



Article

The Case of Ahmad Shamieh's Campaign against Dublin Deportation: Embodiment of Political Violence and Community Care [†]

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[†] This paper is dedicated to all antideportation fighters, who fight against their own or other people's deportations. It is also dedicated to the eternal memory of the squat Autonomous Factory Rog (2006–2021), which was brutally evicted just when I finished the writing.

Abstract: Differently from studies that analyze antideportation struggles in relation to concepts of state sovereignty and (un)making of citizenship, this paper focuses more on intersection of politics and body. It discusses struggle for the "place in the world" as an embodied experience. Ahmad Shamieh came to Slovenia in 2016 through the humanitarian corridor on the Balkan route. The Slovene Ministry of the Interior refused to examine his asylum claim and instead issued him a Dublin Regulation decision, stating that he was to be deported to Croatia. Ahmad's and his supporters' legal and political struggle, which lasted several years, prevented his deportation. In contrast to state's politics of exclusion, causing dehumanization and traumatization the grassroots community struggle developed the politics of inclusion, solidarity and care from below, in practice transforming the conditions of belonging.

Keywords: solidarity; deportability trauma; refugees; migrant struggle; Dublin regulation; Slovenia; autonomous factory Rog; squat; embodiment; radical politics



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1. Introduction

Due to his antideportation campaign, Ahmad Shamieh happened to be the most famous refugee in Slovenia. There have been several hundred newspaper articles and TV reports published about him, most of them in November 2017, when his deportation to Croatia was scheduled. Ahmad fled war in Syria and travelled along the Balkan route through the humanitarian corridor in 2016. At the Austrian border, he was pushed back to Slovenia, where he applied for international protection on 23 February 2016. He was accommodated in the Centre for Asylum Seekers in Ljubljana and became part of the grassroots antiracist community in the Autonomous Factory Rog (i.e., the local squat), where he volunteered, found friends, learnt Slovene and the Latin script. As an asylum seeker from Syria he expected to be able to make Slovenia his new home. However, on 14 June 2016, after 4 months of active waiting, the Ministry of the Interior sent him a Dublin regulation decision¹, that Slovenia would not examine his asylum application and that he was to be deported to Croatia despite he travelled through state controlled corridor. Other researchers have examined (legal) issues pertaining to the corridor in detail (Lunaček Brumen and Meh 2016; Kogovšek Šalamon 2017; Zaviršek 2017), in this article his personal story over the right to stay in Slovenia will be presented drawing on the concepts of deportability and embodiment of political violence, radical autonomy and community care. The last concepts of radical autonomy and community care are related to the Ljubljana squat, called Autonomous Factory Rog (Abram 2017; Bezec 2017; Centrih 2018; Hrvatin 2016). This is the social and political space from where Ahmad Shamieh's antideportation campaign was led and where he got legal, material and emotional support.

The article is based on six narrative interviews and it combines the personal experience of Ahmad Shamieh, some of the theoretical concepts and chronology of the legal proceedings to exclude and expel him. It describes in detail the anti/deportation spectacle, which includes both the power that the state has over an individual and the prevention of Ahmad's deportation by himself and his supporters. It also presents an example of discursive exclusion, the construction of symbolic otherness. Analytical part intersects politics and the body presenting the case of Ahmad Shamieh's teeth. Thus, we explicate embodiment of social inequalities and state's violence (Lipovec Čebroň 2010; Kennedy and Whitlock 2011; Marmot and Wilkinson 2005). Ahmad's destroyed teeth is seen as deportability related trauma. New teeth prosthesis is embodiment of the community care and connectedness, these are seen as the integral part of the struggle. We conclude that the notion of deportability can be seen as one of the political processes, which is connected not only to political subjectivation and (un)making of citizenship as a site of belonging, but also to the site of embodiment (De Genova 2010; Isin 2009; Nyers and Rygiel 2012; Nyers 2019). Thus, we explicate the connectivity of the embodiment, deportability and autonomous struggles.

2. Methodology: Research Methods and Positionality of the Author

The article is based on narrative interviews with Ahmad Shamieh and the other five activists, who, together with Ahmad, have been building community in the Ambasada Rog (one of the many collectives active in the Rog squat), and who participated in his antideportation campaign. I interviewed Ahmad on 9 September 2020 in his apartment in Ljubljana, two days before the arrival of his family from Syria. The interview was held in Slovene, as Ahmad wanted.² I also interviewed Zana Fabjan Blažič, Miha Blažič (Ahmad's representative), Barbara Vodopivec, lawyer Anuška Podvršič and journalist Andraž Rožman.³ I knew all six interviewees from activist circles in the Rog squat. I also knew Ahmad's struggle from the media, occasional socializing with him and in a small part from my own participation in it (for example, I participated in a protest against his deportation in front of the Centre for Asylum Seekers on 14 November 2017). Besides 71 pages of interview transcripts, I have reviewed three decisions of the Administrative Court, the decision of the Supreme Court, the decision of the European Union Court of Justice and a number of media articles and broadcasts.

Regarding the positionality of the researcher, my academic background is based in social work meaning that political processes are investigated through individual and community experiences. In this article the narrative research method was applied to gain this end (Moën 2006). Narrative research is understood as a collaboration process between interviewed activists, including Shamieh and myself as a researcher. I applied this method, not only to present and make sense of extremely exhausting struggle against deportation but also to present Ahmad Shamieh as a person, with his beliefs, opinions and experience of both state exclusion and his political activism. The narrative research method seemed as a "natural" choice as I see my research positionality not only steaming from academic social work but also from activism. To use the term of Nyers (2012), I could say I was "socialised into activism". I associate this socialization with the long-term activist research of the Erasure from the Register of Permanent Residents of the Republic of Slovenia⁴ and a no-border perspective (Jones 2019; Anderson et al. 2012). The first is a systematic violation of human rights in Slovenia, originally happened in 1992 after the break-up of Yugoslavia with still unresolved social, legal and political issues and the latest is an anarchist position towards the border and networking with people for collective actions.

Socialization into activism enabled my deep understanding of the political and legal struggle that Ahmad Shamieh and his supporters have been submitted to—despite the fact that I have only been an observer, I do not have a direct experience of this struggle. This means that my hands did not shake, I was not sweating, I was not dizzy when opening the post from the different courts, I was not at the edge of a nervous breakdown, I was not followed by journalists (all of which two of my interviewees experienced) and my teeth

did not fall out due to stress (as it happened to Ahmad). This leads to the question of whether knowledge and insight might be missing, when the researcher has no embodied experience of being directly involved in the long and complex processes of administrative exclusion that she is researching. Even though the struggle of the Erased taught me a lot about the power of the bureaucratic state based on ethnic exclusion (my health deteriorated at that period as a result of secondary trauma stress), I could barely make sense of the legal labyrinths that the state keeps building for Ahmad Shamieh. In trying to describe his antideportation campaign, I felt like I was standing in front of a big mountain that is the state, and that I could make only a tiny progress climbing to the top. When I thought I reached its peak, I realized that this is just one of the peaks of the mountain, which is stretching always higher and wider. This metaphor is reflected in the transcripts, in that I kept asking the same questions several times, when it came to the legal decisions and appeals. Ahmad Shamieh campaign for the right to international protection was developed against the persistent bureaucratic wall.

3. Ahmad's Arrival to Slovenia and His Asylum Claim

Ahmad Shamieh was born on 12 July 1971 in Syria. He lived in Darayya, 20 km from Damascus. He is married and with his wife they have four children. When they still lived in Darayya, he worked all day long, saved up to buy a house, a shop, a saloon and a car. When he was 40 years old, in 2011, he "had it all". However, that is when the war started. The city was bombed and the Shamieh family hid in the basement. Ahmad's foot and ear were wounded by shrapnel from a grenade. Luckily the doctors saved his leg. Since February 2012, his family had been displaced. They spent the first four years in the city of Qudsaya, near Damascus. When it was no longer possible to stay in Qudsaya because of the war, the family moved to Damascus to live with Ahmad's sister. However, his sister did not get along with the rest of Shamieh family. Ahmad decided to leave for Turkey hoping to earn enough money to bring his family after few months, too (interview Ahmad Shamieh, 9 September 2020).

In January 2016 Turkey's conditions to obtain a visa for family members became harsher and Ahmad believed they would not meet the criteria.⁵ This was also the time of the humanitarian corridor on the Balkan route and Ahmad Shamieh decided to leave for Europe. The following is a longer passage from my interview with Ahmad, where he talks about his arrival to Slovenia and his asylum claim:

"I'm thinking of going Europe. I'm afraid to die at sea. I cannot swim. [. . .] I board a boat together with around 40 other people. For the way from Turkey to Greece, I pay 750 dollars. I sleep in Greece for two days. I receive a paper and continue my journey with a big number of people. We go from Greece to [North] Macedonia. Then the Red Cross comes. I get food, clothes and I get a paper. The same happens on the border with Serbia. On the border between Croatia and Slovenia, the bus waits for 24 h, before we get papers to be able to enter. From Slovenia, I continue towards Austria. I only speak Arabic, no English. [. . .] "Why did you come to Europe?" a police officer asks me through an Arabic translator. I answer: "I come from Darayya, I don't have a house, I don't have anything, there is war. I'm looking for safety". Later, I learnt that the translator translated something else. The Austrian police pushed me back to Slovenia. Here in Slovenia, I was locked up in a cellar [detention centre Veliki otok near Postojna], it's a big room, women and men together. People can't sleep there. The room is small, and the toilet is inside. The second day, a translator comes along with the police. Whoever wants to seek asylum, in order to stay in Slovenia, should sign [asylum application]. I sign. I need this. I don't need to get out of prison in Syria, just to end up in prison in Slovenia. The next day I'm transferred to the Centre for Asylum Seekers and I have my first interview. I was thinking about my family a lot. I needed my family. I asked the inspector if the law here allows people to bring their families. He says yes. Ok, I say."

(interview Ahmad Shamieh, 9 September 2020)

However, it took two and a half years of legal and political battles for Ahmad's asylum claim to be accepted by the Ministry of the Interior, and almost five years for his family to join him. After four months of living in Slovenia, he received a Dublin regulation decision in response to his asylum application: Croatia, and not Slovenia, was to be responsible for examining his asylum claim, as this was the EU member state that he entered first.

Since his arrival in Slovenia, Ahmad attended self-organized language classes in the autonomous community in Rog, he learnt conversational Slovene, he volunteered on a regular basis (working as a hairdresser and a barber), he made friendships and communicated well with the media. Mainstream and leftist media presented Ahmad as a "well integrated refugee". However, the Ministry of the Interior kept preventing Ahmad Shamieh from finding a new home in Slovenia. It could be claimed that the Ministry demonstrated its own logic of "justice, efficiency and legality" (Affolter 2020). As written by Peutz and De Genova (2010, p. 11) deportation "become a mechanism by which governments measure and signal their own effectiveness". A similar observation is made by Nyers (2019, p. 5) that "governments now release their deportation numbers with pride, as evidence that they are 'doing something' about the 'problem' of irregular migration and border control". The issue of deportation is theoretically connected to states' reproduction of sovereignty. This is discussed in the next section in relation to the Dublin regulation, and applying the concept of deportability and the metaphor of suture for the anti/deportation dynamic.

4. Conceptual Framework: European Dublin Regulation and Deportability as a Source of Injustice

Deportation, "the compulsory removal of 'aliens' from the physical, juridical, and social space of the state" (Peutz and De Genova 2010, p. 1), became one of the mechanisms of the globalized migration control (Nyers 2019) and thus part of the European asylum system. De Genova et al. (2018, p. 246) wrote that the Dublin regulation allows "for European states not only to deport migrants back to their countries of origin, but also to a so-called 'safe third country', literally bouncing them back from one place to another [...] thereby refugees are reproduced in the countries of the EU, as people have to integrate again and again, both legally and socially.

Despite the humanitarian corridor on the Balkan route (September 2015–March 2016) when nearly a million refugees had travelled to the countries of the EU under state surveillance, the Dublin regulation had not been officially suspended as it was retroactively defined by the Court of Justice of the European Union (2017). It means that the corridor did not negate the Dublin regulation, meaning Shamieh's entry in Slovenia was treated the same as if he would travel in irregular clandestine way. Presenting Dublin as an unfair and degrading regulation was central to Ahmad's antideportation campaign. "I found it really important to fuck Dublin up. Because I really don't think it is right. [...] To be treated like a bag of potatoes that can be moved from place to place." stressed Anuška Podvršič (interview 30 September 2020), who wrote the majority of Ahmad's appeals. To treat a person like a thing—like a "bag of potatoes"—is a source of trauma and dehumanization.

The above cited authors research deportation through relations of sovereignty, space and the freedom of movement. Whereas Peutz and De Genova (2010) developed the concept of deportation regime, Nyers (2019) introduced the term global deportspora (abject diaspora). Deportation regime is part of "a complex sociopolitical regime that manifests and engenders dominant notions of sovereignty, citizenship, public health, national identity, cultural homogeneity, racial purity, and class privilege" (Peutz and De Genova 2010, p. 2). Similarly, global deportspora is analytical term of transformation of "the terms and conditions of mobility, belonging, and rights" (Nyers 2019, p. 4). In both studies the concept of deportability is at the center of discussion. It is a perspective of a human being. The concept of deportability draws from the perspective of personal experience of a threat or the fact of deportation. Peutz and De Genova (2010, p. 14) see the possibility

of being deported connected “to the multiple vulnerabilities” of individuals, families and communities. In this article personal experience of anti/deportation is at stake as opposed to analyzing citizenship and other political categories transformation.

The slash (/) in the term anti/deportation has been used by Nyers (2019) to emphasize the nexus and intertwine of legal and political processes at both ends. In Nyers (2019, p. 3) words “deportation and antideportation are not discrete activities to be investigated independently of one another”. They are involved in mutually productive relationship, called a strugglefield (Tazzioli 2015 in Nyers 2019, p. 3). Applying different symbolism for the same political processes Nyers (2019, p. 3) takes the theory of Mark Salter about the slash (/) metaphorically seen as “suture”. The suture is a result of knitting together a scar, metaphorically defined by Salter (in Nyers, p. 3) as the “thinking tool” of the moments of tension, anxiety, displacement and rupture. Nyers takes the theory of suture further and apply it to knitting together deportation and antideportation. Both suture and scar are rich in symbolic meanings: Nyers (2019) sees the suture also as trauma, a physical mark of a wound of deportability. Similarly, Lipovec Čebren (2010, p. 190) connected the notion of a scar with particular health deteriorations of the non/citizens of Slovenia, the Erased. The scar as a visible wound of individual bodies, represents both the embodiment of social injustice and at the same time marks the bodies involved in the long-term struggle for their right to live in Slovenia. We cannot but agree with De Genova (2010, p. 13) to see deportability not only as a violation of particular right(s), but more profoundly “the imposition of a [state] power over life itself”. In this section deportability as theoretical concept was addressed, whereas in the next we continue to list the chronology of Ahmad Shamieh’s struggle.

Legal and Political Labyrinths of Deportability

Ahmad Shamieh appealed the Dublin regulation decision at the Administrative Court. The court rejected Ahmad’s appeal on 4 July 2016. Ahmad then appealed at the Supreme Court, which referred a question to the Court of Justice of the European Union on the interpretation of the Dublin III regulation during the time of the humanitarian corridor. As already written above the Court of Justice decided that the corridor did not negate the Dublin regulation (Court of Justice of the European Union 2017). In line with the decision of the Court of Justice of the EU, the Supreme Court of Slovenia rejected Ahmad Shamieh’s complaint on 23 August 2017. Thus, the deportation to Croatia became legally possible. In the meantime, Ahmad Shamieh also complained to the Constitutional Court of Slovenia, but the court refused to decide on his case on 30 October 2017.

Soon after, on 7 November 2017, Shamieh submitted a request to the Ministry of the Interior to use the discretionary clause that the state has in deciding matters pertaining to non-citizens. Ahmad and his supporters intensified their political struggle: “We decided to put pressure on the decision-makers to use the discretionary clause in order not to deport him. The state can either implement, or not implement, Dublin” (Miha Blažič, interview 16 September 2020). The antideportation struggle was supported by many groups and individuals, by the media and some leftist MPs. The public petition in support of Shamieh’s staying in Slovenia was signed by more than 4000 individuals and groups (Božič 2017). The campaign included famous people from the Slovene cultural, political and sports scene. The activists increased the pressure on different levels of decision-making until the Prime Minister got involved (Miha Blažič, interview 16 September 2020). In what follows, these events are described as the anti/deportation spectacle.

5. The Anti/Deportation Spectacle: “In One Moment, You Are Nearly the State’s Hero, and in the Next Moment You Are Illegalised Again”

This piece of comment is extracted from the Miha Blažič’s interview (16 September 2020).

At 5 a.m. on 14 November 2017, the day announced for Ahmad’s deportation, around 50 protesters gathered to oppose the deportation (I was among them). At this point, the coalition called for the halt of this deportation, and the day before the deportation,

the Prime Minister Miro Cerar gave a verbal assurance that the deportation was not to take place ([Radio Študent 2017](#)). This verbal assurance was to be followed by an official confirmation by the Ministry of the Interior—however, that confirmation never took place. Ahmad Shamieh had to appear in front of the Centre for Asylum Seekers at the scheduled time, otherwise he would be considered as evading the procedure—which would formally exclude him from the asylum procedure. Miha Blažič (interview 16 September 2020) remembers that morning and Cerar’s promise to revoke the deportation:

“Shamieh and I were waiting around the corner [for the cancellation of the deportation] and we decided to go in front of the Centre for Asylum Seekers [from where the deportation was supposed to take place], as we didn’t have any other choice. And then Ahmad does his performance with the white sheet and lays on the floor.”

In his spontaneous and emotional speech, Ahmad Shamieh, wrapped in a white sheet, told everyone that he just wants to live in peace, like all people, that he is sick, that he is not an animal and that it is not his fault that there is a war in Syria ([Radio Študent 2017](#)). Ahmad Shamieh (interview 9 September 2020) remembers that morning as follows:

“Early in the morning, I go to the Centre for Asylum Seekers, together with many friends. [. . .] I bring a white sheet with me—in Syria, the deceased are wrapped in a white sheet, for the cemetery. I wrap myself in the white sheet and I say: ‘I live here and I will die here’ and I lay on the floor. The police are on horses next to me, they probably thought that what I was doing is not normal. [. . .] A friend from [the parliamentary party] The Left tells me ‘don’t worry, I’ll go with you’. And so we go into the Centre for Asylum Seekers and then they drive me to the Parliament.”

Shamieh was escorted to the Parliament, where the police cannot enter ([Radio Študent 2017](#); [Rožman 2019](#), p. 217). To understand why the deportation officials waited for the instructions of their bosses at the Ministry of the Interior and did not proceed to deport Shamieh, it is important to understand the history of antideportation struggles in Ljubljana. Both Miha Blažič (interview 16 September 2020) and Andraž Rožman (interview 4 November 2020) believe that the attempt to stop the Dublin deportation of the Korba Sulejman family on 22 March 2017 influenced the deportation officials’ decision to wait with Shamieh’s deportation. The officials of the Ministry of the Interior surely remembered the police attacking protesters, who used their bodies to resist the deportation of the Korba Sulejman family, and they did not want another display of police brutality right on the doorsteps of the Centre for Asylum Seekers.⁶ The evidence here is that deportation apparatus, as [Nyers \(2019, p. 8\)](#) wrote, learns from antideportation struggles.

On the day of the scheduled deportation (14 November 2017), Prime Minister Miro Cerar at his press conference declared that Shamieh was allowed to stay in Slovenia, on the basis of the Aliens Act. Shamieh (interview 9 November 2020) remembers: “I was waiting there [in the Parliament] and listening how Cerar talks on the television: ‘Ahmad can get status’. I was very happy then, very happy!”. The press conference of the Prime Minister was followed by a press conference at the Slovene Academy of Science and Arts ([Meet Ahmad 2017](#)), organized by Ahmad’s supporters. Ahmad was the first to speak. I remember the atmosphere in the hall: it was triumphant, full of relief and a sense that we are stronger together and that the struggle was worth the effort. Ahmad cried tears of happiness and relief. He said that he was very happy and that he found his second family in Ljubljana. The audience clapped enthusiastically ([Meet Ahmad 2017](#)).

5.1. *Withdrawal of Social Rights and Ignorance of the Refugee Experience*

After the morning stress of nearly being deported, visiting the Parliament and the triumphant “Meet Ahmad” press conference, Ahmad was shocked to witness what followed: being stripped of all his social rights. Ahmad Shamieh (interview 9 September 2020) remembers withdrawal of his social rights by the Centre of Asylum Seekers as follows:

“After the meeting with a lot of journalists, I go back to Kotnikova [Centre for Asylum Seekers], to sign that I’m back. I’m no longer afraid, the Prime Minister said Ahmad has status, has status, no fear! I go to Centre for Asylum Seekers and at the reception, they say ‘stop’. ‘Why stop?’ ‘You can’t go in’. And I say: ‘My room’s here, my things are upstairs!’ And the security guard says that I don’t have a room here anymore and that I don’t have my things here. ‘What!? Who ordered this?’ The security guard says: ‘Katarina’.⁷ She ordered that I have to leave and that they need to throw away all my things, clothes and papers. And then I just sit in front. The weather—very cold. Very very cold. That’s the time when Cerar says, Ahmad gets the status, and the same day they tell me that I can’t live in the Centre for Asylum Seekers anymore. [. . .] I’m sitting in Rog, thinking, thinking, thinking. Blood sugar high, blood sugar drops, my body is a map. My brains are a bomb. I’m thinking where to go? I don’t have a house, I don’t have a room, I have no money, no clothes, no food, where should I go? That’s when a friend calls me and tells me he has a room for me.”

Ahmad Shamieh not only lost his accommodation, but again clearly felt under deportation threat. The government did not have enough support among the MPs in order to offer any legal solution that would give Ahmad the right to stay. This meant that Ahmad’s deportation had not been officially called off ([Slovene Press Agency 2017a](#)). At the government’s press conference on 20 November 2017, the MP Karl Erjavec (Democratic Party of Retired People) said that there was no reason for Shamieh to stay in Slovenia, because Croatia respects human rights. He justified his position by saying that “a million Slovenes go to Croatia every year”.⁸ Not only that holidays cannot be compared to the integration of refugees into a new environment, on the contrary, Dublin regulation curtails freedom of movement and reproduces refugees within the EU as addressed above when discussing deportability.

However, the Prime Minister’s support for Shamieh caused outrage among the (right-wing and extreme-right) opposition parties. SDS, the biggest right-wing party, called for an impeachment of the Prime Minister for allegedly abusing his position. “First we were saying: Shamieh stays or the government falls. And then when the government was about to fall, we said: Shamieh stays, even if the government falls”, Anuška Podvršič remembered an anecdote from this period (interview 30 September 2020).

Due to deportability stress, and the violation of social rights (including withdrawal of accommodation) Shamieh had a nervous breakdown and was hospitalized. In our interview, he remembered that traumatic period: “I’m just sitting, I’m not doing anything, I don’t go out at all, my friend asks me if I want to go to the hospital. He drives me to the hospital, I stay there for two weeks” (interview 9 September 2020). The media reports that his health condition is worrying ([Slovene Press Agency 2017b](#)). This link between state violence and Ahmad’s suffering could be defined as the embodiment of deportability stress.

5.2. Endless Legal Labyrinth

The Ministry of the Interior rejected Ahmad Shamieh’s request to use the discretionary clause on 15 November 2017. On 8 December 2017, Shamieh filed a new asylum claim, and the Ministry of the Interior rejected it again. Shamieh initiated an administrative dispute for the second time and asked the Republic of Slovenia to use discretion to decide on his case. The [Administrative Court of the Republic of Slovenia \(2017\)](#) decided in Shamieh’s favor in December 2017 and returned his case to the Ministry of the Interior for reconsideration.⁹ The Ministry of the Interior appealed against that injunction at the Supreme Court. On 12 January 2018, the Supreme Court amended the decision of the Administrative Court and rejected the request for a provisional injunction for Shamieh to stay in Slovenia until the final conclusion of the proceedings. The Supreme Court decided in favor of the appeal of the Ministry of the Interior ([Slovene Press Agency 2018](#)).

However, even after 12 January 2018, Shamieh had not been deported. Being kicked out of the Centre for Asylum Seekers in November 2017 and going underground made him a bit safer from the deportation. On 23 February, his supporters claimed that Slovenia should now be responsible for assessing his asylum claim, since six months have passed since the Dublin decision—and this is the time window allowed by the Dublin regulation for the deportation of the asylum seeker (Košir 2018a). On 9 March 2018, the Ministry of the Interior denied this and informed Shamieh that, according to their understanding of the situation, the six months period only started on 12 January 2018, with the final decision of the Supreme Court regarding the discretionary clause. Shamieh appealed this decision (Košir 2018b).

On 29 March, the media outlet Nova24TV published the news that the deportation of Shamieh was planned for that day, but that it had not been successful, because Shamieh had failed to report to the Ministry of the Interior (Slovene Press Agency and Kamenarič 2018). The deportation was announced informally, as media later reported, and Miha Blažič (interview 16 September 2020) remembers:

“Less than 24 h before, they sent a message to my personal email account, without any signature, that Ahmad should be there [in front of the Ministry of the Interior]. If he doesn’t, they’ll consider this as him not cooperating in the procedure and he’ll no longer be treated as an asylum-seeker. At that point we knew that they lost their way, the deadline for the deportation was over. And the only thing that they could do is to try to deport him immediately and if it works out, it works out. [. . .] The next day we again made a show for the media. There was a lot of police in full gear in front of the Ministry, and we just didn’t show up.”

On 10 April 2018, the Administrative Court decided that the six month period of the Dublin regulation had finished on 23 February 2018 and that Slovenia was now responsible to evaluate Shamieh’s asylum application. The judgment of the Administrative Court was final (Administrative Court of the Republic of Slovenia 2018; Božič 2018). “With their teeth clenched, they accepted Ahmad back into the Centre for Asylum Seekers and into the asylum procedure,” remembers Miha Blažič (interview 16 September 2020). However, a new surprise followed:

“A few weeks later, we receive an appeal of the Ministry of the Interior regarding this matter. They filed a review of the proceedings before the Supreme Court. They couldn’t appeal to the Supreme Court [since the judgment in the Administrative Court was final], but they were able to file a review. And again, we talk to lawyers, who reassure us that the review is rarely successful, that it would require the Ministry to have really good justifications, which they don’t in this case—and that the Supreme Court won’t accept that. And then the Supreme court accepts the review. [. . .] The Ministry of the Interior pulled out, literally out of the blue, the argument that Dublin can be extended to a year and a half” (interview Miha Blažič 16 September 2020)

In their persistency towards banishing Ahmad Shamieh from Slovenia, the Ministry of the Interior had been eventful to the extent that Zana Fabjan Blažič (interview 22 September 2020) felt like she was in a film—what was happening no longer felt real, because of all the unpredictable events and distorted use of law, and because of huge stress:

“It was unbearably stressful. So stressful that, somewhere in between when everything was at its peak, I thought we lost the ground under our feet and we were in a film. At the time when we were hiding Ahmad [when he was kicked from Center for Asylum Seekers and was liable for deportation], a social worker told us that criminal investigators were looking for him, that the antiterrorist unit was looking for him. There was a national security session in the Parliament, where they were debating about Shamieh. SDS [right wing oppositional party] started this, they were debating whether or not Shamieh was a terrorist. We fell into a film, we were pushed into this film, so we were completely paranoid.

Decisions kept coming from the court all the time, and even after it was already said that it was no longer possible to appeal, the Ministry of the Interior appealed again. [. . .] My hands were shaking when I was opening Ahmad's post, my head was spinning as I was reading. [. . .] And then, when we were hiding him, and he urgently needed to see a doctor, we were even paranoid that the doctors will call the police, so we set up a guard, in case the police showed up. Film."

6. Politization of Ahmad's Body and Name

Ahmad's visibility in Slovenia (due to his struggle) was exploited by the right-wing party SDS (Slovene democratic party), which had then been in the opposition, in order to start a political campaign against him and all other "Ahmads" (i.e., against everyone in Slovenia with Muslim names and seeking asylum). On their election campaign posters, they wrote that Ahmad as an asylum seeker receives 1930 euros per month, while Janez (a typical Slovenian name) receives only 500 euros per month. Ahmad Shamieh (interview 9 September 2020) remembers the irony:

"I see the ads on the streets, there is my photo and the text says Ahmad receives 1930 euros per months, while in reality I'm receiving 18 euros per month, three and half years I'm receiving just 18 euros per month. [. . .] Everybody knew that [I am so poor that] I smoke tree leaves, everybody, the police, the inspector, everybody. In the time when there were posters everywhere about me receiving 1930 euros, I smoked tree leaves, because I didn't even have money for cigarettes."

This election campaign jumbo poster is a political text. It is a communication of one of the biggest parliamentary parties with the masses, constructing otherness and mobilizing nationalistic values by provoking feelings of unfairness. It was a campaign against all "Ahmads", i.e., refugees, who are presented as parasites, privileged over the rest of the population, when it comes to social transfers. Ahmad was forced to see himself through the eyes of the dominant majority of "white Janezes". This is a source of traumatization, experienced by racialized subjects (Goldberg 2001). Additionally, this was a campaign against Ahmad Shamieh personally, who was represented not only as a refugee-parasite, but also as a protester. Ahmad was the symbol of struggle and was as such presented as ungrateful for the "protection" he receives from the state (Moulin 2012). The politics of asylum is predicated upon a moral nexus between protection and non-freedom. The Dublin regulation, with its forced removals of individuals and families to other countries, is particularly illustrative of the fact that to seek protection is fashioned as a submission to "a regime that coerces refugees to be submissive and docile supplicants and receivers of protection" (De Genova et al. 2018, p. 246).

If Ahmad Shamieh would have accepted deportation to Croatia, he would most probably get protection. However, the price of this protection would have been the loss of the autonomy he fought for and the loss of energy he invested into integration. Ahmad's case proves that vulnerability does not take the capacity to act away if a person has solidarity support and appears to be part of the community struggle.

7. Governmental Discourse on Integration vs. Self-Organized Integration in the Squat

In our interview, Ahmad Shamieh says that Katarina Štrukelj is not the state. "I don't knock on the door of Katarina Štrukelj's apartment, I'm knocking on the door, because I need to live in Slovenia. Slovenia has laws, judges, government, ministers, president". With that, he stresses that social rights are supposed to be distinct from the arbitrary rule of state officials. Ahmad shows that, what is decreed by the law and policy, does not apply to him. The governmental document on the policy of migration, in the section on integration, puts forward the social work concepts of inclusion, support for self-organization of asylum seekers and respect for their rights. On their website, they wrote that "[i]t is important to encourage self-organisation of people under international protection, and to advocate for their rights, and to make their active participation in the processes of preparation, execution and monitoring of integration policies and measures possible" (Government Office for the

[Support and Integration of Migrants of the Republic Slovenia 2019](#), p. 38).

In reality, however, the Centre for Asylum Seekers, the Government Office for the Support and Integration of Migrants, and the leadership of the Ministry of the Interior, all acted in opposition to this policy paper, in that they actively tried to deport a Syrian asylum seeker, who succeeded through his own efforts to become integrated into Slovene society. Ahmad became the symbol of struggle for refugee rights and of self-organized integration, and for that, the Ministry of the Interior—in opposition to its own principles—punished him, controlled him and attempted to destroy him. They violated Ahmad's social rights (the right to reside in Centre for Asylum Seekers) and for this they were found guilty of mistreatment by the [Administrative Court of the Republic of Slovenia \(2017\)](#). Declaratively, the Government Office and the Ministry of the Interior stand for inclusion of, and respect for, asylum seekers—but, in reality, they create a hostile environment: they exclude, actively prevent inclusion and thus retraumatize people. The governmental discourse on integration is much more than empty words—it is a case of institutional or “organised hypocrisy”, to borrow the term that [Cusumano \(2019\)](#) used to refer to Frontex's (non)rescue missions in the Mediterranean Sea. The term defines the discrepancy between the rhetoric of an institution and its actions and effects. Barbara Vodopivec (interview 7 October 2020) described the hypocrisy of state institutions as follows:

“In Ahmad's case, but also in other cases, I was shocked by the ability of the Ministry of the Interior and the police to manipulate. And not just to manipulate, but also break their own laws. They kept coming up with new rejections. [. . .] Those were years of the Ministry exhausting us, using very technical interpretations of the law and manipulation of legislation. When Ahmad came [to Slovenia], he was full of life and looked healthier. Five years later you can see how bureaucracy completely exhausts an individual—emotionally, physically and in terms of health.”

Radical Politics in Rog

The power as Foucault has shown by analyzing a total institution (from prison to psychiatric hospital) becomes spatialized ([Feldman 1991](#)). [Agamben \(1995\)](#) showed the spatialization of power in the case of the concentration camp. On the other hand, counter-power is being spatialized in (European) squats challenging not only private property and capitalist relations but also notions of national identity, securitization of borders and states' monopoly over the right to belong ([Mudu and Chattopadhyay 2018](#); [Hrvatinić 2016](#); [Beznic 2017](#)). Autonomous Factory Rog is not a background context of migrant struggles, but a constituent component of political subjectivation or citizenship as practice (not as status conferred by the state) ([Erensu 2016](#), p. 665; [Centrih 2018](#)). Subjectivity is bound to specific “sites”, “fields of contestation” and Rog as a squat is the embodiment of anticapitalist and antiauthoritarian struggles. As argued by [Isin \(2009\)](#), politics rests upon concrete spatialities; the space has highly formative role in Ahmad's antideportation campaign. Additionally, vice versa, through supporting Ahmad, the Rog community got more connected, but also more open to the outside and hence more heterogeneous. New political relations, forged from below, were developed. As [Andraž Rožman](#) (interview 4 November 2020) stressed, the support of Shamieh was an example of when “the community works, because we all came together. From the activists in Rog, to humanitarians, journalists, volunteers, professors, intellectuals, even two politicians were there”. Legal advice, emotional support and support for daily survival all came from the autonomous space in Rog, especially from the Ambasada Rog collective.

Even though the campaign centered one person, the motivation for action came from a demand for equal rights for all (not just those, who are favored by the media or those, who are close to Rog activists) and for the dismantling of the unjust Dublin system. In this sense, [Miha Blažič](#) (interview 22 September 2020) commented on the campaign:

“A legitimate criticism of Ahmad's campaign is that it was very centred on him as a person, it was built on the fact that you can relate to him, the sense of closeness,

he is likeable; we played on those emotions. We thought strategically about what we need in order to win. [. . .] But politically I don't like such an approach. It's very individualised and, as a result, a large individual burden fell on him."

Zana Fabjan Blažič and Miha Blažič (interview 22 September 2020) stressed that, while Ahmad "is likeable, antiracist and anticapitalist struggles consist of much more than mutual sympathy and social proximity". It entails the cooperation of people, who are not necessarily of the same social class, "who are not refugee geniuses or artists, that a good film could be made about, but are instead ordinary workers, who don't meet the orientalist standards of beauty, who are not well-spoken and don't evoke compassion and empathy" (Zana Fabjan Blažič and Miha Blažič, interview 22 September 2020). Namely, the likability of refugees can lead to a categorization of "good" and "bad"; of those who deserve protection vs. those who can be deported—and this is no longer linked with equal rights for all. In those cases, it is about the privilege of those, liked by "us", i.e., the dominant white majority. Miha Blažič (interview 22 September 2020) stressed: "If our political agenda is the right to freedom of movement and the right to live wherever they want, and we want those things to be the right of everyone, then this is the basis on which we build political coalitions.". This is the radical position of a struggle, which is not conditioned by personal sympathies, but which is based on the principles of equality, self-organization, freedom and direct democracy. As observed by [Centrih \(2018, p. 381\)](#) Rog activists have, without any substantial financial resources and bureaucratic procedures managed to provide many of the activities and services that the city of Ljubljana had promised or the Ministry declared in their policy statement.

Such (migrant) activism develops in spaces where politics is enacted from below ([Abram 2017](#); [Anderson et al. 2012](#); [Beznec 2017](#); [Centrih 2018](#); [Hrvatinić 2016](#); [Mudu and Chattopadhyay 2018](#); [Nyers 2008](#); [Nyers and Rygiel 2012](#)). Shamieh's struggle for asylum and the right to stay, and not accepting to be sent to Croatia can be seen as a manifestation of migrant autonomy and radical community solidarity. However—for the state—he becomes suspicious and a threat to moral order as he is not compliant with the stereotypical image of refugees as weak, speechless and passive.

8. Analyses: Embodiment of Political Violence and Community Care

Toward the end of our interview, Ahmad said that, after 10 years of seeking a refuge—and especially after the last five years of legal battles to avoid the deportation—he had "all his teeth in his hand". He pulled a small plastic bag out of his pocket and showed them to us. His pulled out teeth will be used as evidence in court in the damage compensation lawsuit against the Government Office for the Support and Integration of Migrants for curtailing his rights as an asylum seeker, when they prevented him entry and stay in the Centre for Asylum Seekers. His teeth are an illustration of how Slovenia treats refugees, when they start using the "legal and political language" of the state, when they take voice to claim the right to international protection. His teeth are an illustration of the expansion of state bureaucracy, which, instead of protecting people, issues an endless chain of decisions and complaints, through which it excludes people, prevents them access to rights, persecutes them and only rarely decides in their favor. His teeth are a proof of the continuation of the erasure: illegalization of 25.671 permanent residents of Slovenia in the 1990s extends into the systematic annihilation of the right to asylum. The right to international protection is destroyed through the low number of accepted asylum claims, through the harsh lives of refugees in Slovenia and the police push-backs from Slovenia to Croatia and back along the Balkan route ([Lipovec Čebren and Zorn 2016](#); [Border Violence Monitoring Network 2020](#)). Ahmad, wounded in the Syrian war, barely managed to save all his limbs. He survived the boat journey from Turkey to Greece, but he has not been able to preserve all his body-parts in Slovenia, a safe member state of the EU. His teeth needed to be pulled out (as the pain was unbearable), because of the politics of exclusion, which sows suffering, both along the external borders of Europe, and on the inside of the EU. Additionally, in turn, his prosthetic teeth are an expression of solidarity: Ahmad's comrades collected the money for

his prosthesis, and they used their networks to find a dentist, who made him new teeth for just the price of the material, and did not charge for her work (interview with Ahmad Shamieh 9 September 2020). Hence the teeth that Ahmad lost reflect the consequence of the work of the Ministry of the Interior, and the new teeth reflect the strength of the collective struggle based on solidarity, mutual care and love for the world (*amor mundi*), to use the words of Hannah Arendt. As one of the interviewees, lawyer Anuška Podvršič (30 September 2020), said, she, searching for legal solution, “thought all the time about Dublin” (and also as the result of the secondary trauma stress)—similarly throughout this research, I am thinking all the time about Ahmad’s teeth.

9. Conclusions

If the deportation is a site where sovereignty is performed, then antideportation is a challenge to some of the most exclusionary and coercive powers of the state. This challenge could not be effective without space from where the struggles emerge. These spaces are defined by practices of autonomy, solidarity and freedom as never given as a substance of rights, but always fought for. The practices of counter-power are spatialized in the European squats including the one in Ljubljana called Autonomous Factory Rog. Nyers (2012, p. 97) claims that “non-status refugees—those figures of excess in our midst—are actively constructing, experimenting, and creating new forms of being political”. In this article such politization was addressed in relation to deportability trauma embodiment and reconnection through activism in squat of the autonomous antiracist community. Thus, we can agree with Cvetkovich (2003 in Kennedy and Whitlock 2011, p. 251) who pointed out that trauma is “a name for experiences of socially situated political violence”.

Ahmad Shamieh and other asylum seekers mobilize to make claims, demand rights and thereby constitute themselves as political, despite their lack of status, formal rights and political power. Politics means precisely this, that you speak at a time and in a place you are not expected to speak (Rancière 2006 in Nyers 2008, p. 165). Ahmad’s pulled out teeth are an illustration of just how hard this struggle can be. It became also clear that protection comes at a price of non-freedom. Ahmad could have the status of an asylum seeker (and probably also a refugee status), if he would allow the Ministry of the Interior to deport him to Croatia. However, Ahmad and his supporters interfere with the state’s decisions. Freedom and self-determination are as important as protection. Protection without freedom brings dehumanization, it means being safely managed, like a “bag of potatoes”. We showed the effects of the authoritative, exclusionary ethos of the Ministry of the Interior and in what way they deepen the bureaucratic machinery of dehumanization and deportability related vulnerability. However, we also showed the strength of the antiracist community and the struggle for equal rights, which wins over state’s persistence in exclusion: Ahmad has never been, and never will be, deported to Croatia.

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Notes

- ¹ The Dublin regulation is an EU law that determines which Member State is responsible for examining an application for asylum. Official Journal of the European Union. Available online: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32003R0343&from=EN> (accessed on 10 January 2021).
- ² I conducted the interview together with Manca Posega, a social worker who also transcribed all the interviews. The interview took three hours and a half, the transcript is 14 pages long.
- ³ I conducted interviews between September and November 2020. I spoke twice with Miha Blažič (once together with Zana Fabjan Blažič). Each interview lasted between half an hour and three hours, and all together, the interviews amount to 57 pages of transcripts (that is without the interview I conducted with Ahmad, those I am counting separately).
- ⁴ Kogovšek et al. (2010); Zorn (2009, 2013).
- ⁵ A new law for Syrians entered into force in January 2016 in order to deter refugees. Available online: <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkeys-new-visa-law-for-syrians-enters-into-force-93642> (accessed on 10 January 2021).
- ⁶ The antideportation campaign of the Korba Sulejman family was also abundantly reported on by the media, especially by Andraž Rožman.
- ⁷ Katarina Štrukelj, the Head of the Centre for Asylum Seekers, and also the Head of the Government Office for the Support and Integration of Migrants. Available online: <https://www.gov.si/drzavni-organi/vladne-sluzbe/urad-vlade-za-oskrbo-in-integracijo-migrantov/> (accessed on 16 January 2021).
- ⁸ This is the statement by MP Karl Erjavec (Democratic Party of the Retired People). Available online: <https://www.zurnal24.si/slovenija/erjavec-hrvaska-je-bolj-elegantna-resitev-300577> (accessed on 18 December 2020). I am grateful to Barbara Vodopivec, who reminded me of this statement.
- ⁹ Namely, the Administrative Court established that Shamieh's asylum claim had not yet been rejected, because the Ministry of the Interior had not issued any decision in this regard. Furthermore, the Administrative Court also established that the Ministry of the Interior made an erroneous claim, when they argued that the use of the discretionary clause was no longer possible, because Shamieh's procedures in Slovenia were completed. The Administrative Court issued a provisional injunction for Shamieh to stay in Slovenia.

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