The Shining

## From an Anonymous Wall to Madina Hussiny Square

SELMA BANICH

Abstract: A collection of fragments titled *The Shining: From an Anonymous Wall to Madina Hussiny Square* assembles artist statements and descriptions of an ongoing series of site-specific interventions in Zagreb made of heat sheet and white masking tape as well as the author's personal notes on the brief but thought-provoking encounters with Y., H. and K. The ›light‹ interventions in conjunction with the powerful migrant stories speak of fragmented, incomplete, and unfinished struggles and display disrupted narratives. Performed and written in solidarity with all the incarcerated and in memory of all the deceased.

Keywords: Balkan corridor, Balkan route, site-specific interventions, heat sheet, freedom of movement

Everything emerges and submerges in the same place: in the (un)inhabited ›squares‹ of soil. But in order to foster a community, merely building a ›settlement‹ is not enough. Because once settled, though physically living almost conjoined, we are rarely together. And even when miles and continents separate us, our entire fabric of being co-exists simultaneously. If we were to simply stop at any coordinate along this mega-narrative and look at the world long enough, we would recognize our own contours emerging from this global tapestry.

Here, coexistence is implied, but our relationships often do not develop spontaneously, organically, or through shared experiences. And while the political, social and economical conditions for the organization of life are extremely simplified, and the communities worldwide are systemically impoverished and artificially parceled, the gap becomes almost insurmountable. The attempt to reestablish the connectivity seems in vain, even structurally impossible.

We have confined ourselves to walls, boundaries, property, and profit. Radical connections are undesirable, and subverting ›the structure‹ is strictly forbidden, rendering us permanently ›unavailable‹ for the global uprising—powerless in our collective ›shining‹.
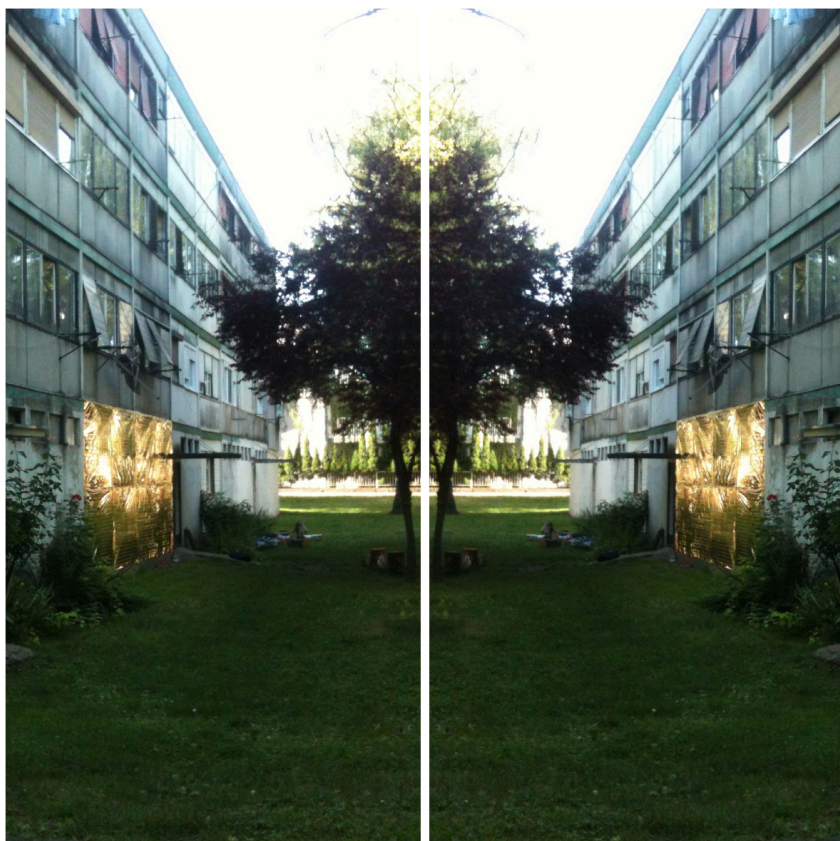
The Shining. Photo by Selma Banich, 2017.

The neighborhood of *Folnegovićevo naselje* in Zagreb is one of many post-Second World War modernist settlements in Europe. Through a closer study of the local imprint, this neighborhood reveals a ›conflict map‹ representing global phenomena reaching from a planned settlement that indirectly includes a class division, a post-socialist period of privatization and urban deindustrialization, a neighborhood antagonism concerning ethnic origins and the class affiliations of its settlers up to the history of migration and refugeeism related to ongoing wars, global economy, and geopolitics.

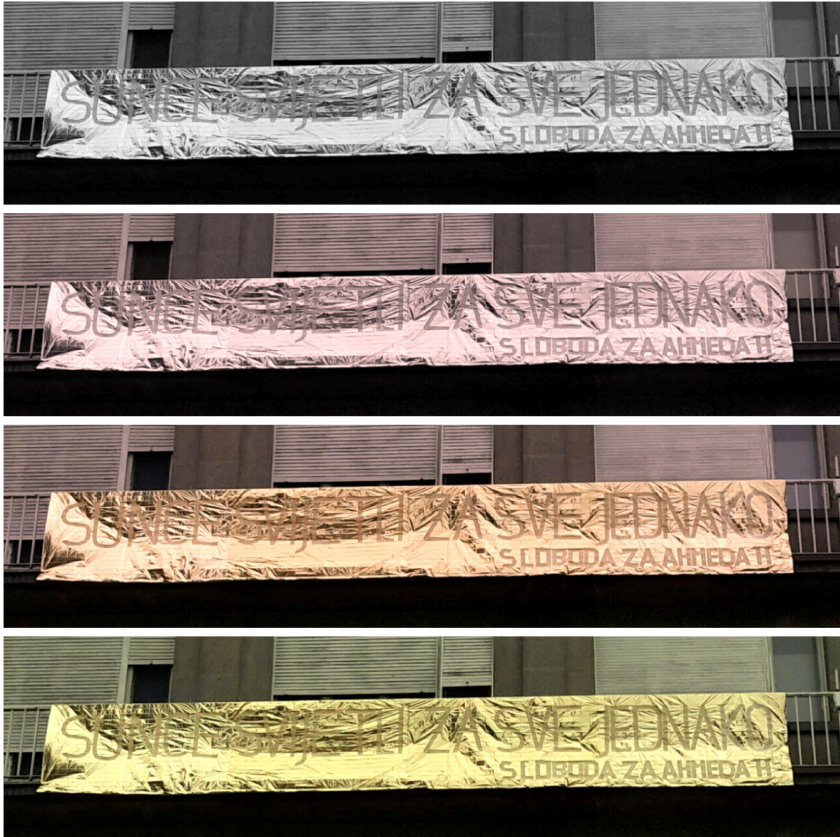The Shining. Photo by Matija Kralj, 2017. Collage by Selma Banich, 2020.

The Shining (2017),[1] a temporary intervention on the surface of a social housing façade in *Folnegovićevo naselje*, attempted to establish a connection between the various inhabitants of the modernist buildings (the prefab ›tin-can‹ housing units built in the 1960s that require urgent solutions for both their dampness and dilapidation

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1 | *The Shining* is an intervention performed by Selma Banich in cooperation with neighborhood inhabitants as an epilogue to the *Communities of Care* research project. *Communities of Care* was conducted by Selma Banich, Marija Borovičkić, Mila Čuljak, Ivana Rončević, and Ana Vilenica within the framework of *Invisible Belonging*, curated by Ana Dana Beroš. The project was a local, Zagreb segment of the international project *Actopolis*, produced by the Goethe-Institut and Urbane Künste Ruhr (2015–2017).

The Sun Shines Equally for All. Photo by Lea Horvat, 2018. Collage by Selma Banich, 2020.

as well as a ›remedy‹ for the class divisions between the co-owners), phenomena related to refugees that have left traces throughout the neighborhood's recent history (from the post-Yugoslav Wars, the Arab Spring up to the Balkan corridor-period), and the collateral scars of the global capitalist war (with its Croatian involvement in the global arms trade and war industry). With such a complex patchwork at hand, this symbolic act of shining from an anonymous, porous wall incites us to devise political imagination beyond obedience and to produce resistive practices, reflected in the global struggles for justice and equity.

The Sun Shines Equally for All. Photo by Matija Kralj, 2018. Collage by Selma Banich, 2020.

I met Y. at Zagreb Central Station in February 2016, just before the closure of the so-called Balkan corridor.[2] We have remained in contact since. He was traveling from Morocco with three other friends and was forced to continue the journey forward. To this day, Y. has not ›settled‹ in his new country of residence—and it is still questionable if he ever will. The repressive and racist European migration regime has made him a modern-day slave—forcing him to survive on 20 euros a day, picking apples on fruit plantations in the north of Italy. There, he joined a workforce of tens if not hundreds of thousands of

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2 | Some names in the article have been deliberately abbreviated to protect the identity of the people and also to put a graphic emphasis on ›light‹ interventions.

Renaming the Republic of Croatia Square into Madina Hussiny Square. Photo by Maddalena Avon, 2018.

voiceless migrant workers, abused and exploited for private profit by the large economies.

During the peak of the so-called refugee crisis in Croatia, the general populous kept calm. They continued buying ›Italian‹ fruits at supermarkets throughout the country, and apples handpicked by Y. easily found their way to our family tables.

To call those affected by war, poverty, or climate change ›a (refugee/migrant) crisis‹ deliberately misleads us from the core causes of contemporary migration and obscures the importance of fundamental human rights: freedom of move-ment and our unconditional right to choose where we want to settle down. I

Povijest imena trga

- Sajmišni trg (1878. – 1888.)[5]

- *Sveučilišni trg* (1888. – 1919.)

- *Wilsonov trg* (1919. – 1927.)

- *Trg kralja Aleksandra I.* (1927. – 1941.)

- *Trg I.* (1941. – 1945.)

- *Kazališni trg* (1945. – 1946.)

- *Trg maršala Tita* (1946. – 2017.)

- *Trg Republike Hrvatske* (2017. – 2018.)

- *Trg Madine Hussiny* (2018. – danas)

Renaming the Republic of Croatia Square into Madina Hussiny Square. Screenshot Wikipedia, 2018.

believe each person should be able to move as freely as I do and to be able to choose a home as I did. Why was Y. denied that right?

The Sun Shines Equally for All (2018),[3] is a collaborative trans-action whose aim was to express comradeship and transnational solidarity with Ahmed H.,[4] Röszke 11

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3 | Action performed during the public presentation of the 101st issue of the journal *Život umjetnosti* (Beroš 2017).

4 | Ahmed H. was convicted for ›terrorism‹ in Hungary, because he protested with thousands of refugees at the Serbian-Hungarian border crossing of Röszke in September 2015 (Free the Röszke 11 2019).
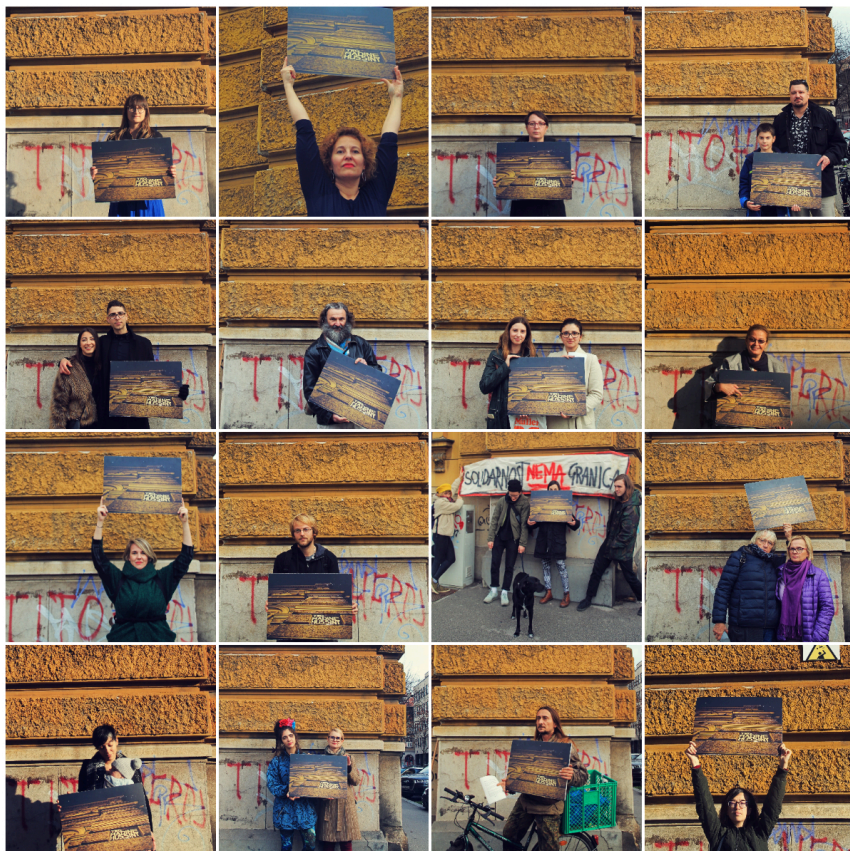
Justice for Madina Hussiny (2019), follow-up action organized by the Activist group of the *Welcome! Initiative.* Photo by Ivana Perić, 2019. Collage by Selma Banich, 2020.

and campaign activists, political prisoners, and detained migrants in Hungary and beyond. Golden during the day and black during the night, the banner displayed on Zagreb's main square demanded the immediate release of Ahmed and all other prisoners held by the racist, neo-colonial ›fortress‹ of Europe. The symbolic act of the heat sheet shining on Zagreb's main square sent a powerful message to the ›fortress‹ rulers: you can not rule what is ungovernable.

Some days ago, I posted a status: »Sorelle e fratelli uniti, fanculo al razzismo e al capitalismo«, with a link to an Italian rap song telling the story of a boy forced to cross the Mediterranean sea in a »death boat«. H., who himself undertook that journey, replied within minutes with a sequence of emoticons: thinking face

emoji, green heart, red heart, and a power fist. He wanted to cheer me up. As if I was the one forced to take that journey next. H.'s gesture reminded me of K.'s question.

I met K. at Zagreb Central Station in March 2019, during the intensified period of violent police push-backs from Croatia to Bosnia. He walked for thirteen days, trekking through a mountain range in order to reach Zagreb. He had been lost without any form of communication, was malnourished, and exhausted from a lack of sleep. He came a long way, desperate to seek asylum in Croatia, but was incarcerated instead.

Upon his release from the *Ježevo* detention center, which only occurred once he had withdrawn his asylum claim, we met again. It was then, before his departure back to Albania, that he asked: »Is there a way I can help you?« I froze... Not because I thought I did not need help, obviously, I did (at the time, I felt as manipulated and harassed by the Croatian police and migration officers as he did when assisting him with the asylum claims), but—honestly speaking—I did not know how to reply. If caring is connected to privilege, what could I possibly ask of a person in such a precarious position? Still, the practice of radical care is an empowering act. No one can prescribe whom we can or cannot care for. Although I did not entirely succeed to help K., we were able to mutually empower each other by exercising our right to care as humans and as political subjects.

Renaming the Republic of Croatia Square into Madina Hussiny Square (2018) was an intervention performed by the *Initiative for the Madina Hussiny Square* in memory of Madina Hussiny, a young girl from Afghanistan whose tragic end was the result of a senseless persecution by the Croatian police. The (re)placement of the heat sheet, tape, and cardboard plaque with Madina's name placed at the former *Republic of Croatia Square* was an act of uncompromised naming—a political, but also profoundly human gesture. It did not call for yet another reinterpretation of a historical event or figure, but was an immediate act of demanding accountability for actions committed and for the irreversible loss of life; because no one: no nation-state, government, military power, economy, or political regime has the right to decree one life valuable and another dispensable.

The encounters with Y., H. and K.—like with so many others—are a constant reminder of how every dangerous, life-threatening journey, every act of systemic violence, and every violation of human dignity endured by so many is, in fact, endured also for our own personal and political freedoms. With every contingent encounter, every boat departing, every plane deporting, and with every violent push-back, detention, incarceration, and torture testimony, we are called to join the liberation movement and its uprising.

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LITERATURE

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Patricia Artimova is a PhD student at the University of Ostrava, Czech Republic. In her research she analyzes migration movements and the changing perception of migration in the Balkans, mainly in Serbia. Since 2015, she is an active member of volunteer initiatives operating in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

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Selma Banich is a Zagreb-based artist, social activist, and community organizer. Her artistic and social practice is based on processual, research, and activist work and is politically inspired by anarchism and feminism.

Barbara Beznec graduated in Political Science of International Relations at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University in Ljubljana, where she later earned her PhD on the subject of European Citizenship. She is a researcher of migration at the Research Center of the Slovenian Academy of Science and Arts.

Emina Bužinkić is a political activist examining the state and police violence against migrants and refugees, particularly concerning issues of border control and violence. Her work extends to understanding the inscriptions of border regimes in the field of schooling by researching the experiences of refugee and migrant students. She is currently obtaining her PhD in critical studies in education and human rights at the University of Minnesota in the United States. She is linked to the Centre for Peace Studies (*Centar za mirovne studije*), the Welcome! Initiative (*Inicijativa Dobrodošli!*), and the Taste of Home (*Okus doma*) in Croatia. Recently she has been

working with the *Transbalkan Solidarity* and *Pirate Care Syllabus Writing Collective*.

Céline Cantat is a postdoctoral fellow at Sciences Po with H2020 project MAGYC-Migration Governance and Asylum Crises. Previously, Céline was a Marie-Curie Fellow at CEU, Budapest, studying migration solidarity groups along the Balkan route. She holds a PhD in Refugee Studies from the University of East London and is co-editor of *Refugee Protection and Civil Society in Europe* (Palgrave, 2018) and *Challenging the Political Across Borders: Migrants' and Solidarity Struggle* (CPS Book Series, 2019).

Andrea Contenta is an independent researcher and a humanitarian worker. After spending some years between Ethiopia, Kenya, and Sudan focusing on violence, conflicts and displacement, he decided to move to Belgrade following the Balkan corridor. Today he lives and works in Athens.

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Civil initiative **Info Kolpa** started in the spring of 2018 as a response to illegal actions of Slovene police, which started systematically denying people the right to seek asylum in Slovenia and pushing people back to Croatia. In the autumn of 2018, we established an informal telephone number for assistance to people wishing to seek asylum in Slovenia. The help we provided proved unsuccessful but with operating the number, we gained a lot of information on practice of push-backs on Slovene-Croatian border, which we presented to Slovene and international public.

Teodora Jovanović is as a research assistant at the Institute of Ethnography of SASA and a doctoral student of ethnology and anthropology at University of Belgrade, Faculty of Philosophy. For her doctoral thesis, she conducted an ethnographic fieldwork in reception centers for asylum seekers in Serbia. Previously, she worked in »Miksal-ište« refugee aid center in Belgrade, and she was involved in »Refugees in Towns« project at Tufts University, Boston, as a local case study researcher.

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The **Push-Back Map Collective** is a transnational group of people that come from different fields of radical politics like feminism, anti-capitalism, and anti-racist struggles. Its members are active in documenting and counteracting push-backs and violence at the internal and external(ised) borders of the EU. One main goal of the mapping project is to provide a platform for transnational, non-hierarchical, radical grassroots interventions and exchange.

Robert Rydzewski is a PhD candidate at the Department of Anthropology and Ethnology at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan, Poland. Formerly, he held a scholarship at the Central European University in Budapest and was a Doctoral Fellow Researcher at the Wirth Institute for Austrian and Central European Studies at University of Alberta in Edmonton in Canada. His scientific interests are migration, civil society, transformations of post-Yugoslav cities. Currently, he is completing his PhD dissertation about the migrant movement in the Serbian part of the Balkan route.

Jack Sapoch is an activist affiliated with the NGO No Name Kitchen, where he coordinates the collection of push-back testimonies. In this capacity, he works in the wider Border Violence Monitoring Network—a joint-project organized by independent NGOs—to draw attention to the issue of border violence in the Western Balkans. He received his undergraduate degree from Bates College (USA) where he researched the institutional influences affecting refugee assistance in the ›barracks‹ of Belgrade in 2017.

Zita Seichter, **Miriam Neßler** and **Paul Knopf** met each other at Bauhaus-University Weimar in 2017. Today, they are studying Art and Architecture, Urban Studies as well as Human Geography and Regional Development in Weimar, Berlin and Eberswalde. Besides being interested in border regime practices in Belgrade and beyond, they are involved in activist and artistic contexts, researching and teaching on Solidarity Cities, the Right to the City, transformation strategies from a decolonizing perspective as well as art and architecture in the context of the Anthropocene. Related publication: Eckardt, Frank / Neßler, Miriam / Seichter, Zita (Hg.) (2019): Weit weg und unbeachtet. Stadt und Flüchtende in Belgrad seit Schließung der Balkanroute.

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