of forced refugeehood in 2015 boiled down to an image of a wave or an invasion of a huge number of people who create chaos and crisis in European countries, even though it was known that only a small number of refugees even managed to reach Europe (cf. e.g. New Keywords Collective 2016: 21–25). Then as well as now, most of the refugees were in Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Egypt,<sup>16</sup> and many died or drowned crossing the Mediterranean.<sup>17</sup> The Welcome! Initiative focused on providing quality and objective information on the situation in the countries of origin, raising public awareness and the awareness of political structures on the moral and legal responsibility of the Republic of

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<sup>15</sup> The Opatovac camp was operational from 20 September 2015 until the opening of the Winter Reception and Transit Center in Slavonski Brod on 3 November 2015. On 13 April 2016, the last refugees left the Slavonski Brod camp.

<sup>16</sup> Compare data and assessments available on websites of international and intergovernmental organizations such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Amnesty International (AI), Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

<sup>17</sup> Cf. e.g. information available on the following platforms: Missing Migrants Project (<https://missingmigrants.iom.int/>), Watch the Med (<http://www.watchthemed.net/>) and Alarm Phone (<https://alarmphone.org/en/>).

Croatia and EU Member States towards refugees who come to these territories and the need to face their own political and administrative unwillingness to actually accommodate refugees, along with the rising fascism in European states in recent years which is responsible for growing xenophobia, racism and various forms of violence. In relation to that, Europe had to face its own management crisis, as well as its crisis of solidarity among its political and social ranks.

By connecting the term “refugee crisis” with other ones created since the autumn of 2015 until today, the Initiative continues to warn of the adverse consequences of constructing a negative image of refugees, or their negative representation in the media. Change of the media representation of refugees from people with difficult person stories to the story that most of them are economic migrants threatening the European labour market or even to their representation as terrorists greatly influenced public perception and caused a decrease in support for refugees in Croatia and other European countries. Therefore, our task of solidary mobilisation through information sharing and other aspects of organized work was extremely complex. Our work was primarily rooted in real time and space with full understanding of the socio-political context and finding quality models and ways of influencing political decisions and changing awareness in society. Numerous Initiative releases were created in such an environment. I hereby present the one sent to the heads of state in Croatia and Slovenia on 23 October 2015 ahead of their urgent meeting where we expected them to make specific political decisions such as an agreement on the transit and reception of refugees or an agreement on activating international protection mechanisms. The agreement on transit was made,<sup>18</sup> but the temporary protection measure was never activated despite the appeals of civil societies across the European Union.

**Appeal to the Governments of the Region:  
Strengthen the Voice for a Solidary and Open Europe**

The Welcome! Initiative, which includes more than 60 associations, sent a joint letter with Slovenian and Hungarian activists to Croatian and Slovenian Governments ahead of an urgent meeting of European heads of state on Sunday, 25 October. At a press conference held today (24

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<sup>18</sup> At the meeting, the heads of state agreed on coordination between the states, specifically on the mechanisms for formalising the corridor. The press release from the meeting is available at: [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-15-5904\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-15-5904_en.htm).

October), civil society organisations stated that this meeting is key to preventing human tragedies that escalate due to political disputes and lack of coordination among neighbouring states on the so-called Balkan route. Just like volunteers, who give out water, food, blankets, raincoats and, most of all, information and encouragement to the refugees on a number of border and reception points on a daily basis, manage to find strength, they ask the same of government heads – to find strength and determination for a clear political agreement on a common regime of reception and protection for refugees, without “playing hide and seek” with information, registration or opening and closing of borders. Their response on Sunday is crucial in the coming winter months when long hours of waiting in the mud and snow by exhausted people, and most of all children, may result in additional deaths on European soil instead of salvation from war. Therefore, the Welcome! Initiative proposes a specific agreement on monthly regimes of transport, reception and protection of refugees throughout the route, from Greece to Germany, with defined interstate obligations to exchange information on reception and registration and for every service in the field to cooperate, with the obligation to ensure public transportation and prevent people smuggling and other forms of organized crime.

In addition, it is necessary to activate the temporary protection measure in accordance with the EU Directive no. 55/2001 to ensure refugee status faster as long as war conflicts persist. This measure was introduced into European legislation based on experience with the refugee crisis in former Yugoslavia in the 1990s. However, it has not been activated until today, even though the EPP Congress deemed it as necessary in its emergency resolution on the refugee crisis.

Militarisation as a reaction to unarmed people seeking refuge is not only contrary to European values, the founding treaties of the EU and international humanitarian law, but it also an inadequate and illusory response to the current crisis in the EU.<sup>19</sup>

## Mobilisation methodology, tactics and strategies

The Welcome! Initiative used several mobilisation tools, from press conferences, press releases and actions to thematic and regular reports. Regular daily reports, and regular weekly reports after the closing of Slavonski

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<sup>19</sup> Available at: <http://welcome.cms.hr/index.php/hr/2015/10/23/apel-vladama-u-regiji-pojacajte-glas-za-solidarnu-i-otvorenu-europu/>.

Brod camp, were a key tool for mobilising the civil society, volunteers, the media and the public.

Daily reports, which are (sometimes in various forms) distributed across different channels, through the aforementioned Initiative website, e-mail list and Facebook group, reflected the concentration of relevant information in the crisis period that was supplemented by appeals for support and solidarity and included:

- Monitoring the situation at the borders and border areas and projections of refugee needs with messages for volunteer mobilisation,
- Information on the conditions in camps – information obtained in camps by Initiative coordinators and volunteers, reporting on the work of the police, humanitarian workers and volunteers,
- Analysis of political decisions by European leaders and the Croatian Government, military and police conduct along the corridor, specifically discussions of German and Austrian parliaments and executive authorities, European Council and European Commission press releases and other relevant decisions/documents,
- Research into the situation in all countries along the corridor with special monitoring of events in Greece and Turkey,
- Reporting on transnational solidarity actions,
- Monitoring the situation in countries of primary receipt of refugees in the Middle East and in war-affected countries of origin, and
- Other relevant information.

Information was gathered in different ways, through mass and independent media, whether local or national, regional and international, or domestic and international field reporters with whom we had cooperated previously or started to cooperate during the crisis. We also gathered information through transnational activist solidarity networks and through networks of international volunteers who provided aid in all of the countries along the route or corridor, from refugees themselves and refugee collectives throughout the Euro-Mediterranean zone and from domestic and international civil organisations who provided humanitarian aid in the same way as the Centre for Peace Studies / the Welcome! Initiative. We gathered and disseminated information daily, a few times a day in the beginning, then once a day and finally, since the refugee camp was closed, the reports have been published weekly.

Daily reports of the Welcome! Initiative were an important means of informing the media and the public in Croatia, and were often the only daily image of the situation in camps and other points of care and transit. Along with the news published by the association Are You Syrious? called the AYS Daily News Digest, our reports were the only continuous source of critical information sharing that opposed the predominantly one-sided media image and spectacle of border situations and numbers (cf. De Genova 2002; New Keywords Collective 2016: 21–25), the statistics and other official information put out by the Ministry of the Interior, the Government of the Republic of Croatia and others.

Understanding the structure of our readers has strongly influenced the form of our daily and weekly reports and messages. They primarily targeted the public oriented towards solidarity and humanitarian action in the field, the collection and distribution of humanitarian aid and raising awareness, as well as humanitarian aid workers and volunteers from other organisations engaged in camps. Besides humanitarian aid workers and volunteers, they were intended for media professionals, journalists and editors, academia, social workers, civil society, informal initiatives, etc. We expected them to use that shared information to make a proactive step in their domain of work and private life. Realising the breadth and complexity of what was happening before our eyes, we thought that it was important to mobilise people from different fields of expertise, who did not see themselves in providing support in the field or in some other form of action. This also led us to develop diversified approaches and forms, organise conferences for the academia or meeting with the diplomatic corps, public actions for and with the citizens, provide education and workshops for young people, etc.

As already mentioned, reports have changed form and focus over time depending on the dynamics of events. Daily reports, sent several times in a single day, were calls for mobilisation and support, first on border crossings and public points due to the humanitarian catastrophe before our eyes and the need to provide fast and efficient support, and then primarily in camps after the corridor was formed. The weekly reports that were introduced after the camp was closed and which may be considered a result of forced passivation of the situation and the end of transit through Balkan and other European countries, developed the form of mosaic analysis of political circumstances and an overview of the situation. The reports sought to integrate appeals and calls to resist rigid policies. In addition

to that, they were a medium with which we tried to keep the public's attention on the topic that gradually became neglected and forgotten in the media in the context of the general media dictate of reality representation, and which was thus construed as almost non-existent.

#### **The Unbearable Lightness of Humanitarian Disaster**

**People continue to arrive on the one side of the border, while a bottleneck is being formed on the other. The situation is serious and requires strong expression of solidarity and political pressure.**

On the Slovenia-Croatia border, the police and army surround refugees and prevent them from moving for hours on end. They carry weapons. There are tanks in the background and helicopters are circulating above everyone. An atmosphere of fear and tension is created. This atmosphere is present mostly in Rigonce. In Brežice, people are not given water for 24 hours, food for 48 hours, and thousands sleep at temperatures below zero. This is happening while we are writing/reading this report.

Volunteers rarely have access to anyone, which means that refugees are not given water, food or other aid for hours. We recently heard that one of the active official border crossings is going to close. This will create an even bigger bottleneck.

**We invite all of you who are near the borders to venture along them and find out where help is needed.** This is a call for all of you who applied to volunteers in Zagreb and the surrounding area and through the website [welcome.cms.hr](http://welcome.cms.hr). Join some of the Initiative volunteers, as well as volunteers who came from Germany, Austria, the Czech Republic and Switzerland.

Trains mostly arrive at Ključ Brdovečki – border crossing Rigonce. Croatian police in the field called for volunteers to help because they fear there might soon be serious consequences for people and their lives.

There are 600–700 people in Bapska and many more near Berkasovo. People continue to arrive, they are taken to camp for registration and then placed on trains and buses headed for Slovenia. It seems that some of the people are taken from Bapska directly to Tovarnik by the police.

We expect up to 9,000 people today.

**Today, we have 227,157 reasons to once again STRONGLY CRITICISE THE EUROPEAN UNION AND GOVERNMENTS OF CROATIA, SLOVENIA, HUNGARY and others for such treatment of refugees – the unbearable lightness of deepening the humanitarian disaster and the lack of response in refugee protection.**

This is the number of refugees that entered Croatia so far.

An example of a daily report. Report distributed on 23 October 2015 via the e-mail list as a call for mobilisation

An example of a daily report distributed on 20 December 2015 via the e-mail list:

**Balkan Express**

Dear readers,

During the last 24 hours, three trains carrying a total of 3,276 refugees entered Croatia. Our volunteers provided the usual aid. It was observed that the trains were overcrowded far beyond the standard. People were pushed together in inhumane conditions and begged volunteers to intervene. Given that the responsibility for that is transferred to the shift commander at the Ministry of the Interior and the decision on the number of wagons is made somewhere else, it was impossible to influence such decisions, and people were left in a desperate state within overcrowded trains.

Transit is still carried out at incredible speed, which can have a very detrimental effect on the health of hypothermic children and parents, especially mothers who have no time to [...] even briefly relax and take care of the children in such a short time.

Volunteers also observed cases of police insensitivity to family separation before entering the train, all for the purpose of express transport.

At the same time, there are continued protests against policies that led to Croatia and Slovenia being divided not only by border but by wire. Two border protests were held – one peaceful protest in Primorje-Gorski Kotar County by local leaders, citizens and hunters from both Croatian and Slovenian Side at the border crossing Lipa-Novokračine and another procession along the river Kupa on the Slovenian side called “The Fence Must Fall”. The protest was organized by the local community and approximately 300 people attended. The international network of associations for environmental protection Alpe Adria Green with headquarters in Slovenian Jesenice submitted a criminal complaint to the Slovenian State Prosecutor’s Office against the Slovenian Government for installing the wire fence!

Enclosed are photographs from today’s protest along the river Kupa as well as from yesterday’s protest Against the Wire that was held simultaneously on both sides.

With solidarity from Slavonski Brod [...].<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Cf. <https://www.facebook.com/CentarzaMirovneStudije/photos/a.361396390621670.86895.163908197037158/936843329743637/>.



The form of the Welcome! Initiative report shows both the general and specific public communication strategies and tactics that were used. The overall public communication of the Initiative was not only informative.

In addition to the aforementioned and illustrated mobilisation role, it also had an interventionist role. The intervention tool has consistently worked to prevent the spread of disinformation and associated expected social panic, to dispel myths and prejudices on refugees and to reduce the social distance between Croatian citizens and refugees. The media representation of refugees, which was changeable at the expense of refugees but also the consumers of construed information, largely dictated the strategies and tactics of public communication and mobilisation across our regular virtual channels. The general strategy of balancing the public and media portrayal of refugees, but also of informing on Government and EU policies meant that we had to develop microtactics for our approach on a daily basis, sometimes even several times a day. For example, press conferences in front of camps in Opatovac and Slovanski Brod, immediately next to the space with the refugees, or as close as we were allowed, provided an image of safety and lack of fear of transmissible diseases or other dangers that were often associated with the image of refugees. After the sudden announcement of racial segregation, with the term racial exclusion interpreted as defined by Étienne Balibar (1991), or the so-called profiling that was introduced on 18 November 2015 and that led to the exclusion of all those who do not come from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan (those from Afghanistan were also excluded from February 2016), we responded with a press conference held at the Croatia-Slovenia border crossing Harmica-Rigonce. The press conference was held next to the track of the train that carried refugees to Slovenia daily, often several times a day.<sup>21</sup>

Other decisions or events affected the choice of microtactics in all of our means of public communication – decisions on opening or closing the borders seven months later, on opening transit camps, on introducing the aforementioned profiling, the wire on the Hungary-Croatia and Slovenia-Croatia border as well as decision on forced returns and detention of refugees or the agreement between the European Union and Turkey. We were also strongly influenced by events outside of Croatia, in other European countries, such as the terrorist attacks in Paris or sexual

<sup>21</sup> Cf. <http://welcome.cms.hr/index.php/hr/2015/11/20/prolaz-samo-za-odabrane/>.

assaults in Cologne and other German cities to which we were morally and politically obliged to react by condemning such acts but also by deconstructing the image of a refugee as an unquestionable perpetrator. In our public communication, we also tried to respond to hyper-politicisation of the refugee crisis whose subtext was a call to stop further movement of refugees in such large numbers. In opposition to that, we consistently emphasised the broader and deeper political context of decisions made by political structures and decision-makers in the humanitarian crisis of unimaginable proportions, under unpredictable conditions, as exemplified in the Initiative press release of 10 February 2016:

**A Safe Corridor for Refugees Should Not Be an Excuse  
for Racial Profiling**

Following yesterday's announcement by the Minister of the Interior Vlaho Orepić on the introduction of a new regime of transporting refugees by train from Macedonia to Austria, the Welcome! Initiative would like to remind that we must ensure protected and safe corridors for refugees by air, land and sea to their desired destinations in order to reduce human rights violations and the number of deaths that occur daily in the EU.

The aforementioned refugee transport may be a good approach for people directly threatened by war, but the Welcome! Initiative would like to remind that people who seek international protection for other reasons, such as political persecution, do not currently have access to the system of international protection. The procedure of seeking international protection is individual and every person who has the need to seek asylum must have access to that process, and their destiny cannot be arbitrarily assessed within a discriminatory system of racial profiling. Therefore, the authorities must also ensure access to the system of international protection for persons not originating from Syria, Iraq or Afghanistan, as well as safe and legal ways for all those people who wish to find safety in the European Union. Otherwise, such decisions contribute to stronger fortification of EU borders and are subject to equally arbitrary decisions to reduce the number of people allowed and to completely close the corridor. As a society, we cannot allow all the responsibility for this humanitarian crisis to fall on two countries, Austria and Germany, and for the consequence of taking on this responsibility to be increasingly frequent deportation and unnecessary detention of people solely on the basis of their country of origin. The Initiative invites the governments of other countries to accept people who seek safety and protection, under the principle of solidarity.

By establishing a safe corridor for refugees, the duration of this uncertain route will be considerably shortened, but it is also necessary to create dignified conditions in trains used to transport refugees to their destinations. The Welcome! Initiative requires and expects for governments to ensure humanitarian aid, the presence of doctors and medical assistance in wagons, as well as access for volunteers from specialized organisations that provide support to vulnerable groups, and to provide a space for mothers with children, pregnant women, nursing mothers, as well as for people with disabilities. When transporting refugees, the number of passenger spaces in trains should also be taken into account and the governments should provide a sufficient number of trains in order to avoid exceeding their capacity. In addition, in places where police officers and locomotives will rotate, the governments should provide booths with organisations, volunteers, self-organized groups and infrastructure where refugees will receive any necessary urgent support.<sup>22</sup>

### **In the background of crisis mobilisation: towards a conclusion**

The Welcome! Initiative daily reports were, therefore, not merely a collection of gathered information. They were also an expression of deep involvement in all aspects of the Initiative's work and immediate work in camps and other refugee support points. Despite having been made under pressure and quickly, we approached them with a sense of great responsibility, aware of our own goals and the need for broad mobilisation that is based in genuine solidarity and resistance to shameful political decisions.

The Welcome! Initiative reports were created in different spaces and contexts, in a freezing container in one of the two transit camps or on the meadows around Bregana, a Slovenia-Croatia border crossing, on the one hand, and in an office space at the Centre for Peace Studies specifically intended for this Initiative on the other. The coordination of the Welcome! Initiative together with volunteers gathered and sent the most varied information and insights into the situation at several parallel locations in Croatia, with constant exchange of insights with activists, associates and journalists throughout the corridor. The Initiative's coordination had continuous internal audio and textual channels (via mobile apps, etc.) that

<sup>22</sup> Available at: <http://welcome.cms.hr/index.php/hr/2016/02/10/siguran-koridor-za-izbjeglice-ne-smije-bit-i-izlika-za-rasnu-profilaciju/>.

were open twenty-four hours a day, with all of the other existing phone and virtual channels. Information was regularly transmitted directly from the field or almost simultaneously with events, decisions and procedures to which it referred, and it was the basis for both short- and long-term tactics for engagement. Such intense communication contributed to the creation of a highly cohesive group whose communication day after day lasted for months. Given that the coordination was comprised of a relatively large number of people in a clearly demanding and new situation, the differences and contributions of individuals that were visible in ways of public communication, the style of writing reports and defining individual actions were highlighted. The Initiative did not have one standardized form of public communication but encouraged pluralism of public “outings”. For this reason, daily reports were sometimes longer, sometimes shorter, they mostly contained political messages, but were sometimes published without them, etc.

Looking back, it was certainly a crisis coordination whose work was highly challenging and demanding, with constant awareness and focus on maintaining a cohesive and solidary coordination group that communicated consciously and assertively to each other, but also on maintaining a broad network of volunteers, colleagues and supporters. The situation at the time demanded high levels of concentration and speed, as well as constant readiness to publicly communicate through reports and other means of public communication that opened up the media space. Those media appearances sometimes led to citizen responses in solidarity, but also verbal and physical threats.

Given the high motivation to respond to the needs of refugees and to call for political responsibility, we also faced numerous other difficulties in this crisis. Crisis work brought on a difficult emotional experience, heavy burden and fatigue, and numerous frustrations with the political establishment in Croatia and abroad, and condemnation of that establishment. These states were not always sufficiently recognized, but they certainly influences the conscious or unconscious choice of tactics for public communication, as well as the manner of phrasing the reports. Difficult emotional experiences, such as dealing with the lack of food or water for hundreds and thousands in need, or of blankets and warm pads in tents, or with pushing a wheelchair on gravel without the help of police officers who followed the line of refugees from the entrance to Opatovac camp to the sector with tents, or with finding children sitting or lying in mud on a

cold and rainy nights, or witnessing families being separated on platforms and trains because of the fast pace of transit, and finally dealing with the feeling of helplessness when meeting refugees in detention, to name just a few of the experiences, found their way into our reports. At the same time, those reports were read by humanitarian aid works and volunteers in the camp, as well as employees of the Ministry of the Interior and other institutions present in the camp. This is why we sometimes wrote the reports with caution, making sure that cooperation with the Welcome! Initiative is not revoked in the context of security management rigidity and that we are therefore not denied access to the refugees, preventing us from providing a humanitarian solidary contribution which was the reason for the Initiative's presence in the camp and which, in addition to providing direct support to refugees, also included mediation work with the police officers or translators who showed intolerance and loud superiority. We had our doubts about applauding and praising publicly recognized good practices by the Government because they, according to our estimates, were short-lived or constructed political manipulation (e.g. providing hot beverages for refugees after weeks of requests). We consistently criticised humanitarianism and a depoliticized humanitarian response to a crisis of these proportions aware we were also part of that system that does not provide any guarantee of recovery from humiliation or of equality as opposed to superiority and of new and sincere opportunities for refugees.

Daily information gathering and recording of insights led to a subsequent and unplanned, especially in such crisis conditions, documentary and research work which provides opportunities for deeper insight into the broader aspects of our activity, from evaluation-reflective elements of quality and effectiveness of mobilisation through public communication strategies to coherent connectedness and building of both local and transnational cooperation based on solidarity. Each of these aspects has been partially analysed in this text which largely serves as a call to all active participants to thoroughly and deeply analyse the efforts invested into mobilisation based on solidarity which, I believe, left a lasting mark.

Translated by Nikolina Vujnović

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Katarina Peović Vuković

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## “Refugee Crisis” and the Speech of the Unconscious

### Introduction: the refugees as the “little other”

This article deals with the discursive analysis pertaining to the creation of the image of refugees in the Croatian media, which played an important role in the relatively recent collective identification in the period between the beginning of a larger influx of refugees into Croatia in August 2015, and the closing of the borders in March 2016; namely, the period referred to as “the refugee crisis”.<sup>1</sup> The “crisis” in question manifests itself as an element of expansion of the West/East dichotomy, typical of the Orientalist and Balkanist discourse used in recent history as a discursive tool for conflating Croats with Western Europeans, in opposition to the Balkans, the realm of “the others”. Croatian homogenization in the 1990s was built on the foundations of typical boundary discourse, the *Antemurale Christianitatis*, the last bastion of Europeanness beyond which lay the uncivilised and violent geo-political expanse of the Balkans. This particular geo-political imagery was however characteristic not only of Croatian identification, but also of other national identifications created through internal homogenisation and in opposition to “the others”.

Let us outline this fundamental dichotomy. Milica Bakić-Hayden (1995) uses the term nesting Orientalism to refer to the pattern of how the original dichotomy upon which Orientalism is premised is reproduced – a pattern which indicates that Asia is always “further East” compared to Eastern Europe.<sup>2</sup> Within Eastern Europe as such, this gradation is repro-

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<sup>1</sup> This text is a modified version of a chapter from the book *Marx u digitalnom dobu: dijalektički materijalizam na vratima tehnologije* (Peović Vuković 2016a).

<sup>2</sup> In her famous study *Imagining the Balkans*, the seminal work of the discipline of Balkan Studies, Maria Todorova makes a case against viewing Balkanism as a subspecies of

duced by placing the Balkans as the “Easternmost”. A similar hierarchy is reproduced within the Balkans. Here is how Slavoj Žižek describes the nesting process:

It seems as if there is no definitive answer to the question “Where do the Balkans begin?” – the Balkans are always somewhere else, a little bit more towards the southeast...

For the Serbs, they begin *down there*, in Kosovo or in Bosnia, and they defend the Christian civilization against this Europe's Other; for the Croats, they begin in orthodox, despotical and Byzantine Serbia, against which Croatia safeguards Western democratic values; for Slovenes they begin in Croatia, and we are the last bulwark of the peaceful *Mitteleuropa*; for many Italians and Austrians they begin in Slovenia, the Western outpost of the Slavic hordes; for many Germans, Austria itself, because of its historical links, is already tainted with Balkan corruption and inefficiency; for many Northern Germans, Bavaria, with its Catholic provincial *fair*, it is not free of a Balkan contamination [...].

The enigmatic multiple displacement of the frontier clearly demonstrates that in the case of the Balkans we are dealing not with real geography but with an imaginary cartography which projects on to the real landscape its own shadowy, often disavowed, ideological antagonisms, just as Freud claimed that the localization of the hysteric's conversion symptoms project on to the physical body the map of another, imaginary autonomy (Žižek 2000: 3-4).

In such projections, the gaze ought to move from the object of observation onto the subject in order to detect that the object is but a canvas upon which the subject's unconscious, repressed content is projected.<sup>3</sup>

After the onset of the “refugee crisis” the focus shifted from the differences between Croats and their closest neighbours to the differences between the two civilisations, Christian and Muslim, returning the dichotomy thus into its original setting (Asia vs. Europe). This dichotomy is instituted not only by means of less violent types of discourse, such as Croatia's Europeanisation, liberalisation and similar consensually positive political and

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Orientalism, because “there is a historical and geographic concreteness of the Balkans as opposed to the intangible nature of the Orient” (1997: 9). However, regardless of whether it is “nesting Orientalisms” or “nesting Balkanisms”, Todorova's work serves as a fundamental toolkit for studying the reflexive production of the discourse on the Balkans as both the region and its inhabitants as “the other”.

<sup>3</sup> At the same time, to Europe the Balkans represents its own unconscious, so one can therefore talk of the Balkans as “Europe's Unconscious” (Dolar according to Bijelić 2011).

economic processes, but also through embracing the Western-European brand of xenophobia. This embracing of the Western-European xenophobic discursive repertoire, as we shall soon see, also implies the origin of the dichotomy's instituting process – the imaginary identification with the West, the process of symbolising Western Europe as the fundamental symbolic Other Balkans. Unlike Europe as the Big Other, the refugees assume the role of the “little other”, the imaginary other. This distinction will be further elaborated below, but at this point let us just observe how the refugees, as the “little other”, occupy the same position in the structure of identification that used to be occupied by Serbs, Slovenians, and Bosnians, as well as other nations in Yugoslavia.

This paper introduces an overview of the discursive knowledge, practices and beliefs present in official Croatian media and on the internet during the “refugee crisis”. The period was marked by an increase in xenophobic statements, but also an increase in solidarity, as well as a widely-understood media (as witnessed by, for instance, the Facebook page *Dear Refugees: Welcome to Croatia*) and NGO activism. The latter is particularly important to point out as a way of distancing oneself from some instances of international criticism of Eastern Europe as particularly xenophobic (Horn 2015).

The research used private and public conversations on the internet, Facebook profiles, the Facebook page *Islamist Immigrants are NOT welcome*, Croatian government Facebook page, *Jutarnji list*, Croatian Radio-Television (HRT) and Z1 Television TV programmes, etc. Private Facebook conversations are quoted without including the participants' names. The research used a Facebook profile of an anonymous individual who granted the access to their account for the purpose of this analysis.

### The internet as the public sphere's unconscious

The idea here is to explore the ways of shaping the “crisis” and the images of refugees in the official, institutional, centralised media, as well as on social media. In the statements pertaining to the refugees, there is a clear tendency of “slipping” away from the issues at hand into more peripheral content, where the signifier “refugees” begins to fill with various other elements, such as famine and poverty, the war in Croatia, the Balkans and the Balkanisation of Croatia, the state as a penetrated body, terrorism, filth, and animalism.

What is being followed as the speech about the refugees is more than a simple representation of the real and the given. As with any speech, this too is result of the secondary revision, which, much like with dreams, twists the suppressed content and charges it with new elements. All the while, online media enables a more direct articulation of the unconscious. The internet speech about the refugees appears almost as an authentic speech of the unconscious, defined as the part of the psyche comprising “the repressed contents which have been denied access to the preconscious-conscious system” (Laplanche and Pontalis 1973: 421). Unconscious contents are the contents “strongly cathected by instinctual energy” that “seek to re-enter consciousness”, which can however “only gain access to the system Pcs.-Cs. in compromise-formations after having undergone the distortions of the censorship” (Laplanche and Pontalis 1973: 421). What has been repressed can only appear in the preconscious-conscious system in a revised, “monstrous” form, since it has undergone censorship or the “secondary revision” brought about by repression (*Verdrängung*) (Freud 1982 [1900]: 559). The sphere of the unconscious collective Croatian subjectivity thus belongs to the internet, the space where, due to the loosening of censorship mechanisms, we encounter the domain dubbed by Freud the Id, the dark, inaccessible part of the psyche (Freud 1961 [1940]: 80) providing the Ego with energy.

The ways in which the internet collectivity articulates its phantasms and how they assume the shape of the Id have been dealt with previously (Peović Vuković 2016b). In all the cases it is clear the internet is established as the instinctive field, the site of release for the invasive instinctual cathexis, the invested energy attached to an idea or to a group of ideas (Laplanche and Pontalis 1973: 64). Freud’s term *Besetzung*, cathexis, charge, refers to an economic concept as it is defined in psychoanalysis: the fact that a certain amount of psychical energy is attached to an idea or to a group of ideas, to a part of the body, to an object, etc. Cathexis is invested energy (Laplanche and Pontalis 1973: 64). Because of censorship, in the conscious state this energy is largely repressed, however loosening inhibitions causes it to become discharged. Much like muscle relaxation is a prerequisite for sleep, so is communication without secondary revision only possible in the moments of “relaxed” uncensored communication on the internet. For this reason, internet communication can be viewed as a version of simple narrative forms such as associations, slips, and dreams, which to Freud were the royal road (*Via regia*) into the unconscious (Freud

1982 [1900]: 577). The reason it is so is that decentralised horizontal communication does present itself as a convenient space for free associations. The internet resembles a psychoanalytical session where the patient is able to speak freely, and the analyst listens without interrupting.

Numerous authors argue for the “distributive communication” on the internet being far less susceptible to censorship (Castells 2000, 2003, 2010; Galloway 2006; Poster 1995; Rheingold 1993; Turkle 1995), but it bears noting that this communication is also less susceptible to auto-censorship. In the first instance, the term “censorship” is used in the sense of intermediation and media filtering which the internet lacks. There is no “gatekeeping” on the internet, as some media theorists have remarked. Paul Levinson, for example, writes about the “rusted gatekeepers” (1999: 119–131), pointing to the loosening of control and editorial placement of news into the media. The other meaning of censorship is that of the secondary revision in the psychological process of speech formation. With regard to the centralised communication of institutional media such as newspapers, television, or the radio, internet communication is positioned between the public and the private, which makes it a polygon for incursion of uncensored communication.

Several examples from this research point to the politicians’ statements reported in centralised institutional media (newspapers, television, radio) having undergone significant revision, while the speech used on social media is closer to the instinctual segment of the psyche as opposed to the rationally inhibited end of the psychic channel as outlined by Freud in his first topography 1961 [1940]: 85). In this paper, we have selected certain themes pointing to “junction points”, common utterances appearing in many versions suggesting a common source. There are – without attempting to present this as an exhaustive list – seven such junction points: “remembering our war”, the social question – “us vs. them”, “the return to the Balkans”, terrorism, “the state as a penetrated body”, filth and animalism. Within the frameworks of each one of them it can be observed that the utterances subjected to stronger revision were broadcast, as a rule, in centralised media, while those closer to the unconscious speech all appeared on the internet.

What the research shows is that, in Freudian terms, the manifest content (a wide subject matter gathered around the signifier “refugees”) is the result of latent repressed content that has undergone various revisions and therefore representative of what Freud (1982 [1900]) calls “the dream-work”. It is therefore necessary to study the methods of revision and their

action. As with dream analysis, the aim of this analysis is to draw attention to the difference between the manifest and latent contents – not in order to simply reveal the “hidden” dimension, but, as Freud remarks, in order to reveal the difference itself. Despite the unconscious always being present in the form of the manifest content, it is difficult to understand how the distortion of the latent content occurs in the first place. This bears noting, as there is a widespread understanding of the unconscious as “deeply” hidden and elusive. Although Freud’s first topography (unconscious – conscious – preconscious) is a complex system for “deciphering” the unconscious, it also shows that the unconscious is constantly “talking”.

Condensation and displacement are two of Freud’s best-known dream-work mechanisms, which we will supplement with symbolism, to which Freud also gave particular regard, including a chapter in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1982 [1900]).

## Displacement

One of the most common forms of the dream-work is displacement (Ger. *Verschiebung*), the fact that an idea’s emphasis, interest or intensity is liable to be detached from it and to pass on to other ideas, which were originally of little intensity but which are related to the first idea by a chain of associations (Laplanche and Pontalis 1973: 121). Classic displacement is at work when the speech pertaining to the refugees is randomly replaced by other issues, such as the war in Croatia, hunger and poverty, the Balkans and terrorism. Let us start in provisional order.

### Theme one: “remembering our war”

The war in Croatia is a theme illustrating classic displacement, where it is clear that the war itself is of little significance for the content (the refugees), but it appears as an idea charged with instinctual cathexis. In the dominant discourse, despite being replete with debateable moments and points of contention, the war presents a locus of powerful positive emotions, the feelings of pride, spite, hope, and often also conflict, which in this case is not negative. The very thorniness of this issue and insisting on upholding a positive image fills this discursive matrix with the energy it requires to link

the unlinkable. An individual's Facebook profile thus reads: "It was the same in the nineties when we had to defend our country... Now we are defending our country once again."<sup>4</sup> Antagonism is clearly communicated in this statement – cathexis is linked to an event otherwise unrelated to the contemporary "refugee crisis", but it bursts through linking itself to the issue at hand. It is not completely clear how "it" can be "the same" if we consider the reality which shows, clearly, that the war in question is not taking place on the territory of Croatia, but of the distant Syria and other countries; that the refugees are not Croats but Syrians, Afghans, Iraqis and others.

On the other hand, politicians' statements demonstrate a more complex secondary revision of the same invested force and source. The statement made by the Croatian politician Željka Markić, for instance, displays similar "slipping" towards the theme of the war in Croatia. The link to the repressed content is not so clear, and the reasons for the displacement are more skilfully disguised:

Exactly this Croatian experience – our personal experience of exile and welcoming refugees under circumstances much graver than those the United Kingdom, France, the Netherlands or Germany are currently under – is what enables us to clearly tell what is going on today.<sup>5</sup>

Although the relationship between the displacement and exile in the past (during the war in Croatia) and today (affecting Syrians, Afghans, Iranians and others) is unclear, it is seemingly rationally supported – through logistical skills, the experience of tragedy, rationality relating to war, etc. Yet the actual investment is disguising its source in this statement – the powerful energy drawn from the memory of the war in Croatia. Markić similarly claims the circumstances of the war in Croatia to have been more challenging than the situation in the United Kingdom, France, or the Netherlands – thus achieving complete displacement. Symptomatically, what the statement omits is e.g. Syria, where the war is actually taking place and where numerous refugees are from, thereby refusing to afford the Syrian refugees the pathos reserved exclusively for Croats who suffered war trauma in the

<sup>4</sup> The texts found on the internet are reported in original if they are in English or in a translation but in a form as close to the original as possible, including misspells and with an indication of the emoticons used in the conversation.

<sup>5</sup> "Željka Markić pisala Milanoviću: 'Među izbjeglicama ima terorista, prihvatilišta moraju biti izvan EU, te u arapskim zemljama'", 7 September 2015, <http://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/zeljka-markic-pisala-milanovicu-medu-izbjeglicama-ima-i-terorista-prihvatilista-moraju-biti-izvan-eu-te-u-arapskim-zemljama/297949/>.

relatively recent past. Any chance for drawing a possible and logical parallel between the Croats and the Syrians, for example, which would necessitate a real comparison of casualties, devastation, the scope of conflict, factions involved in the conflict etc. is thus removed and evaded.<sup>6</sup>

### Theme two: the social question – “us vs. them”

the second group of displacement, which is a classic form of dream revision in the dream-work, places the emphasis on the dichotomy wealth/poverty. The refugees are discursively modelled as excessively rich, while the question of attitude towards them is posed antagonistically – “us versus them”. Such statements on social media are more directly connected to the unconscious. Here are several quotations expressing intolerance using this key:

- Mobile phones... Google maps... Who pays their roaming fees (personal Facebook profile);
- And then they’re the poor ones... hungry and barefoot. Give me a break! (personal Facebook profile);
- SDP has emptied several thousand Croatian houses... the ‘PATRIOTIC COALITION’ will fill them with arabs! Sad. (*Islamist Immigrants are NOT welcome* Facebook group).

A slightly longer elaboration of the same complex was offered by none other than a Croatian Red Cross volunteer on his personal Facebook profile:

Currently the border looks like Jakuševac [a neighbourhood in Zagreb, the site of the city’s largest landfill, as well as a flea market], i.e. stands with clothes, food and drinks, on one side of the stands the volunteers, on the other the migrants checking out what they like and what fits them, [*grin emoticon*]. The gang is now lying around the tents, blankets and camp beds, chilling like they’re at the beach (don’t get me wrong, they did walk from Turkey to Bregana after all).

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<sup>6</sup> Another example to be singled out within this group can merely be speculated upon, namely the date listed by the *Islamist Immigrants are NOT welcome* Facebook group as the date it was allegedly established – 8 April, 1992. Since such date is clearly imaginary, one must wonder why this particular falsification? The date is indeed symbolic, hence one can assume it was chosen as the date of the foundation of the Croatian Defense Assembly (Hrvatsko vijeće obrane), a Croatian military formation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The link here, too, remains vague unless one considers the instinctual energy related to the event.



Vulgarisms on the internet often link the unconscious to the idea in a more direct way. This is especially salient in phrasing the same metaphor in two different ways on the Croatian Government's Facebook pages. Bureaucratic vocabulary ("border measures", "defensive reaction", "migrant flow") versus vulgarisms ("we'll be screwed", etc.). A Government official explains the reasons for closing the border to a Facebook user broaching the question thus:

Mario, our border measure is a reaction defending national interests and controlling the migrant flow. Regards.  
(Official FB page of the Government of the Republic of Croatia; answering the question why the Prime Minister closed the borders)

Although this statement is closer to a form of secondary revision which will be dealt with later (condensation) and thematically part of the "state as a penetrated body" theme, it is listed here because it is the answer to the statement of a Facebook user whose description of the situation is closer to the social question theme. In this case the "official" statement is the one implying the metaphor of the state as a penetrated body and connoting the threat of penetration, thus linking the idea of borders to penetrable spots on the body, while the user's comment dealt with the social question:

Well be screwed,as far as I can see in the foreign media we are filling to capacity and when full well be the refugee camp of the EU. Of course you are familiar with that but you are misleading your people. The proof is the Hungarians raising a fence against us and the announcement by the austrian minister that she has a list of illegals they will return to Croatia.I don't understand why were playing Mother Theresa while our people are also hungry. (Comment on the official FB page of the Government of Croatia)

### Theme three: "the return to the Balkans"

One of the statements representative for the relationship between the refugees and the Balkans as two seemingly unrelated signifiers was made by the then opposition politician Tomislav Karamarko:

The Dublin Regulation is being violated, as well as various other EU regulations on immigration. This way Croatia has opened its borders to the Balkans while closing them to the EU. God forbid should there be an epi-

demic. At the same time, local people are in fear. Life here is paralysed so it is uncertain whether children will continue going to school.<sup>7</sup>

Much like with Željka Markić, the vague and illogical link, disguised by the apparent rationality of a statement which had undergone secondary revision, points to inconsistencies. Compared to similar statements, this one has also undergone a powerful secondary revision. Karamarko's statement about the Balkans is factually inaccurate, since Croatia had been criticised precisely for opening its borders, not closing them to the West. The then Prime Minister Zoran Milanović was facing criticism by right-wing politicians for allowing the refugees to traverse the territory of the Republic of Croatia. Karamarko's statement, however, despite being factually inaccurate, alludes to the traditional dichotomy between the West and the East, the Orientalist paradigm within which the Balkans stands for the uncivilised, violent and backward space placed in opposition to civilised Europe.

#### Theme four: terrorism

The idea of terrorism notably indicates secondary revision in the politicians' statements. The idea of terrorism often appears in the form of free associations with regard to refugees. Željka Markić's statement, for example, attests to an attempt to create a causal relationship between the so-called economic migrants and terrorists:

Among the women, children and old people fleeing death from faraway countries there are also many refugees coming to the European Union for economic reasons or sent by terrorist organisations wreaking havoc in those countries.<sup>8</sup>

The conjunction *or* implies connection (one *or* the other), although this is a free association (there is no connection between economic migrants and terrorists).

<sup>7</sup> "Karamarko in Tovarnik: I came here as somebody who will have to deal with these problems in a few months", 20 September 2015, <http://izbori.jutarnji.hr/karamarko-u-tovarniku-ovdje-sam-dosao-i-kao-čovjek-koji-ce-morati-rješavati-ove-probleme-za-nekoliko-mjeseci/>.

<sup>8</sup> "Željka Markić writes to Milanović: 'There are terrorists among refugees. Camps need to be outside EU, in Arab countries'", 7 September, 2015, <http://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/zeljka-markic-pisala-milanovicu-medu-izbjeglicama-ima-i-terorista-prihvatilista-moraju-bit-i-izvan-eu-te-u-arapskim-zemljama/297949/>, emphasis by K. P. V.

Similarly, Andrija Hebrang's statement aims to construct a pseudo-causal link and disguise its relationship with the repressed content. When asked in a television talk-show if a terrorist act were to happen, who would hypothetically be responsible for it, he said:

I am afraid a number of those people have a purpose. I can say that because I have been in the field and I saw what is going on. There are a lot of Syrians, poor people fleeing war and saving their lives. They are about forty percent. The rest are economic migrants, but several other groups caught my eye because they refused to be photographed. That is symptomatic. You try to take his photo with your phone, he covers his face. If you come to a country asking to be hosted, helped and given transit, why are you hiding your face? (Andrija Hebrang, Z1 television, *Bujica*, 21 September 2015).<sup>9</sup>

The expression *a number of those people*, therefore, connotes terrorists, although the reasons why some refugees might not want to have their photographs taken could be found in a number of other phenomena, such as refusing to provide the reporters with spectacular media material, feelings of vulnerability, women's conservative position, etc.

There is need for a digression here which will be dealt with in the second part of the analysis. In all these statements, a keen eye can spot the intention – in other words, a careful reader can conclude that these kinds of statements have deliberately established a pseudo-connection, and that one is dealing with a premeditated discursive strategy, as opposed to the unconscious penetrating the discourse instinctually, without the speaker's knowledge. Undeniably the politicians quoted here overtly harbour the intentions of discrediting the refugees, and there is no need for granting them clemency through the work of their unconscious, a reading implying their obliviousness to what they are doing. Still, their statements suggest how even such intentions are discursively framed in a monstrous way, bowing to instinct and libidinal energy. In all these cases, we can also talk about a rationally contemplated linking of instincts and political statements about the refugees; none of it will diminish the connection to the unconscious, whether it be the unconscious of those politicians, or of the citizens their statements are aimed at. In a word, even a fabricated unconscious is a certain subject's unconscious. In that case, even if we refuse to absolve the right-wing politics of hate speech, pointing to the

<sup>9</sup> Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aw7Wn5U07PU>.

source of their statements being in the unconscious is capable of explaining the reasons for the effectiveness of that discourse. In spite of what the right-wing discourse is communicating appearing absurd to those who do not support it, there is no denying its success. That success indeed comes as the result of an instinctual investment of unconscious content into the subject matter marked “refugees”.

### Condensation

Another form of censorship, or the dream-work as described by Freud, is condensation (Ger. *Verdichtung*). Condensation is a mechanism wherein “a sole idea represents several associative chains” (Laplanche and Pontalis 1973: 82).

### Theme five: “the state is a penetrated body”

One of the censorships represented in the discourse pertaining to the refugees and the “refugee crisis” was that of “the state as a penetrated body”. The representation of the state as a body is a form of synecdoche, figure where a part (the body) is taken to stand for the whole (the state). A state in peril is discursively constructed through associative chains suggesting the body’s boundaries are penetrable. The result of such censorship (the state as a body consisting of many parts) is much wider than the latent content (the fear of being penetrated).

The corporeal metaphor codes the experience of a nation manifested as a fear of insecure or permeable borders as the equivalent of the fear for one’s own body. Because nations are understood in corporeal terms, their borders are to be secured as orifices and entry points from infiltration and penetration. Such statements were routinely heard from the right-wing politicians and conservatives criticising the government by calling for the defending of national borders and expressing concern over national sovereignty. The statement made by Andrija Hebrang commenting on the situation at the border is well known: “The army should have been placed at the border, to use their bodies against the intrusion”.<sup>10</sup> Condensation is

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Hina, “Hebrang asks himself are some migrants covered political agents. ‘Mlanoć has historical guilt’”, 19 September 2015; <http://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/hr->

also present in the ubiquitous metaphor of the “river of refugees” suggesting overflow and incursion. Corporeal metaphors were, after all, widely popular in the Nazi fantasy of Germany as a physical body, a “substance of flesh and blood” (Koenigsberg 1975: 75).<sup>11</sup>

### Themes six and seven: filth and animalism

The themes of “filth” and “animalism” present a form of condensation suggesting both a direct and a less-direct connection with an unconscious idea. They pertain to the classic dream symbolism as a form of indirect and figurative representation of an unconscious idea, conflict, or desire (Freud 1982 [1900]: 345). Repressed content appears in symbolisations in the form of metaphors, symbols, formulaic expressions. Their ties to folklore, myths, legends, traditions, figures of speech and other forms aside, it bears noting that symbols belong to the collective sphere and there is a “codebook” of sorts (they always mean the same thing, the metaphorical transmission is always the same transmission from the original to the intended meaning). But what Freud takes interest in is how symbols are used as an expression of the unconscious, given they have undergone secondary revision and are not just a common expression in a collective.

Despite disguising its symbolism at first, a statement by Andrija Hebrang about the situation on the ground belongs in this very group:

There is so much litter and rags on the ground I nearly stepped on a child. Now imagine if I had stepped on that child? (Andrija Hebrang, Z1 television, *Bujica*, 21 September 2015).

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vatska/hebrang-se-pita-ima-li-medu-migrantima-ljudi-na-tajnom-politickom-zadatku-milanovic-snosi-povijesnu-krivnju/302296/. After this, his thoughts slip into completely obscure terrain. In a reporting tone reminiscent of travel writing, Hebrang describes: “I am watching two chickens fighting in the backyard. Us urban dwellers rarely get to see that” (cf. Ladislav Tomičić, “Tired but tireless. In fear of Hungarians they are looking for a way through Slovenia”, 20 September 2015, [http://www.novolist.hr/Vijesti/Hrvatska/Umorni-ali-uporni-Zbog-straha-od-Madara-izbjeglice-traze-put-za-Sloveniju?meta\\_refresh=true](http://www.novolist.hr/Vijesti/Hrvatska/Umorni-ali-uporni-Zbog-straha-od-Madara-izbjeglice-traze-put-za-Sloveniju?meta_refresh=true)). These kinds of slips of meaning, the source of which likely remains out of our reach, are still indicative of strong secondary revision due to how obviously and radically they diverge from the issue at hand.

<sup>11</sup> A famous example of a corporeal metaphor, albeit with no penetrative associations, is Hitler’s comparing the loss of the Polish corridor with “a strip of flesh cut from our body” and a national wound “that bleeds continuously, and will continue to bleed till the land is returned to us” (Koenigsberg 1975: 6). Thanks to Antonio Grgić for the reference.

The statement uses filth as a form of symbol which has undergone complete secondary revision. One could interpret it as a criticism of irresponsible organisation; possibly also as critical of the children's parents – yet posed like this, without interpretation, it points to the symbolic character of litter and clutter and stands in counterpoint to the notions of victims, children and their parents. Even on a more abstract level, this image is placed in counterpoint to civilisation itself. The statement moves the emphasis from one idea (victim) to another (filth), which acts as a consequence to the fundamental dichotomy us/them, Asia/Europe. In *Civilisation and Its Discontents*, Freud refers to cleanliness as one of prime requirements of civilisation, standing in firm opposition to dirtiness as barbarous (Freud 2014 [1930]: 3826).

Same intention, albeit with less secondary revision, can be found in the statements on private Facebook profiles, which read: "The border looks like Jakuševac." Facebook pages are visibly unburdened by the secondary revision, unlike the statement by Andrija Hebrang, where the dichotomy civilisation/barbarism is constituted much more cautiously, using the argument of caring for the wellbeing of those simultaneously denounced as filthy ("Imagine if I had stepped on that child?").

Another group of symbols and symbolic representation which also belongs to displacement as a form of the dream-work is animalism. The Facebook group *Islamist Immigrants are NOT welcome* boasts a significant repertoire of animalistic expressions, perhaps the strangest of which is the term "goat fucker", used on the page to refer to Muslims. Private Facebook profiles will often display statements like "They are cattle."

In the case of animalism, the secondary revision introduces us to the active process behind other "revisions", pertaining to the adoption of international racism. Social media are registering the emergence of a paradoxical discourse of supranational racism, which in many cases falls into the aporia of blending the subject and object of hate. The group *Islamist Immigrants are NOT welcome* offers most fertile ground for researching this phenomenon, as the themes and the vocabulary of international racism are readily adopted there. One example is particularly illustrative – it is the image of a mouse with a English caption "born in the horse barn" and the following comment: "If Ahmed is a German, then little mouse below is in fact-a horse". The fact of using English to communicate is symptomatic in itself. What is key, however, is that hate speech is clearly oblivious to its recipient, because otherwise this post would not have appeared in a *Croatian* Facebook group, ignoring the fact that a large number of Croatian

citizens who emigrated are in fact in the mouse's shoes. This kinship between the Middle-Eastern refugees and Croatian economic migrants was overlooked; it is exactly this specific articulation of xenophobia that is rendering the paradox incomprehensible. (An equivalent to this paradox would be an African American member of the Ku Klux Klan.)

This intense process of adopting the vocabulary, rules and themes of Western-European xenophobia is sometimes accompanied by coalitions between the otherwise discursively "warring" parties of Croats, Serbs, and Slovenes. This offers by far the best insight into transformation in the sphere of "nesting Orientalism", as described by Bakić-Hayden, which operates according to the formula "the Balkans are the others". Nowadays that dichotomy is further complicated by the advent of supranational xenophobia which also acts to enable short-term coalitions between opposed groups. For example, in these Facebook groups one can often encounter international support for the cause of hating Muslims. In the *Islamist Immigrants are NOT welcome* group Croats are thus seen displaying solidarity towards the Macedonian police officers beating immigrants at the border, or their Slovenian neighbours erecting a wire fence on the border to Croatia, staying firmly planted within the post-Yugoslav contextual framework. The oddity of that support is hard to miss, especially since soon after such initial show of support there is conflict among the group members themselves, so expressions of solidarity and national conflicts emerge almost in the same breath.

Sticking with literal interpretations of hate speech, the expressions "goat fucker" and "filthy Arab" find their motivation in what the online subjects are repressing and subjecting to powerful secondary revision – the feeling of marginalisation, the "periphery complex", and other problems inherent to those who are themselves in the position of economic and political subalterns. The Balkan nesting syndrome, which aims to topologically place the otherness as far as possible from its Ego, reveals a subject seeking to distance itself from the imaginary identifications ascribed to it by Western Europe: the dirtiness, disorganisation, conflict, corruption, and chaos of the Balkans. What the subjects adopting international xenophobia are unaware of is that their violent gestures are replicating the violence they themselves are victims of. Finally, such blindness is itself indicative of racism's blind spot – hate speech as a matter of self-reflection and constituting one's own unconscious. This is where we conclude the first part of the analysis and move on to the second problem.

## Truth has the structure of a fiction

here we are going to digress a little into the modes of researching the production of discursive images of the other. It is necessary to elaborate on them, as the psychoanalytic discursive analysis method is not self-explanatory, since it does in a way question the problem of truth which is woven into the problem of representation. After all, there is the question of whether the representation of refugees is truthful or not.

Although with Freud psychoanalysis advocates for a “return to truth”, a word which, as Jacques Lacan phrased it, has been “banished from polite society” (Lacan 1966: 405), it is clear that truth is not easily recognised when it appears. The psychoanalytical quest for truth is at the same time an exploration of the concept of truth itself, and its goal is not to separate truth from lie, but to define the format and conditions under which truth appears. What is truly revolutionary is the way in which Freud introduces the joint between truth and knowledge (Lacan 1966: 803). Truth is driven by desire. It is at that joint between desire and knowledge that desire binds itself to the Other’s desire, and it is at this joint that the desire for knowledge resides. We find it impossible to pose the question of the representation of refugees in the media without exploring the status of truth in relation to desire and the Other’s desire as its driving force.

In his early phase Lacan relates desire to the production of signifiers (desire “invests” into production), and will later relate this statement to the imaginary order. In his early, linguistic phase, Lacan brings together truth, the subject and the signifier. “The signifier is what represents a subject for another signifier” (Lacan 1966: 819).

When these insights by Lacan are applied to the question of the discursive representation of the refugees, “the refugees” surfaces as the signifier representing – to Croatians – a subject that is also another signifier, which becomes another signifier’s subject, ad infinitum. This simple chain of signifiers produces subjects. The “other” that springs into shape here is not the other of the symbolic, but of Lacan’s imaginary order, which is a distinction Lacan introduces in his later phase. In his early phase, there is still the chain of production of others, which, using the vocabulary of the later phase, will be referred to as “the little other”.

“refugees” (the signifier) → representing the subject of the signifier  
 “Croats” → representing the subject of the signifier “Europeans” → etc.



This chain is truth as placed within an anti-essentialist framework. The chain is meant to show there is no deep truth about the subject, given that all subjects are merely signifiers, which only become subjects in relation to other signifiers, simultaneously subjects and subjected (as the English language aptly expresses) to the logic of the production of signifiers, the chain structure. We are therefore operating with signifiers such as "refugees", "terrorists", "Westerners", "Easterners", instead of the truth about them.

In his later works Lacan supplements this linguistic scheme with three orders: the Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real. The real is what is, strictly speaking, "unthinkable" (Lacan 1974–1975: 11). The real cannot be represented, for every meaning is the symbolic's other, or, in other words, imaginary. Lacan used mathematical formulas and graphs in order to avoid any symbolic-imaginary representation. This explains the Borromean rings representing the inseparableness of the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real in the constitution of the self.

Language, as a symbolic order, does not operate with meaning. The function of language, as Lacan puts it (1966: 237–322), is not to inform, but to evoke – and to evoke the other's response. What constitutes the Ego is asking. (This definition is, incidentally, almost the opposite of the cognitivist definition after the sender-message-receiver model, which defines communication through answering). The Imaginary, on the other hand, holds everything together. The Imaginary is the third ring. Truth is the Imaginary, or, as Lacan puts it, "truth has the structure of a fiction" (1966: 808). Truth is the product of the unthinkability of the Real, of the production of the Symbolic, and of fictional reflection in the Imaginary. (Here, as with other concepts related to the Real, we are dealing with "negative constitution", which Lacan borrows from Hegel). Precisely because it possesses no essence, the Real induces production. The lack originating from the Real is a form of desire (Fr. *jouissance*) as the other's instinct and shape – on the one hand the little other of the imaginary order, and on the other the symbolic Other.

Finally, Lacan's famous motto "truth is nothing but what knowledge can learn that it knows merely by putting its ignorance to work" (1966: 798) plays a major role in understanding the "truth" about the refugees. Like the unconscious, knowledge will also learn that it "already knows" – in other words, the production of imaginary truth cannot be stopped. The unstopability of unconscious processes needs to be pointed out here as well – the point is not finding the truth hidden behind manifest content,

but noticing that “the thing” is speaking for itself. For this reason, it is best to approach imaginary truths literally and to insist on their literal meaning, because that is the only way how to escape the symbolic interpretations we are inevitably bringing into the analysis.

### The role of the symbolic order

we can return to the primary analysis now. It bears noting that the discursive representation of the refugees is not in the service of a representational act, neither factually, nor through hate speech – it is not in the function of deliberate falsification. Criticism of hate speech (at least the kind popular in the media) often stops at condemning such speech. In criminalist terms, they are “accused” of “deceit”. For example – Muslims are not filthy; they are not false victims or wealthy; it is not true there are terrorists among them, etc. In the example of social reproof within the “us versus them” framework, this criticism of hate speech would stop at criticising the amount of money spent on housing the refugees, or the number of housing units allocated to those eligible for asylum, and so forth.

Yet are such statements not exemplary of “manslaughter” (to stay with the criminalist paradigm), not because the subjects of such utterances are oblivious to their evil intentions (to accuse, insult, punish another), but because they are oblivious to the source of those intentions? The source of hate speech is not found, as the subject of utterance might believe, in some actual danger – posed by the other, the refugee – but in the threat of the imaginary (little) other. The status of the imaginary other, in that sense, is much more complex. “The unconscious is the discourse of the Other,” Lacan writes (1966: 265),<sup>12</sup> for two reasons. First of all, the subjects of utterance are clearly not conscious of their own unconscious. Yet, at the same time, they are subjects determined by the big Other, the symbolic order they are subject to. There is more to be said of the latter complex.

An annotation is in order here. This differentiation should not be taken as amnesty for the subject of utterance (hate speech), much like the cur-

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<sup>12</sup> As Lacan shows in his analysis of Edgar Allan Poe’s “The purloined letter”, the letter in the story does not have a meaning “as such”, but only in context and inter-relation, the letter plays the role of the unconscious subject in the story (Lacan 1966: 11–64). In this analysis, the refugees are the equivalent of the letter in Poe’s story – the unconscious as the discourse of the other.

rent trends of quasi-psychologising violent offenders which refer (including the offenders themselves) to a difficult childhood, cruel parents and economic deprivation. The goal here is to point to the subject's very intention being hidden in a particularly obscene manner. The key question to ask is not why is the subject of utterance insulting the other, but rather who is the subject playing his role for; who is the symbolic master-signifier, the big Other, whom the subject is actually addressing while playing that role? Here we need to distinguish between the little other (the refugees) and the big Other (the symbolic order), following Lacan's distinction (Lacan 1988), as well as Freud's second topography. Lacan identifies the big Other with a) language as structure, b) the symbolic order as the legislative producer of human culture, and c) the Freudian unconscious as redefined by Lacan (Chiesa 2007: 35). In short, Lacan suggests the source of the intention of the subject of utterance residing not in instinct and the unconscious, in fear and discomfort, but in "playing the role" before the symbolic Other. The discourse of the Other traces its origins to the symbolic dimension of authority, the master-signifier (S1 in Lacan's topography). The master-signifier is a paternalistic function (the name of the Father), the signifier fixing all meanings.

The big Other is a variant of Freud's Super-ego domain defined in his second topography which divides the psyche into domains: the Id, the Ego, and the Super-ego. In the second topography the conscious is equated to the Super-ego, the Id to the unconscious, while the subject is finding himself in an even less enviable position (as compared to the first topography) because now he is serving, as Freud phrased it, three harsh masters: "the external world, the Super-ego, and the Id" (1961 [1940]: 84). In Lacan's work there is a version of sorts of Freud's topography (Matijašević 2006: 6), where the symbolic order is identified with the Super-ego domain, and the imaginary order with the Id. Insofar as we have been dealing with the imaginary order and the Id domain in the first part, in the second part we shall be placing the symbolic order and the Super-ego domain in the focus of our interest, in order to enable insight into the source of hate speech.

It is revealed that the formal and informal speeches are subjects in a dialogue with, on the one hand, the Super-ego domain, and, on the other, the unconscious and intuitive part of the psyche represented in the internet's collective unconscious, as well as in individual utterances by the subjects of online communication. Two instances of speech are instituted here, up until now vaguely outlined in some of the examples, especially

in the example of the communication conducted on the Facebook page of the Government of the Republic of Croatia, between Facebook users (FB) and the Croatian Government (CG). The dialogue on this page suggests that not only are online communication forms representative of the speech of the unconscious, but they also contour the symbolic function of the Other. The Government's page is particularly suitable for such readings, because side-by-side with official statements by the officials we see uninhibited messages teeming with symptomatic elements. It is on this very page that one can find a number of counterpointed statements – the official “censored” discourse on the one hand, and the “uncensored” discourse of the internet collective on the other.

– FB user in comment to the Government's praise of the volunteers in the refugee camps: “How wonderful, they got a thankyou notes, they will probably be fired soon!”

Reply by CG: “Leticija, we are sure they appreciate the recognition for the humanity shown, as well as professionalism. Regards!”

– FB user: “Greetings,I would also appreciate Your recognition to finally be recognised as a nurse abroad. I would appreciate that ministry of health finally issues valid certificates for 23000 nurses! Believe me I and my colleagues would be very happy! Thank you”

– FB user: “If we were a state, these hordes would not be walking in. And I am supposed to care about how they are doing, and do they care how we are doing when they are spending our last money left after the criminal privatisation and transition?”

– FB user: “And why did Prime Minister Milanović scream and close the borders if it is so?!?”

– FB user: “Respect to these people.”

Reply by CG: “Zarko, we agree, much respect to them. Regards!”

– FB user: “It's fine while they are taking them in further west but what will happen when they close the borders? Then we'll be fckd. totally”

It would be all too easy to describe the speech on the Web as the speech of people who are desperate, anxious, disappointed, intolerant, and so on. Such “truth” must be supplemented by an insight into the absurdity of the very conversation placed in the context of horizontal communication which still establishes a hierarchy. In this communication there are two active instances to observe – the first domain of the Id identified with the collective subject of the Web, and the other, Super-ego domain (which acts

as the Super-ego domain of the subjects on the Web), which outlines the contours of the master-signifier the subjects are "playing a role" for. The theatrical moment is key, because the subject both introjects the figure of the "Father", but also unconsciously distorts the images and themes in order to conceal or reshape his desire before the symbolic Other. "The law of the father" must be broken, and the subjected subject does not know that the Father knows which way the subject will be breaking the Law. There are also other ways for the Law to be broken, so why is it being broken in this specific way (through hysterical speech and a distortion of the subject matter)? Is the rage of the subjects of the Web directed at the refugees also the rage which showcases the impossibility of a different answer to the questions positioned primarily in the field of political economy?

### "Father, don't you see I'm burning?"

In order to demonstrate who the hysteric subjects on the Web are playing their roles for, a wider digression is needed. This is a dream Freud gives consideration to in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, recounted to him by a patient who had herself heard it in a lecture on dreams (Freud 1982 [1900]: 488):

A father had been watching bedside his child's sick-bed for days and nights on end. After the child had died, he went into the next room to lie down, but left the door open so that he could see from his bedroom into the room in which his child's body was laid out, with tall candles standing round it. An old man had been engaged to keep watch over it, and sat beside the body murmuring prayers. After a few hours' sleep, the father had a dream that *his child was standing besides his bed, caught him by the arm, and whispered reproachfully: 'Father, don't you see I'm burning?'* He woke up, noticed a bright glare of light from the next room, hurried into it and found that the old watchman had dropped off to sleep and that the wrappings and one of the arms of his beloved child's dead body had been burned by a lighted candle that had fallen on them.

In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, it is in connection to this dream that Freud puts forward one of his fundamental theses, namely that "a dream is the fulfilment of a wish" (1982 [1900]: 141). Even a highly traumatic dream, such as this one, represents the fulfilment of some wish. In this terrifying dream the father is dreaming that the child is in fact alive, easing thus the consequences of reality. Freud concludes that this very dream contains all

the characteristics that differentiate dreams from waking life (Freud 1982 [1900]: 490) because, among other things, it points to an effect of surprise present in the dream, which is the result of secondary revision.

Freud derived his dream theory from his earlier research of hysteria, concluding that the same irrational psychical processes dominate the production of dreams (Freud 1900: 567). Those processes also appear in the second phase of the dream-work and take effect after the primary revision (condensation, displacement, symbolism), trying to hide the traces of cathexis. The secondary revision places the dream elements into a coherent sequence. In the case of this dream, the father dreaming of his child being alive revises the dream by introducing criticism – the accusation placing the scene into a seemingly “normal” order of things (the child is dead, the father can communicate with the child, but the child is accusing the father of something). The energetic-mechanic dream formula offered by Freud implies a wish as the “drive” of a dream. A wish is the drive, but it is distorted by the working of the Super-ego domain that leads to the subject feeling guilty, ashamed, insecure. However, it rarely appears in an unmodified form (only children have dreams unmodified by secondary revision). In other words, the (symbolic) Father of the father having the dream is making the subject distort his dream. The otherwise inaccessible unconscious becomes accessible by asking *why* the latent content has ‘assumed’ the form of manifest content (Freud 1982 [1900]: 486), and not whether the dream is true and what it is hiding.

Finally, as cautioned before, the interpretation of dreams cannot merely be a translation from the manifest into the latent content, but needs to be directed at exploring the Super-ego domain, which determines the secondary revision. As hysteria and the dream-work both occur as similar processes, so the interpretation of dreams in the case of the hysterical subjects on the Web can assume the form of the interpretation of a dream. Then it becomes apparent that the representation of the refugees as posing a danger to the national body is but a by-product of the imaginary identification of the subjects affected by the symbolic order (of the Super-ego domain) producing their own “truths”. In simplified terms, there is a figure of the Father who is structuring the wish of the subjects on the Web.

Now we can introduce the second dimension of the interpretation of hate speech. Not only can we notice the presence of distortion in it (expressed as displacement, condensation and symbolism), pointing at the subject’s unconscious, but inside those distortions it is possible to distin-

guish between the primary and secondary revisions, where the Super-ego domain is responsible for the latter. That way, the role of the symbolic order in hate speech is apparent, on both sides – in the centralised as well as decentralised media. On the one hand, the politicians' statements, which, as we have demonstrated, have undergone strong secondary revision, are "counting on" hate speech. Official statements are formulated on the background of hate speech, just as they are taking into account the unspoken dialogue with the subjects of that hate speech. Official speech emerges as a form of disciplining and pacifying the informal language of the subjects on the Web. As such, however, it must not veer too far from hate speech; it must "sow" a sufficient number of signifiers referring to that speech. This is noticeable, for instance, in the explanation of the closing of the borders as a "measure" and "reaction" "in defence" of national interest, and the control of the "migrant flow". (The absurdity of the phrase "migrant flow" is rather indicative, as it points to its origin in the phrase "a river of migrants", which reveals the secondary revision painting the migrants as a natural disaster and a stable temporal intrusion phenomenon, for it is *de facto* composed of two metaphoric expressions – "the flow of time" and "a river of people"). The *measures*, *reactions*, *defences*, and *national interests* suggest the strictness and rigidity of the institutional control of people, so it is clear how a symbolic authority (a Government official) addresses mostly those against allowing the movement of migrants through Croatia, while the same the authorities adopt a completely different discourse when, for example, thanking the volunteers.

The dialogue, on the other hand, is even more interesting. That is the side of the "subjected" subject – the subject on the internet "sowing" hate speech. The subjects on the internet play the hysterical role of a hysteric, insisting on the fear of penetration, the fear of social deprivation, the fear of foreigners, etc., instead of, say, "pure" hate as an *a priori* rejection of the other. At the same time, those themes being "slipped" into, such as social and political issues, are not positioned within the framework of the critique of political economy, but within the "us versus them" Orientalist dichotomy framework. A dialogue between the vulgar subject on the Web and the Government officials on the Facebook page of the Croatian Government is a classical hysterical theatre – between the subjected subject and his Super-ego. Lacan identifies the instance with authoritative power and knowledge, whether it be God, Nature, History, Society, State, Party, Science, or the analyst as "the subject supposed to know", as defined by Lacan in his transfer analysis (Johnston 2013). The Lacanian *subjet sup-*

*posé savoir* is an instance of the Real – non-existent and only ascribed “magical” characteristic by the subjects, yet capable of producing a key shift in the development of the psychoanalytic treatment (Žižek 2008: 183).

This hate speech should not be considered as a simple outburst of rage, or even a defensive reaction of the socially subordinate, but instead as a discourse showcasing the “acting” for and before the symbolic authority of the Super-ego.<sup>13</sup> The real hysterical question, “Father, don’t you see I’m burning?”, formed in Freud’s *The Interpretation of Dreams* suggested the origin of identification in the symbolic order. That question needs to be asked in all the examples from the internet quoted here, because only it reveals the true character of the distortion of the content (the speech about the refugees). That question must be asked in order to notice it is also being asked by the subordinate subjects to their Super-ego. For only when we have asked this question can we answer why the distortion occurs, and we can see how the subjects of communication are hysterical subjects in a powerful transfer relationship characteristic of a hysterical subject and his question: “*Che vuoi?*” – the question asked by the subject to his superior authority, and which actually means “What do you want me to want?” (Žižek 2008). Croatian political space keeps witnessing this hysterical theatre in which both the authorities “pacifying” the subordinated nationalist tendencies and the subjects of utterances – hate speech – themselves are engaged in a constant dialogue with each other.<sup>14</sup>

With this we conclude the analysis of the importance of the symbolic order and the Super-ego function in hate speech and move on to the final, third part of the analysis.

### “Brotherhood and unity”: the other returns the gaze

a completely different dimension of the problem arises once we flip the mirror and direct the psychoanalytic apparatus onto the discursive prac-

<sup>13</sup> This kind of a *passage à l’acte*, and *acting out* as its most common variant, is a constituent part of psychoanalytic therapy (before the onset of transfer) wherein the analyst is supposed to assume the position of authority (“the subject supposed to know”).

<sup>14</sup> This is also the key for reading the ‘Ustashisation’ of Croatian society, particularly in the statements of those right-wing politicians asked for their opinion on the Independent State of Croatia, in order to “once and for all” arrive at an official view of the historical malformation in question. Those statements regularly show reluctance in the form of “I/we condemn all crimes, both left and right”.



tices of the little other, who has now become a subject producing his own imaginary representations. Those messages sometimes transform into a mirror image – a representation produced by the subordinate: the Syrians, Afghans and others in refugee camps and along the roads. The former little other returning the gaze in the mirror is now being positioned as the subject, one who gazes and produces the (imaginary) image of Croatians and Croatia.

Those representational practices did make it into the media, though seldom. Not because the other, the refugees were not given a chance to speak; the news reports did allow the refugees to speak – albeit in English – about their experiences. Yet those experiences were often framed by the dominant discourse. The production of the other's image rarely occurred in a mode that would be marked by conflict or dissonant to the dominant discourse. What is meant by this is not conflict in general, but conflict in the sense of an ideological-hegemonic framework. Still, the media coverage of the refugee transit through Croatia offers a sporadic insight into the discursive strategies of the refugees and their experience of Croatians and others along the so-called Balkan route. One such exceptional moment was a peaceful protest at the Serbian-Hungarian border Horgoš – Rösztke in mid-September 2015 when the refugees were chanting the famous slogan, both in English and in Croatian/Serbian/Bosnian: "Bratstvo i jedinstvo" and "Brotherhood and unity".<sup>15</sup> What could this slogan possibly represent to the refugees, and why would have they, of all the slogans, chosen precisely that one?

Firstly, it signifies a spontaneous understanding of the causes that led to their being held up in no-man's-land area of the border. The slogan functions as a precise diagnosis of the problems that led to their ordeal. There was no reception facility at the border, the refugees were forced to sit on the ground and wait for hours. The respective governments kept shuffling responsibility onto one another, both claiming the other side was to blame for the situation. The Croatian Government sent the refugees by buses to the Hungarian border, signalling to Europe where the problem had occurred, while Serbia (as a country undergoing pre-assessment negotiations for joining the European Union) kept directing the refugees to the Croatian border, conceding to Hungary's ultimatum.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Miodrag Sovulj, "Peaceful protest on a no man's land on Horgos", 17 September 2015, <http://rs.n1info.com/a93212/Vesti/Situacija-na-Horgosu.html>.

This way, although the true “villain” was Hungary, the countries whose borders had just been closed at that moment – Serbia and Croatia – were in the position to really help the refugees by enabling their movement. Conceptually, the refugee problems were borne out of the conflict between countries that used to be friends. Had Croatia and Serbia acted in unison in this case, the refugees could have been protected both logistically, by preventing their unnecessary movement toward the Hungarian border, and politically, by condemning Hungary. The conflicts dividing those two post-Yugoslav countries unfairly became the problems of the third party – the refugees. The refugees thus asked, with this gesture, “where is your brotherhood and unity now?” and “why are you not united now, around this issue?” (On top of this, the *de facto* route the refugees were supposed to traverse was on the motorway between Belgrade and Zagreb, which in the days of Yugoslavia was called “The Brotherhood and Unity Highway”).

At the same time, this gesture possesses a different meaning; it is a reminder of the unity between the Third World countries and Yugoslavia, or its descendants, Croatia and Serbia, at whose borders they were stranded. Both Yugoslavia and Syria had, for instance, participated in the Non-Aligned Movement. The refugees, among which some were educated in Yugoslavia and spoke the language, were able to recollect the Yugoslav slogan, which had back then meant the transgression of the powerful divide between the East and West and the introduction of alternative struggles and issues such as Western imperialism. This gesture can therefore be interpreted in a wider sense as an outcry of the subordinated and oppressed; a call for brotherhood and unity. It is also facilitated by the slogan the refugees had displayed at the border: “Where is the human’s rights”, calling out not only the post-Yugoslav countries, but Europe as a whole. (Incidentally, the English language used here, including the grammatical errors, is indicative of the similarities of those seemingly in opposing parties – the refugees, on one side, and the xenophobes whose statements were analysed in the previous section, on the other).

It is not our intention to glorify the refugees as a subject producing a real image of the other, while the opposite process is characterised by falsification. Indeed, the discursive practices of some of the refugees insisting on particular European countries instead of the security minimum, are marked by a number of problematic instances, indicating imaginary identification and processes marked by the unconscious. Choosing this slogan

however, at this moment the refugees had stepped out of the framework of both their own and the subject's imaginary representation – by asking the us/them question through not asking about us or them, but about the very character of that question's framework.

Did this gesture not, after all, imply the true character of solidarity and unity? Was the moral not the following: that the countries of Western Europe and South-Eastern Europe, which often declare solidarity in public discourse (even right-wing politics will rarely fail to express solidarity with refugees), are at the same time perfectly ready to suspend human rights given the political-economic framework demand it of them? Economy seems "neither good nor bad; it is the place of no value (other than commercial value, and of money as general form of equivalence)", yet it simply "runs more or less well" as "neutral exteriority" (Badiou 2001: 31; cf. Badiou 1993). This leads us to the final conclusions. In the post-socialist era solidarity is one of the foundational maxims of non-governmental organisations and peace-builders in conflicts striving to reconcile the warring parties. Still, it is increasingly more difficult to understand solidarity and unity from the aspect of economic and political struggles. Instead of the political-economic framework, human rights are recognised only from the aspect of de-politicised charity and humanitarianism, and, if they wish to be recognised, must take the shape of abstract humanity and advocacy for human rights, animal rights, and, nowadays not entirely impossible, machines.

As Badiou demonstrates, human rights and ethics are exhausted to the point we might be better off advocating antihumanism, or at least "theoretical antihumanism" (Badiou 2001: 5; cf. Badiou 1993). Considering both these concepts are only "compatible with the self-satisfied egoism of the affluent West" (2001: 7; cf. Badiou 1993), they have lost all meaning. Human rights and humanitarian actions identify human beings with victims not allowed agency and thought. (The refugees are welcome only insofar as they represent the little other – the canvas onto which the West can project its emblems).

In that sense the "refugee crisis" has uncovered the hidden dark side of Western democracies – the fact that borders are not only open for people, but also for capital and goods. Globalisation never was a project of instituting a free flow of people, but a process of brutal enforcement of market values. What the silent protest at the border demonstrated is not related only to the individual struggles of the refugees, but also to the hegemonic consensus of the free market.

We have no space here to delve into the differences in the representational strategies between the Western, Anglo-American media and the Croatian media. But, let it be said that the dominant tone in the American media indicates a suspicious attitude towards the refugees' rationality. In some media the question of why they decide to take such a dangerous journey keeps being repeated as if the dangers on the way are a matter of natural disasters, and not of political-economic reasoning and of laws. This alleged irrationality was hence often displayed with the remark that: "They won't find what they are searching for – the 'heaven on earth'". On the other hand, the statements about, for instance, Syria which appear in the media describe it as no less than a hellhole. Between the heaven on earth and the hellhole stand the journey and a refugee camp.

Returning to the issues of the internet and the "refugee crisis", it is evident that nowhere are the forms of the hegemony of a post-political world more clearly open to interpretation than on the internet. A post-hegemonic world in which, as many have noticed, the Super-ego domain has become ineffective (Kovel 1980; Lasch 1997; Žižek 1999) is the world of the internet as the ideal media materialisation of a hegemonic logic. The Super-ego, which had traditionally been assigned the role of the judge, Father and/or the Law, has now been neutralised by narcissism and pre-Oedipal processes of personality development. In a post-political world, the Father has been overthrown, there is an illusion of no more prohibitions or limitations imposed onto the free subject. Such is the culture advanced in the form of a decentralised network turned into a media manifestation of a political-ideological project allowing every subject the ability to speak (the hegemony of human rights), yet which simultaneously demonstrates those "free subjects" – in Freudian terms – "serving their masters", their Super-ego domains, the symbolic authorities without whom no analysis of hate speech can be complete.

In conclusion, there are three possible levels of analysis of hate speech in the "refugee crisis" period between August 2015 and March 2016. The first is factual, as declarations of hate speech are generally factually inaccurate. The second level would be understanding the unconscious in discursive analysis – the interpretations taking the other/signifier (the refugees) as the subject's unconscious. The third level is that of the symbolic order – a discursive analysis considering the connection between hate speech and symbolic authority. It is only in these three modes that discursive analysis is able to comprehend the ethical question of hate speech, which, apart

from its relation to the little other (the refugees) also suggests the subject's relation to his imaginary (the Ego) and the symbolic Other. In that sense it is demonstrated how hate speech is simultaneously the speech about the impossibility of grasping the framework of one's own identification.

Translated by Julia Veble Mikić

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