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The Everyday Life of a *Homo Sacer*. Enclave Urbanism in Podgorica, Montenegro

Abstract. This article ethnographically follows the everyday life of a *homo sacer*—a young Roma woman who has lived her whole life in a camp for displaced persons. The camp has been built for Roma, Ashkalias, and Balkan Egyptians who in 1999 fled from the violence in Kosovo to Podgorica, the capital of Montenegro. The key aim of the article is to see what happens with the concepts of '*homo sacer*' and 'bare life' when ethnographically engaged in the context of Southeastern Europe. The article argues that ethnographic fieldwork in urban settings reveals in what way a *homo sacer* has an everyday life and a complex sociopolitical existence, and that camps are urban formations that can be related to very different socio-historical and political projects.

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Introduction

Mirela and I ordered tea and apple juice in the 'Mexican pub' in Podgorica, the capital of Montenegro. After a minute, I realized she was visibly nervous. She looked around anxiously and moved restlessly in her chair. I tried to figure out why. We had just submitted her application for a work-ID (*radna knjižica*) to the municipal government—she had asked me to help her with this, and I had happily obliged. Afterwards, I wanted to hear Mirela's perspective on her encounter with the municipal bureaucrats, so I invited her for a drink in a nearby pub. She accepted, partly out of kindness, partly because, as I soon realized, she could not return to the camp on her own. After I had asked several times what was wrong, Mirela replied she was afraid that someone would see her drinking in a pub and then tell everybody in the camp she had low morals (*nizak moral*). This would have ruined her life.

As an 18-year old, unmarried, and childless woman, Mirela did not have a high social position in the Konik camp in Podgorica. Born in 1998, she had spent practically her whole life in this camp for displaced Roma, Ashkalias,

and Balkan Egyptians who, in 1998 and 1999, had fled from the violence in Kosovo to Montenegro.¹ The camp is one of the largest for refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the Balkans. Gender and age hierarchies meant that, as a young woman, her voice did not account for much in family decision making. Yet, her reputation was as good as it could get: Mirela was a fine seamstress, a respectful daughter, and she did not shy away from hard housework. She preferred to keep her reputation this way. A drink in a pub in the town could ruin everything, if the wrong person saw her there. Once I understood this, we quickly finished our drinks, called the taxi, and went back to the Konik camp.

Critical social theory often approaches refugee camps through the framework provided by the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, as places where people are simultaneously excluded from the state and included into the wider political order by virtue of their exclusion.² From the top-down perspective, the Konik camp residents, who have lived in Montenegro for over a decade with no citizenship, no permanent personal documents, and little tangible personal property, may seem to be representatives of ‘bare life’—*homines sacri* (literally, ‘sacred men’). Here, I refer to Agamben’s theory that the paradoxes of the political order of modernity can be expressed in the image of the *homo sacer*—an obscure figure in archaic Roman law who could be killed but not sacrificed. *Homo sacer* presents an illustration of a human life that is ‘included in the juridical order solely in the form of its exclusion (that is, of its capacity to be killed)’.³ Yet, in the course of my research, I learned to see Mirela and other people from the Konik camp as much more than ‘bare life’. People who may appear to be no more than ‘bare life’ from the top-down perspective of critical social theory have a name, everyday routines, family ties, kinship roles, and a social location from the perspective of their communities in the camp. The Konik camp residents had been partially excluded from the juridical and political order of the Montenegrin state for almost two decades, yet they were also immersed into complex sociopolitical relationships within the camp.

¹ Balkan Egyptians present an ethnic minority that gained particular prominence in Kosovo in the mid 1980s, due to their role in the complex system of ethnic quotas in the Yugoslav administration and competition over political power between the largest ethnic groups living in Kosovo, Albanians and Serbs. In 2009, an Ashkali identity was claimed only by 43 internally displaced persons. See Ger Duijzings, *Religion and the Politics of Identity in Kosovo*, London 2000, 132-156; Crna Gora, Ministarstvo za ljudska i manjinska prava, *Strategija za socijalnu inkluziju Roma i Egipćana u Crnoj Gori 2016-2020*, Podgorica 2016, 5, https://ec.europa.eu/epale/sites/epale/files/strategija_za_socijalnu_inkluziju_roma_i_egipcana_2016-2020.docx. All internet sources were accessed on 4 February 2018.

² Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer. Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Stanford/CA 1998.

³ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 8.

The main argument of this article is that ethnographic fieldwork in urban settings allows us to see in what way a *homo sacer* has an everyday life and a complex sociopolitical existence. As Duijzings emphasizes, 'one of the contributions that anthropology can make to urban studies [is]: to ethnographically test—and if necessary correct and reject—the empirically often unsubstantiated claims made by the grand theorists of life in the city'.⁴ Following this direction, my key aim is to see what happens with such philosophical concepts as '*homo sacer*' and 'bare life' when we ethnographically engage with them in Southeastern Europe. Ethnographically following social relations and their changes in the Konik camp reveals that refugee camps do not necessarily produce 'bare life': 'Life goes on in camps—albeit a life that is affected by the camp', as Turner suggests.⁵ This was the case with the Konik camp in Podgorica at the time of my fieldwork. I conducted eight months of ethnographic participant observation in the camp during 2015–2016. The focus of my ethnographic research was on the Red Cross humanitarians who managed the camp, which is why I lived in the town and often travelled to and from the camp with them. I also explored various things that took place within and around the camp: an evangelical proselytizing church, a mosque, NGO programmes for children and of support to welfare applications, a kindergarten, and so forth. I had known several Red Cross workers since my childhood, which is why I was quickly allowed to participate in their daily activities of managing the camp, particularly during distribution of humanitarian aid and the 'family centre' they organized three times a week for the women from the camp. In conducting long-term participant observation, I learned that, during 2015–2016, the Konik camp was not a space of exception where the juridical order of the state was suspended, while law and illegality existed in a zone of indistinction. True, the state institutions were difficult to reach from the Konik camp; however, the camp was not quite beyond governance.

First, the camp—like the whole country—was supervised by the EU. Namely, Montenegro is aiming to join the EU. In 2010, European observers defined the Konik camp as one of seven key priorities Montenegro had to resolve before it could open EU negotiations.⁶ Ever since, the camp has served to indicate the 'level' of Montenegro's 'Europeanness'. Residents of the Konik camp could hardly

⁴ Ger Duijzings, The Bucharest Urban Anthropology and Ethnography Workshop, *Colloquia. Journal of Central European History* 18 (2011), 131–149, 147, <http://hiphi.ubbcluj.ro/isce/numere/2011.html>.

⁵ Simon Turner, What Is a Refugee Camp? Explorations of the Limits and Effects of the Camp, *Journal of Refugee Studies* 29, no. 2 (2016), 139–148, 139, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fev024>.

⁶ European Commission, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council, Commission Opinion on Montenegro's Application for Membership of the European Union, Brussels, 9 November 2010, https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/pdf/key_documents/2010/package/mn_opinion_2010_en.pdf.

be *homines sacri*, if the social, legal, and material organization of their life was used by EU observers as an indicator of the progress of the whole country on its 'way to Europe'. What is more, the camp was its own sociopolitical universe, in which particular subject positions, political claims, and moral selves have become differentiated over time.⁷ For example, living within this sociopolitical universe for a decade and a half, the camp residents had developed a particular image of what 'a home' should look like. It was visualized as a nice-looking house with all the amenities (water, electricity, completely furnished) and enough space to accommodate several generations of the same family. When they discussed the desired materiality of an ideal home, they also criticized the materiality of the camp where they lived: government-provided, standardized metal containers with electricity, but without running water, were nothing like their desired home. Talking about the ideal and actual materialities of home, the displaced were able to express gratitude for the humanitarian aid, as well as resentment of the overall living conditions in displacement. In doing so, the displaced also asserted their voice and their sociopolitical subjectivity.

In order to develop my argument, I first discuss the figure of *homo sacer* in connection with the organization of everyday life in the Konik camp. I then focus on camps, not as epitomizing modern Western politics, but as urban formations that reflect and are related to very different historical and sociopolitical projects. In the final part, I outline how, at the time of my research, the Konik camp was involved in the project of Europeanization of Montenegro.

Who Is a *Homo Sacer*?

Giorgio Agamben differentiates politically qualified life (*bios*) from bare life (*zoe*). While *bios* refers to life bounded by rights and duties shared by citizens as members of a political community, *zoe* refers to nothing but itself, that is the pure biological fact of existence. In Agamben's framework, modernist Western politics 'constitutes itself through an exclusion (which is simultaneously an inclusion) of bare life' from the borders of a polis.⁸ Sovereign power—the power of the state and the power of a ruler—is located precisely in the ability to differentiate political life from bare life, and spaces of regular politics that are governed by the law from spaces of exception where the common juridical order is suspended.

Refugees and refugee camps seem to be paradigmatic examples of Agamben's political theory. This point was made by Prem Kumar Rajaram and Carl

⁷ Ilana Feldman, Humanitarian Care and the Ends of Life. The Politics of Aging and Dying in a Palestinian Refugee Camp, *Cultural Anthropology* 32, no. 1 (2017), 42-67, <https://culanth.org/articles/883-humanitarian-care-and-the-ends-of-life-the>.

⁸ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 7.

Grundy-Warr, who sought 'to understand refugees in detention in Australia, Thailand, and Malaysia as *homines sacri*, bare lives consigned to zones of exemption where the sovereign law ceases to function'.⁹ In their reading, refugees are outside the law, because they are located outside the borders of a national polis—that is, because they do not fit into the family of nations. Rajaram and Grundy-Warr 'seek to imbue particularity into Agamben's sometimes generalizing thought on refugees and politics' and argue that there are "'degrees" of detention and of atrocity within zones of exemption in different geographical and political contexts'.¹⁰ However, in doing so, they retain the figure of *homo sacer* as politically and analytically productive for thinking about the 'levels of innuendo and violence' that refugees often have to endure: 'The refugee as *homo sacer* describes the condition of exclusion that those exempt from the normal sovereignty are subject to.'¹¹

Politically speaking, the figure of *homo sacer* offers an important and powerful tool for thinking about the position of displaced persons vis-à-vis the state. However, this figure seems less helpful for understanding the everyday life of the displaced and the different forms of sovereignty that states enact, if we take a more ethnographical and historical perspective. Magnus Fiskesjö suggests that the figures of 'slave' and 'barbarian' might have provided historically more accurate illustrations of the logic of exclusion and inclusion on which sovereign power is based, because both 'involve the denial of equal membership in society, and a reduction to something less than human, which could then be exploited outside normal law'.¹² Yet, it is the historical familiarity of the concepts of slavery and barbarianism that makes their 'otherness and exclusion from equal political rights' to be seen 'as already justified'. This could be why Agamben turned to the obscure figure of *homo sacer* 'as a heuristic guide meant to reveal the present situation'.¹³ In Fiskesjö's view, *homo sacer* is an 'ahistorical' concept that was already obscure in the Roman texts in which Agamben found it—its main advantage being that it is 'good to think with' about the logics of modern Western politics.

⁹ Prem Kumar Rajaram / Carl Grundy-Warr, The Irregular Migrant as Homo Sacer. Migration and Detention in Australia, Malaysia, and Thailand, *International Migration* 42, no. 1 (2004), 38, DOI: 10.1111/j.0020-7985.2004.00273.x.

¹⁰ Rajaram / Grundy-Warr, The Irregular Migrant as Homo Sacer, 39.

¹¹ Rajaram / Grundy-Warr, The Irregular Migrant as Homo Sacer, 41.

¹² Magnus Fiskesjö, Outlaws, Barbarians, Slaves. Critical Reflections on Agamben's Homo Sacer, *HAU. Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 2, no. 1 (2012), 161-180, 161, <https://doi.org/10.14318/hau2.1.009>.

¹³ Fiskesjö, Outlaws, Barbarians, Slaves, 164.

Ethnography in the Camp. The Everyday Life of a *Homo Sacer*

Mirela told me one day: ‘There is always something to change around here, and yet everything always stays the same.’ Many camp residents expressed a similar sense that things were never quite the same and that, simultaneously, things have never really changed in the camp. In order to understand such claims, we need to grasp what sort of a life the camp residents desired. We also need to know what sorts of changes took place in the camp—particularly in its infrastructure.

Four thousand Roma, Ashkalias, and Balkan Egyptians, comprising a refugee group usually jointly referred to in Montenegrin politics as the ‘RAE population’, had fled from the war in Kosovo and settled in Konik, Podgorica in 1998 and 1999.¹⁴ Humanitarian organizations, including the UNHCR, the Italian *Intersos*, and the US *World Vision*, provided the initial support. The Italian humanitarian organization *Intersos* built a new tent camp in August 1999, consisting of 250 tents that were to serve as temporary shelters for the displaced. *Intersos* also planned the construction of 250 barracks, which was never realized.¹⁵ In December 1999, a heavy storm destroyed the tent camp.¹⁶ A new camp for the displaced was built by the *Intersos* in March 2000. It consisted of forty-one wooden barracks with eight rooms of fifteen square metres each. In the following months, the camp got electricity.¹⁷ There was no running water in the barracks; instead there were four sanitary blocks, with shared toilets, showers, and taps. *Intersos* and *World Vision* managed different parts of the camp until August 2003, when the Montenegrin Red Cross took over with the UNHCR’s financial support. Around 2,500 IDPs lived in the camp during the 2000s, more than 400 families.

Over the next twelve years, various parts of the camp were destroyed in fires. I found data in the Montenegrin media about major fires in 2001, 2007, 2008, 2011, and two fires in 2009, in which two girls lost their lives.¹⁸ The continuous problem was caused by low-quality construction. *Intersos* built ‘objects of a lower standard, in order to solve the urgent problem of accommodation’, the Montenegrin commissar for refugees stated in 2005.¹⁹ Almost three years later,

¹⁴ Montenegro Red Cross, Project Proposal. Educational Support and Social Inclusion for Roma Children and Youth in Montenegro 2013, Podgorica 2012, <https://www.cri.it/flex/fr/C2012/542.pdf>.

¹⁵ Gradnja izbjegličkog kampa, *Pobjeda*, 19 August 1999.

¹⁶ Drama na Vrelima Ribničkim. Nevrijeme uništilo izbjegličko šatorsko naselje u Podgorici, *Pobjeda*, 6 December 1999.

¹⁷ Počelo postavljanje elektro mreže u kampu Konik I. U prvoj fazi samo rasvjeta, *Vijesti*, 18 May 2000.

¹⁸ See for example, Tragedija na Vrelima Ribničkim. Požar usmrtio dvije djevojčice, *Pobjeda*, 19 March 2009.

¹⁹ S. Nonković, Koniku ne prijete epidemija, *Dan*, 23 November 2005.

the main manager of the camp echoed this: 'The nine-year-old barracks housing the displaced Roma were built for a one-time, temporary use. It is normal that they are not functional anymore.'²⁰ Observing how the infrastructure of the camp was increasingly worsening, UNHCR humanitarians argued that their task was to help out with the regular maintenance of the camp: any large-scale improvement of the camp depended on the relevant state authorities.²¹

The sense that things were constantly changing was probably caused by the continuous small-scale repairs in the camp. The living units—their roofs, water and canalization pipes, and electrical network—had mostly been fully replaced several times in the course of seventeen years. The Red Cross had serviced fire extinguishers in the camp several times. They also organized training for the camp residents on what to do to save people and property in the event of a fire. In early 2008, the Red Cross received a grant from the US government to fix and replace damaged roofs. Around 80% of them leaked, and 30% had to be fully replaced.²² Yet, despite continuous repairs to the camp, things had not changed much from the perspective of its residents. The camp had an improvised character from day one—and this has not changed. As long as the displaced from Kosovo lived in a camp whose infrastructure was built as an urgent and temporary answer to the displacement, the problems (including fires) were bound to continue. Things had to be repaired all the time. Yet, the living conditions in the camp did not improve in a way that resonated with the image of a good life of many of my interlocutors—which included permanent apartments or houses with running water and enough living space for all family members.

I learned many of these things from Mirela. I met her during a workshop of the Red Cross 'family centre', where we took a few photographs together, exchanged phone numbers, and quickly established a closer contact. She was born in 1998 in a village close to Peć (Albanian Pejë), Kosovo. Her parents fled to Podgorica soon after she was born, so Mirela has lived practically her whole life in the camp. During my research in 2015-2016, Mirela had a resolved legal status: she had gained Kosovan citizenship and registered herself as a foreigner in Montenegro. Until then, the only personal document Mirela had was a permit issued to the IDPs: camp residents were initially registered as IDPs, because back in 1998-1999 Montenegro and Kosovo were part of the same state, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (*Savezna Republika Jugoslavija*). When Montenegro declared independence in 2006, the camp residents were no longer internally displaced. However, resolving their ambiguous legal status took almost a de-

²⁰ Četiri neuslovna kupatila za 281 porodicu, *Dan*, 23 February 2008.

²¹ Predstavnik UNHCR-a za Crnu Goru Serž Dukas upozorio: Romi na Koniku žive u bijedi, *Dan*, 21 March 2009.

²² SAD će objezbijediti donaciju za sanaciju izbjegličkog naselja u Podgorici. Za popravku krova u kampu na Koniku 28 hiljada dolara, *Pobjeda*, 30 January 2008.

cade. The route offered to camp residents by the Montenegrin institutions to resolve their legal status required applying for citizenship of a neighbouring country, such as Kosovo or Serbia, and then registering as a foreigner in Montenegro—which was precisely what Mirela did.

As long as she was without citizenship, Mirela was, in some sense, a *homo sacer*—a person excluded from the order of the state, the law, and official politics. Yet, in other ways, Mirela led so much more than a ‘bare life’. She vigorously pursued a particular moral self that was made possible by the internal socio-political universe of the camp and, in doing so, she worked towards particular sociopolitical engagements.²³ In the Mexican pub, she felt a clear pressure to leave as quickly as possible. On other occasions, she refused my suggestion to go outside of the camp for a walk around Konik, once again because she did not want people to see her as a person of ‘low morals’. She was not forbidden to leave the camp, as she explained: she asked me to help her apply for the work-ID in order to attend training for hairdressers that her uncle organized in the town. She hoped to get a job as a hairdresser after the training; this would require her to travel regularly between the camp and the town. She was, however, expected not to wander around with friends for leisure. In order to leave the camp premises as such, there had to be a clear purpose, rather than acting as a young woman with too much free time on her hands wandering around the camp for relaxation. By conforming to certain expectations of how a young woman ought to behave, Mirela presented herself as a moral person: hard-working, respectful, and respectable.

Presenting oneself as this moral person was inspired by a particular image of home that was shared by many women in the camp. I regularly attended workshops of the ‘family centre’ run by the Red Cross. During one of the workshops, I asked several women to draw what an ideal home looked like for them. They visualized the ideal home as a house with nice furniture, flowers, and enough room to accommodate several generations of the same family. Such an image of a home was in stark contrast to the metal containers in the camp, with restricted access to water and severely limited living space.

The women’s yearning for a particular kind of a home represented a criticism of their living conditions in the camp’s metal containers. These metal containers had been donated by the Montenegrin government after the 2012 fire. The government decided to obtain used metal containers as a medium-term solution for the accommodation in the camp. The metal containers were, once again, far from what camp residents wanted. Similar to the previous wooden barracks, the metal containers had electricity but no running water. Electricity made it possible for many families in the camp to again use TVs, smart phones, and

²³ James Laidlaw, For an Anthropology of Ethics and Freedom, *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 8, no. 2 (2002), 311-332, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3134477>.

computers with an internet connection. However, with restricted access to water and limited living space, the materiality of the camp shaped family intimacy in ways that did not fully resonate with the camp residents. When discussing home, domesticity, and family intimacy, the displaced women expressed a mixture of gratitude and resentment for the aid they had been given. In doing so, they articulated their sociopolitical subjectivity.

Here, I should specify that I understand politics as an inherent aspect of all social relations, rather than as a separate field of practice: politics refers to a particular redistribution of the ability to live a good life and is, therefore, a dimension of any social encounter.²⁴ As Butler suggests:

‘Even the life stripped of rights is still within the sphere of the political, and is thus not reduced to mere being, but is, more often than not, angered, indignant, rising up and resisting. To be outside established and legitimate political structures is still to be saturated in power relations, and this saturation is the point of departure for a theory of the political that includes dominant and subjugated forms, modes of inclusion and legitimation as well as modes of delegitimation and effacement.’²⁵

During my fieldwork, Mirela and other camp residents did not organize public resistance to the conditions that stripped them of their rights. As a matter of fact, women from the camp never engaged in an overt resistance to the humanitarians, the state, or the EU; it was the men who organized public protests in 2005. Back then, a group of men from the camp protested in front of the UNHCR and OSCE offices in the town. They demanded a number of things, including taking over the management of the camp through their NGOs, claiming funds for the construction of residential buildings, and employment. The humanitarian organizations rejected the demands and quieted the protests, largely because they refused to recognize the protesters as representatives of all the camp residents, and also because they did not trust the experience and accountability of the newly established Roma NGOs.²⁶

If the resistance of women was not overt and organized, the political disposition was still there, expressed in a specific way. By evoking images of their ideal home, the women expressed indignation at their actual living conditions, as well as resentment of the almost two-decade ordeal of camp life. Their yearnings for a proper home illustrate that the camp residents were not just *homines sacri*, not just ‘bare lives’ consigned to a zone of exemption where the sovereign law ceased to function: refugees and IDPs—people who may appear to have nothing

²⁴ Judith Butler, *Precarious Life. The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, London, New York 2004.

²⁵ Judith Butler, *Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street*, *Transversal*. *EIPCP multilingual webjournal*, September 2011, <http://www.eipcp.net/transversal/1011/butler/en>.

²⁶ Optužbe na račun humanitaraca. Ispred kancelarije UNHCR protestovala grupa Roma raseljenih sa Kosova, *Pobjeda*, 1 April 2005. See also Hoće kontrolu novca. Romi i Egipćani sa Kosova nezadovoljni radom UNHCR i OSCE, *Vijesti*, 1 April 2005.

more than bare life—can and do have sociopolitical dispositions, and they can work towards realizing them. Mirela's ideas about what home and family life should look like served as a sociopolitical reflection on life within the camp. By presenting herself as a particular moral entity—hard-working, respectful, and respectable—Mirela also worked on transforming into a reality her visions of home and the good life related to such a moral self. In doing so, she articulated sociopolitical subjectivity. If Mirela seemed to live just a 'bare life' from the perspective of the state while she was without documents, she was simultaneously immersed in sociopolitical relations of kinship, labour, and friendship from the internal perspective of the camp. She negotiated reciprocity and oppression with her environment. She had lived in the condition of simultaneous invisibility (to the Montenegrin state) and full visibility (within the camp) from her birth until she obtained the citizenship of Kosovo and registered herself as a foreigner in Montenegro. In this sense, the problem was not that Mirela's life was 'bare', that is, led outside the social and political structures. The problem was that the ways in which her life *was* sociopolitical had been invisible to the Montenegrin state. The sociopolitical universe of the Konik camp unravelled within many simultaneous separations and connections to the sociopolitical order of the Montenegrin state.

Historicizing Camps

In Agamben's framework, the camp is an epitome of modern Western politics. Camps are spaces where the 'bare life' of the *homo sacer* intersects with a single juridical order of a state: 'The essence of the camp consists in the materialization of the state of exception and in the subsequent creation of a space in which bare life and the juridical rule enter into a threshold of indistinction.'²⁷ Agamben is interested in the logic of the exclusion enacted by the camp, rather than in its particular sociohistorical appearances. Therefore, he suggests that 'we find ourselves virtually in the presence of a camp every time such a structure is created, independent of the kinds of crime that are committed there and whatever its denomination and specific topography'.²⁸ In his view, the same logic of the camp is present in concentration camps, zones designated for asylum seekers at airports, as well as in the 'stadium in Bari into which the Italian police in 1991 provisionally herded all illegal Albanian immigrants before sending them back to their country'.²⁹

Agamben's philosophical account of the camp as the absolute space of exception and biopolitical paradigm of the modern proved to be extremely productive

²⁷ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 143.

²⁸ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 174.

²⁹ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 174.

for social scientific exploration of the injustices of encampment. Yet, the ‘ahistoricity’ of his analysis has also been noted.³⁰ While the general logic of exclusion may be similar in concentration camps, refugee camps, Gypsy camps, asylum zones, and ghettos, it is analytically and politically problematic to conflate them as the same type of historical formation. Urban ethnographic fieldwork contributes to differentiating the actual sociopolitical effects of different camps, or even of the same camp over the years. A brief overview of the historical and anthropological literature demonstrates that different camps are related to very different political projects, including colonialism, humanitarianism, fascism, multiculturalism, and Europeanization.

Towards the end of the Second World War, refugee camps turned the refugee into ‘a knowable, nameable figure and [...] an object of social-scientific knowledge’.³¹ The appearance of the refugee as a sociopolitical category – and of the camps as the main spatial technology for governing them – was made possible through the national order of things: a vision of the world as a family of nation-states.³² Refugees pose a conceptual and practical challenge to such a vision; as people who fled their homeland, they present a ‘matter out of place’ in the national order of things.³³ If refugees are ‘liminal in the categorical order of nation-states’,³⁴ the camp presents a logical technology for managing them. Refugee camps spatially concentrate the displaced in one location; they enable classification, ordering, and the overall administration of people and humanitarian aid alike.

A different logic of governance is present in contemporary camps for displaced people, reflecting changes that have taken place in the humanitarian world since the 1980s. In Elizabeth Dunn’s and Jason Cons’ terms, contemporary refugee and IDP camps are places ruled by ‘aleatory sovereignty’.³⁵ There is no single authority, sovereign, or form of power that has shaped the life of all the camp residents in more or less the same way; rather, life in a camp has been unevenly shaped by ‘the multiple forms of power that abound, compete and overlap [...] and the forms of anxiety that they provoke for both those who are governed and those who seek to govern’.³⁶ The refugee and IDP camps run by humani-

³⁰ See Ernesto Laclau, *Bare Life or Social Indeterminacy?*, in: Matthew Calarco / Steven DeCaroli, eds, *Giorgio Agamben. Sovereignty and Life*, Stanford/CA 2007, 11-22.

³¹ Liisa Malkki, *Purity and Exile. Violence, Memory and National Cosmology among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania*, Chicago 1995, 498.

³² Liisa Malkki, *Refugees and Exile. From ‘Refugee Studies’ to the National Order of Things*, *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995), 495-523, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2155947>.

³³ Liisa Malkki, *National Geographic. The Rooting of Peoples and the Territorialization of National Identity among Scholars and Refugees*, *Cultural Anthropology* 7, no. 1 (1992), 24-45.

³⁴ Malkki, *National Geographic*, 34.

³⁵ Elizabeth C. Dunn / Jason Cons, *Aleatory Sovereignty and the Rule of Sensitive Spaces*, *Antipode* 46, no. 1 (2014), 92-109, DOI: 10.1111/anti.12028.

³⁶ Dunn / Cons, *Aleatory Sovereignty*, 95.

tarian 'mobile sovereignty'³⁷ are not so much a zone of indistinction between 'bare life' and juridical order, as they are a zone of partial governance: a zone of random and aleatory sovereignty in which different forms of order are only sometimes dominant.³⁸

'Gypsy camps' present yet another type of a structure. They emerged in Europe in the 1960s as a specific spatio-racial political technology for governing social heterogeneity. As Picker, Greenfields, and Smith demonstrate, Gypsy camps were regulated by various policies and laws, including the 1968 Caravan Act in the UK and a number of similar legal documents in the Netherlands, France, and Italy.³⁹ The authors further argue that this new type of camp was the result of a combination of the criminalization of sedentarist lifestyles, on the one hand, and an ideology of protection of minority cultural rights, on the other. 'Gypsy camps' began to appear at the peripheries of larger towns in Western European countries, on publicly owned campsites, thanks to governmental assumption 'that itinerants needed a place to stop in order to become incrementally integrated into mainstream society without totally losing their "way of life"'.⁴⁰

The Konik camp provided accommodation for people who are both 'refugees' (or, rather, IDPs) and 'Gypsies' (or, rather Roma, Ashkali, and Balkan Egyptians). However, we should not assume this made it either a space of 'aleatory sovereignty' or a 'Gypsy camp'. Its specific character provides a good illustration of the need to differentiate camps, in order to understand their particular socio-historical and political effects. Firstly, the Konik camp was not a 'Gypsy camp' of the kind Picker, Greenfields, and Smith write about, because Montenegro has no contemporary policies against nomadism. The 19th century anti-nomadic laws in the Balkans contributed to the sedentarism of the Roma.⁴¹ Over a hundred years later, in Montenegro there was no need to transform the peripheries of

³⁷ Mariella Pandolfi, Laboratory of Intervention. The Humanitarian Governance of the Postcommunist Balkan Territories, in: Mary-Jo Del Vecchio Good et al., eds, *Postcolonial Disorders*, Berkeley/CA 2008, 157-188.

³⁸ It seems that the so-called reception centres and transit camps for refugees from Syria and other countries, which mushroomed along the 'Balkan route' in 2015, are also places ruled by chance, ad hoc decision-making, and legal ambiguity. See Tea Škokić / Renata Jambrešić Kirin, The Shopping Center of Abnormal Normality. Ethnography of the Distribution Tent in the Refugee Camp in Slavonski Brod, *Narodna umjetnost* 54, no. 1 (2017), 129-146; and also Marijana Hameršak / Iva Pleše, Winter Reception and Transit Center in the Republic of Croatia. An Ethnographic View of the Slavonski Brod Refugee Camp, *Narodna umjetnost* 54, no. 1 (2017), 101-127.

³⁹ Giovanni Picker / Margaret Greenfields / David Smith, Colonial Refractions. The 'Gypsy Camp' as a Spatio-Racial Political Technology, *City* 19, no. 5 (2015), 741-752, DOI: 10.1080/13604813.2015.1071123.

⁴⁰ Picker / Greenfields / Smith, *Colonial Refractions*, 742.

⁴¹ David Crowe, *A History of the Gypsies of Eastern Europe and Russia*, London 1996.

towns into public campsites for nomadic itinerants, as had been done in Western Europe. The Konik camp was a spati racial political technology for governing social heterogeneity, but this was not related to anti-nomad policies.

Secondly, the Konik camp was a constitutive element of the international supervision of Montenegrin statehood. I refer here to Cowan's notion of 'supervised states', that is, the situation in which international actors become intensely involved in directing and supervising a state's management of internal difference, minority rights, and many other issues.⁴² Various international actors, from humanitarian organizations to the EU, took part in supervising how Montenegro managed the war-time displaced persons from the Yugoslav republics. First, the Konik camp was created and initially managed and financed by the UNHCR, *Intersos*, and *World Vision*. Thus, in its early years, the Konik camp reflected what Pandolfi calls 'humanitarian mobile sovereignty'.⁴³ From the late 2000s, it became a place that served as an indicator of Montenegro's progress in EU integration: in 2010, the European Commission set closing the Konik camp as one of the priorities for the Montenegrin accession negotiations with the EU.⁴⁴ As a space indicating the level of 'Europeanization' of Montenegro, the Konik camp was now *par excellence* a place of politics. Let us take a closer look at this large-scale shift in the character of the Konik camp.

The State, Europe, and the Camp

The residents of the Konik camp were initially registered as IDPs at the Commissariat for Displaced Persons of the Republic of Montenegro. Major international humanitarian organizations managed their survival and wellbeing—*Intersos* and *World Vision*, with UNHCR support. In 2003, the Montenegrin Red Cross took over the management of the camp. The state authorities had little interest in this urban enclave, since they were preoccupied with the impending 2006 referendum on the independence of Montenegro. For instance, in 2005 the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare adopted a 'National Strategy on Durable Solutions for the Refugees and IDPs', but the parliament failed to include the 'internally displaced persons' into any piece of legislature before or after that. As a result, in the mid 2000s the IDPs could not find legal employment: labour-market regulations prescribed procedures of employment only for citizens, foreigners, and refugees. The IDPs were legally invisible. Similarly,

⁴² Jane Cowan, *The Supervised State, Identities. Global Studies in Culture and Power* 14, no. 5 (2007), 545-578, DOI: 10.1080/10702890701662573.

⁴³ Mariella Pandolfi, *Contract of Mutual (In)Difference. Governance and Humanitarian Apparatus in Albania and Kosovo, Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies* 10, no. 1 (2003), 369-381, <http://www.repository.law.indiana.edu/ijgls/vol10/iss1/13>.

⁴⁴ European Stability Initiative (ESI), *Montenegro and the EU*, 4 July 2012, <http://www.esiweb.org/index.php?lang=en&id=526>.

a new healthcare software adopted by the public healthcare system in the mid 2000s did not have built-in features for IDPs. This made it impossible for camp residents to access healthcare through the institutional channels.⁴⁵

These examples clearly indicate that the state was not really absent from the camp, but neither was it evenly and systematically present. Partially blind towards the IDPs, the Montenegrin state executed governmental decisions over certain aspects of life in the Konik camp *and*, simultaneously, refused to see the camp residents as legal subjects, with responsibilities and rights to work or healthcare. When Montenegro gained independence in 2006, the IDPs were in a profoundly ambiguous legal situation: they were not internally displaced anymore, but they also did not fulfil the criteria for Montenegrin citizenship, nor were they offered by the Montenegrin authorities to re-register as refugees.

The situation in the camp changed drastically when the European Commission expressed interest in it. In 2010, it defined the Konik camp as one of seven issues to be resolved before opening accession negotiations with Montenegro. The promise of EU integration had a clear and direct effect on the life of the people in the camp. The Montenegrin authorities, eager to engage in the EU accession process, suddenly started claiming that the camp was to be closed as soon as possible, and developed a number of steps to do so.⁴⁶

The first major step was to adopt, in 2011, a 'Strategy for Durable Solutions of the Displaced and Internally Displaced Persons in Montenegro, with a Specific Focus on the Konik Area'. This enabled opening negotiations with the EU. The 2011 Strategy defined the so-called durable solutions for the legal status of the camp residents. They could either: 1) return voluntarily to their country of origin (Kosovo or Serbia), or 2) register as foreigners in Montenegro.⁴⁷ A small proportion of the camp residents decided to return to Kosovo or Serbia, with the financial and administrative support of the respective governments and humanitarian organizations such as the UNHCR. Those who decided to stay in Montenegro had to re-register as foreigners. In order to do so, the displaced first had to obtain citizenship of neighbouring countries — Kosovo or Serbia. The humanitarian organizations and the governments of the three countries involved mutually cooperated, with the aim to facilitate the citizenship application and subsequent application for the legal status of foreigner in Montenegro. As a re-

⁴⁵ Ministarstvo rada i socijalnog staranja Crne Gore, Nacionalna strategija za trajno rješavanje problema izbjeglica i interno raseljenih lica u Crnoj Gori, Podgorica 2005.

⁴⁶ Ministarstvo rada i socijalnog staranja Crne Gore, Strategija za trajno rješavanje pitanja raseljenih i interno raseljenih lica u Crnoj Gori sa posebnim osvrtom na oblast Konik, Podgorica 2011, <http://www.mrs.gov.me/ResourceManager/FileDownload.aspx?rId=93286&rType=2>. See also Evropska unija, Delegacija Evropske unije u Crnoj Gori, Od EU 1.5 miliona EUR za izbjeglički kamp, Podgorica, 27 January 2011, <http://www.delmece.europa.eu/code/navigate.php?Id=630>.

⁴⁷ Ministarstvo rada i socijalnog staranja Crne Gore, Strategija za trajno rješavanje.

sult, the camp residents slowly started obtaining new personal identification documents proving their status as foreigners. Those who obtained such new personal identification documents have now almost the same rights as the Montenegrin citizens, with the exception of the right to vote.

As a result of their new legal status, the camp residents during my fieldwork usually travelled to the town for work, healthcare, education, and the sorting out of their personal affairs: Mirela's visit to the municipal government to apply for work ID was an example of this. People's journeys to the town were clearly shaped by gender and age. Women rarely worked outside of the camp, so they also seldom left its premises. Children, however, travelled to the public elementary schools every day on special buses that the municipality of Podgorica, the Ministry of Education of Montenegro, and humanitarian organizations had designated for this purpose. Namely, as part of official governmental efforts to integrate the displaced into Montenegrin society, the children from the camp started attending the municipal public schools. This initiative was the product of collaboration between the Red Cross, the UNHCR, the Montenegrin Ministry of Education, and a few other institutions. Transport to the schools throughout the town was organized every day in several shifts, enabling the children from the camp to travel to and from the town without difficulties. Many men also went to the town on a daily basis for work, which usually included informal collecting and reselling of waste and scrap metal, selling used goods at the town's grocery market (*pijaca*), official employment in the city sanitation, and so forth. Several families in the camp owned a car, which provided a way to increase their monthly incomes. Resolving the ambiguities of their legal status enabled the camp residents to travel regularly between the city and the camp, and thus to develop a substantial urban knowledge, the kind of knowledge that 'emerges along iterative yet non-linear trajectories and is actually embedded in the materiality and spatiality of cities and their institutions'.⁴⁸

The second major step that Montenegrin authorities took to improve the life of the camp residents was to build new social housing, to move the camp residents into it, and to dismantle the camp. More than sixteen buildings with ninety apartments were constructed right next to the camp, with the financial support of the European Union. The Montenegrin government and the Podgorica municipality provided the land, while the funding for the construction came from the international 'Regional Housing Programme' and the European Commission.⁴⁹ Four residential buildings were completed in 2015, and camp residents moved into them in early 2016. During 2017, a dozen new buildings

⁴⁸ Campkin / Duijzings, eds, *Engaged Urbanism*, 19.

⁴⁹ The 'Regional Housing Programme in the Western Balkans' is a joint project of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, and Serbia, initiated in 2005 and relaunched in 2010, which aims at the provision of durable housing solutions for refugees and internally displaced

were completed and occupied, while several others are still in the process of construction.⁵⁰ Once all (former) residents of the Konik camp have moved into the new buildings, the camp will be dismantled. During our last phone chat in December 2017, Mirela seemed very pleased with the apartment her family had been assigned. It remains to be seen whether and how much the life in the new buildings will resonate with the former camp residents' vision of a good life.

Conclusion

This article offers an ethnographic account of the Konik camp for the displaced Roma, Ashkalias, and Balkan Egyptians who had fled from Kosovo to Montenegro in 1998 and 1999. It suggests that ethnography in cities allows us to explore in what way broad theoretical concepts from urban studies allow us to understand social transformation in Southeastern Europe. As Ger Duijzings suggests:

'The task of the anthropologist should be first of all to reflect upon the subjective and cultural dimensions of these changes, how they are perceived and understood. People perceive cities and experience urban life differently, and it is important to recognize that their views are coloured by their social and cultural backgrounds (of which they may have several).'⁵¹

This article suggests that the residents of the Konik camp were not *homines sacri*, that is, representatives of 'bare life'. Ethnographic research in the urban enclave demonstrates that the residents of the Konik camp led a thoroughly sociopolitical existence, visible in their kinship and gender relations within the camp, and especially in their criticism of the materialities of the camp. The residents of the camp claimed that things have been changing constantly in the camp over the years, yet somehow a more substantial change had never happened. These claims make sense when we take into account the visions of a good life the camp residents cultivated. The infrastructure of the camp changed many times over the years, that is, things had to be repaired all the time. Yet the discrepancy between the changing living conditions and people's vision of a good life did not decrease over time, which is why people claimed that things in the camp were never permanent, but they also never really changed. Their vision of a good life was grounded in a specific idea of what a home, domesticity, and family intimacy ought to be like. The camp did not offer anything remotely like an ideal home nor, by extension, a good life. Criticizing the materiality of the camp

persons after the armed conflicts. See the programme's website, <http://regionalthousingprogramme.org/bosnia-and-herzegovina/>.

⁵⁰ See Kamp Konik 2 zatvoren nakon 16 godina, *Vijesti online*, 21 December 2016, <http://www.vijesti.me/vijesti/kamp-konik-2-zatvoren-nakon-16-godina-917287>.

⁵¹ Duijzings, *From Bongo Bongo to Boston Via the Balkans*, 109.

and asserting a desire for a particular kind of home (and the good life it would enable), the residents of the camp articulated their sociopolitical subjectivity.

This article also demonstrated that ethnography of an urban enclave allows us to see camps, not as a zone of indistinction between the sovereign power and 'bare life', but as related to particular historical projects, that can change their character over time. During the 2000s, the camp reflected the aleatory sovereignty of the international humanitarian world. This has changed over time. During the 2010s, negotiations between the Montenegrin state and EU representatives have had a direct effect on living conditions both in the camp and in the town. In 2015-2016, the Konik camp was not so much a materialization of a state of exception: rather, it had a 'civilizing' role. The Konik camp was a place indicating the 'progress' of Europeanization of Montenegro.

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