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An Adieu to Europe: The Impossible Necessity of Balkans Politics*

"Our experience is provincial," writes Radomir Konstantinović at the very beginning of his book, now famous, *Philosophy of the Provincial*, published in Belgrade in 1969. “Province is our destiny, it’s our evil fate,” he continues by using the metaphor of the provincial in order to describe the way of life and thinking typical of small town mentality.

Every reading of Konstantinović’s book is actually a rereading and reopening of the one and the same problem – the problem of the double and ambiguous nature of the provincial mind. Although predominantly targeting Serbian nationalism, Konstantinović’s criticism doesn’t primarily refer to any particular territorial or geo-political location, but to the provincial mind in as much as “there is no country where it (the mindset) is

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* This text came out as a proceeding from the regional conference “Integrating Differences - Human Rights, Social Inclusion and Social Cohesion in the Balkans on its Road to the EU,” which took place in Ohrid, 28-31 May, 2009, organized by the “Euro-Balkan” Institute, and supported by the Jean Monnet Programme of the European Commission.

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* Овој текст произлезе од моето излагање на регионалната конференција „Интегрирање на разликите: Човековите права, социјалното вклучување и социјалната кохезија на Балканот на неговиот пат кон ЕУ“, која се одржа во Охрид од 28 до 31 мај 2009 година, во организација на Институтот „Евро-Балкан“ и со поддршка на програмата Жан Моне на Европската Комисија.
impossible, since it is equally impossible everywhere in its demand to ideally be closed off.”

By invoking Konstantinović's work, I would like to pose a question about new, contemporary provincialisms, local and global, Balkans provincialism as well as European provincialism, “east” provincialism as well as “west” provincialism - in other words, about the provincialism of every identitarian logic of thinking and politics that continues to haunt, like a ghost, like a specter, every idea of almost any community. Or, to put it differently - what is provincial in the concept of the provincial mind is not constituted within any particular position but rather through denying the (ex)position towards the difference and otherness. Therefore, what is provincial is the very relation, not the position as such.

The Provincial Mind is constituted by its uniformed and unified way of thinking, by the various procedures of homogenization of community and thus by the exclusion of what is different and other. However, in some cases these strategies of excluding the differences and otherness’ operate precisely through the processes of inclusion, for example, in the domain of contemporary integration discourses that eventually result in anihilation, assimilation and absorption of every difference and every otherness.

The politics of the inclusive exclusion operate through various procedures of assimilation and integration. This means that it is this politics that embraces cultural, political, sexual, national and all other differences only through erasing them.
It seems that both discourses of exclusion and inclusion mark the other, point to the other as to the possible danger for the “infantile world of the provincial.” In return, the provincial mind has to protect its own uniformity through denying any possibility of change and through rejecting any kind of uncertainty and risk that unavoidably goes together with thinking that is always already the other thinking, different way of thinking.

Within a province, within a small town (where it is important to underline that its smallness is constituted by the very fact that it is closed off), thinking always becomes one thinking, same thinking, certain thinking.

The Provincial Mind is the mind of ready made solutions, the mind of life patterns and life routines with the ready answers to all possible questions; it is about constant reestablishing of the tradition that serves as safeguard and does nothing but repeats the provincial past.2

Thus, it is the provincial mind’s refusal to look into the future that appears to be the origin of every aspiration to turn the world into a provincial place, e.g a small town.

Considering the overall topic of this conference more closely, “Integrating Differences: Human Rights, Social Inclusion and Social Cohesion in the Balkans on its Road to the EU,” I would like to point to the fact that public discourses in Balkan countries “on their road to EU” as well as in the EU itself are in many cases reinforcing the spirit of the provincial and thus reflecting mutual provincialisms.
За да ја поткрепам тезава, ќе искористам примери од современото српско општество „на неговиот пат кон ЕУ“, иако претпоставувам дека и многу други земји на Балканот во своите заедници имаат слични искуства со јавните дискурси околу интеграциите во ЕУ.

Во Србија, идејата за интеграциии во ЕУ ја има логиката на нормативен дискурс; неприкосновеноста на оној став дека „мора да станеме дел од ЕУ“ има свои перформативни дејства и служи како аргумент што треба згодно да се повторува и да се цитира секогаш кога оние кои носат одлуки во Србија стануваат неволни вистински да се фатат во костец со мноzinските и таканаречени традиционални вредности.

Во март 2009 година, српското Собрание расправаше за еден антидискриминациски закон што забранува секаква дискриминација, било врз основа на расата, вероисповедата, сексуалната опредељба, родот, било врз какви-годе други фактори. Жилаво му се противева Српската православна црква и некои други конзервативци, но законот беше дел од реформите за усогласување на нацијата со политиките на Европската Унија и беше суштински важно да се донесе за да можат српските државјани да патуваат без визи, па така законот се донесе.  

Српската православна црква, поддржана од мноштво други верски заедници, побара измена на членовите што се однесуваа на правата на хомосексуалците и верските слободи. Претставниците на Црквата тврдеа дека законот може погрешно да се толкува и да се злоупотребува. Други критичари, пак, велеа дека законот е противен на српската традиција.

In order to support this thesis, I will use examples from contemporary Serbian society “on its road to EU,” although I suppose that many other countries in the Balkans share similar experiences concerning public discourses on EU integration in their communities.

In Serbia, the idea about EU integration has the logic of a normative discourse; unquestionable nature of this “we must be part of EU” attitude has its performative effects and serves as an argument which is to be repeated and cited whenever decision makers in Serbia become unwilling to actually confront the majority and so called traditional values.

In March, 2009 Serbian Parliament debated over an anti-discrimination law which bans any kind of discrimination, whether based on race, religion, sexual orientation, gender or other factors. It was strongly opposed by the Serbian Orthodox Church and other conservatives; but the legislation was part of reforms to align the nation with European Union policies and was crucial if Serbian citizens were to gain the right to travel without visas, so the law was passed.  

The Serbian Orthodox Church supported by many other religious communities, requested changes to the articles concerning gay rights and religious freedom. Church representatives argued that the law might be liable to misinterpretation and misuse. Other critics have said it runs counter to Serbian tradition.
Dragan Markovic - Palma, the Mayor of the small town Jagodina and a member of the Serbian Parliament as the leader of the United Serbia Party offered this argument the logic of which is rather hard to follow: “In Serbia, there are over 3,700,000 women. Out of 3,700,000 women, we can say that 3,650,000 are very beautiful women. If this [anti-discrimination] law passes, and it’s been known that a large number of women are already finding it hard to cope with the global financial crisis, if we vote for this law then, these women will surely have a problem.” He also claimed “If we are to proceed towards Europe in the company of homosexuals it would be better not to go at all.”

Now, we will try to understand what the Mayor of this small town in Serbia actually wanted to say: first, the vast majority of Serbian women are very beautiful (out of 3,700,000 only 50,000 are not); second, most of these very beautiful women are in financial crisis (still, a remaining question is what kind of financial status are facing those 50,000 not very beautiful women?). Further, if you are a very beautiful women who lives in Serbia in the midst of the world financial crisis, you can certainly count on financially successful heterosexual men (is it possible any other way?); and finally, if the anti-discrimination law is passed, there is the obvious danger that heterosexual men will become homosexuals, and thus financially less capable of supporting the 3,650,000 very beautiful women who live in Serbia and Serbia will collapse. Besides the fact that this argument is absolutely homophobic and extremely macho, what it also shows is the fear that financially capable, heterosexual men in Serbia will become less manly and powerful (read as homosexuals) if they lose the possibility to discriminate against homosexuals (as well as 3,650,000 very beautiful Serbian women and 50,000 not very beautiful women.)
Let us go back to the other effects of the law itself. It appears that those who voted “yes” for the anti-discriminatory law voted, in fact, for travelling around Europe without visas. Of course, if they had money. However, since the vast majority of Serbian citizens can not afford to travel due to the economic crisis, they will also have to vote “yes” for the law that introduces extra taxes for Serbian citizens in order to fill holes in government’s budget. Furthermore, given that most of the people struggle in their day-to-day existence, they would vote “yes” for everything that promises money and investments. Universiade in Belgrade, for example. But then, in order to have Universiade in Belgrade, we will have to vote “yes” for the re-allocation of Roma citizens from the locations necessary for Belgrade’s city government to present Belgrade as a city of 21st century to their EU business partners as “Roma free” (which is the direct association of Juden frei): namely, the future capital of the Balkans and, of course, the great opportunity for foreign investments. In this ideological vicious circle, the line of argumentation and political decisions does not really go along with any kind of thinking that advocates human lives and quality of life in certain communities; this line of argument has the same trajectory as the neoliberal logic of money and/or ideology circulation. Consequently, it is neither about our lives nor about the lives of others; it’s neither about the others right to have rights nor about our right to have rights. It is all about re-establishing the dominant ideological patterns, that is to say, it’s all about keeping the status quo and its provincial conservative effects.

At the end of the day, those who criticized the anti-discriminatory law and were worried that the law
“runs counter to Serbian tradition” could be at peace. Serbian provincialism and its tradition remained intact since the real debate on human rights politics and anti-discriminatory policy has been almost completely silenced. In any case, it didn’t even touch upon those most important issues that such a public debate could bring to a particular community – the search for the alternatives to the politics of exclusion as well as to the political culture and ideology based on war, violence and discrimination.

It seems that the most serious “benefit” of anti-discriminatory law will be that discrimination, human suffering, misery and violence against the citizens of Serbia will be better controlled and institutionalized from now on. Thus, the most vulnerable ones will be one more time marked and reproduced in their otherness since the human rights discourse and anti-discriminatory policies are producing a certain kind of subject that needs protection. They are removed from politics, they are made passive and consequently someone else gets the mandate to act - in order to help or protect - e.g. to intervene. It is this constant recreation of the need for protection that leads to a kind of interventionism, which is not necessarily an aspect of emancipatory politics.

I would suggest that the way in which anti-discriminatory law was argued, motivated and presented in Serbia would do nothing else but produce subjects in need of protection without any political possibilities and alternatives left (as I have previously mentioned, for example LGBTIQ population as well as 3,650,000 very beautiful and 50,000 less beautiful women who live in Serbia).
Дури и да се засновува врз најдобрите пракси и вредности на ЕУ, конкретниов закон – без значителни промени во српското оштетество и во неговата политичка култура – всушност само го засилува инфантилниот паланечки ум, кој –покому прекусамата стратегија за вклучување – и натаму е исключив не само кон маргинализираните поединци и групи, туку и во смисла на поиѓрагаи по аливернашви и полишчийки можности.

Да потсетам на Фуко (Foucault) и на неговите осврти за начинот на кој одредена идеја или модел на човештвото се развило благодарение на различните пракси – а една од нив е и правниот дискурс – и за тоа како таа човечка идеја станала нормативна, очигледна и навидум универзална. „Хуманизмот не може да биде универзален, но може многу да важи за одреденаситуација. Онашто нараекувамежуманизам го користете и марксистите, либералите, нацистите, католиците. Тоа не значи дека треба да го отфрлиме она што го нараекуваме човекови права или слобода, туку дека не можеме да кажеме оти слободата или човековите права мораат да се ограничат во рамките на некои граница... Кај хуманизмот ме плаши тоа што еден извесен облик на нашата етика тој го претставува како универзален модел за сите видови слобода. Мислам дека во иднината пред нас ќе има повеќе тајни, повеќе можни свободи и повеќе изуми отколку што можеме да си замислиме во хуманизмов каков што догматски се претставува на сите страни од политичкото виножито: од левицата, од центраот и од десницата“.

Преку своите конвенции, ЕУ веќе утврдила постапки кои за првпат во историјата овозможуваат интересите на поединците, на граѓаните, да избијат на межународната сцена, на полето на межународното

Even if it is based on the best possible EU practices and values, this particular law - without considerable changes in Serbian society and political culture – in fact, does nothing else but reinforces the infantile provincial mind, which is again - through the very “strategy of inclusion” - exclusive not only in respect to marginalized individuals and groups but also in terms of searching for alternatives and political possibilities.

I would like to recall Foucault and his writing on how a certain idea or a model of humanity was developed through different practices - juridical discourse being one of them - and how this idea of man has become normative, self-evident, and apparently universal. “Humanism may not be universal but may be quite relative to a certain situation. What we call humanism has been used by Marxists, liberals, Nazis, Catholics. This does not mean that we have to get rid of what we call human rights or freedom, but that we can’t say that freedom or human rights has to be limited at certain frontiers... What I am afraid of about humanism is that it presents a certain form of our ethics as a universal model for any kind of freedom. I think that there are more secrets, more possible freedoms, and more inventions in our future than we can imagine in humanism as it is dogmatically represented on every side of the political rainbow: the Left, the Center, the Right.”

Through its conventions, the EU has already established procedures which for the first time in history make it possible for the interest of the individuals, of the citizens, to come out onto the international stage, into the
право, кои порано беа резервирани само за суверени-
те држави. Склоноста кон интернационализирање на
човековите права укажува на волјата на глобалната
заедница сè повеќе да ја зема пред вид сувереноста
на поединецот, или на малцинските групи, а не на
dржавите. Од друга страна, процесот на сè повидли-
vата глобализација на човековите права сведочи
како „западното“ стојалиште за универзалноста на
човековите права може да функционира речиси како
diplomatsko и политичко алиби за postkoloniјален
интервенционизам.⁶

Ако наводно деполитизираната хуманитарна по-
литика на човековите права е висински депо-
литизирана,⁷ нема да создава никакви нормативни
dимензии, ниту некакви димензии кои создаваат
субјекти; нема да носи никакви културни претпос-
tавки и цели; нема да пропишува и задава ништо;
едноставно ќе ги шири можностите, алтернативите,
можните слободи и ќе овозможи повеќе изуми во
иднината.

Секакво друго претставување и сфакање на поли-
тиката на човековите права и натаму ќе биде
diplomatsko и политично алиби за postkoloniјален
интервенционизам. И натаму ќе биде ништо освен
повторување на претходнospоменатото инклузивно-
исключување кое функционира преку ништење,
асимилација, интеграција и кое ги прифаќа култур-
nите, политичките, половините, националните и сите
други разлики само преку нивно бришење. Така, тоа
го повторува и засилува паланечкиош ум.

Понатаму, друго прашање што мора да се постави е
dali политиката за човековите права ги штити не-
dолжните, страдните и дискримирираните поединици
врз основа на универсалните (претполитички) чове-

If supposedly depoliticized humanitarian politics of hu-
man rights was really depoliticized,⁷ it would not create
any normative or subject-producing dimensions; it would
not carry any cultural assumptions or aims; it would not
prescribe or proscribe anything; it would simply expand
possibilities, alternatives, possible freedoms, and more
inventions in our future.

Every other way of presenting and understanding the
politics of human rights will remain a diplomatic and a
political alibi for post-colonial interventionism. It will
remain nothing else but the repetition of the earlier
mentioned inclusive exclusion which operates through
annihilation, assimilation, integration and which
embraces cultural, political, sexual, national and all other
differences only through erasing them. Thus, it repeats
and reinforces the provincial mind.

Furthermore, another question that has to be asked
is whether human rights politics protect innocent,
suffering and discriminated individuals on the basis of
universal (pre-political) human rights or on the basis of
field of international law, which were reserved solely for
sovereign states. The tendency of internationalization of
human rights indicates the global community’s willing-
ness to increasingly take into account the sovereignty of
the individual, or of minority groups and not of states.
On the other hand, the process of increasingly visible
globalization of human rights testifies how the “western”
insistence on the universality of human rights can func-
tion virtually as a diplomatic and political alibi for post-
colonial interventionism.⁶
the specific political rights of citizens, members of the particular political community?

This line of argumentation allows us to invoke Agamben’s notion of *homo sacer* as a human being reduced to “bare life.”* It is precisely this zone of indistinction between biological and political when a human being becomes an ideal bearer of universal human rights since s/he is excluded from the political community, deprived of its particular socio-political identity which accounts for her/his determinate citizenship and no longer recognized and/or treated as human. Agamben is interested in violent foundations of political authority and in this context he deals with the problem of a gap between man and citizen in the figure of refugee as the site where it is shown the distance between the bare life and the state. He investigates the relation between dissolution of nation-states and the future of the concept of citizen and concludes that giving rights became constitutive operation by which state deploys control over its own citizens. In this sense, one might say that it is through the very process of their positioning within the particular order that refugees become actually excluded from politics. The paradox of human rights politics is that one is deprived of human rights precisely when one is effectively reduced to a human being as such (*homo sacer*), that is to say, precisely when one effectively becomes the ideal bearer of universal human rights. Thus, the paradox of the politics of human rights is that they appear to be the “rights” of those excluded and removed from political community, of those reduced to inhumanity and consequently of those who does not have any rights.
What happens to human rights when they become of no use or when they become the rights of those who have no rights?

Ranciere proposes the following:

(...) when they are of no use, you do the same as charitable persons do with their old clothes. You give them to the poor. Those rights that appear to be useless in their place are sent abroad, along with medicine and clothes, to people deprived of medicine, clothes, and rights. It is in this way, as the result of this process, that the Rights of Man become the rights of those who have no rights, the rights of bare human beings subjected to inhuman repression and inhuman conditions of existence. They become humanitarian rights, the rights of those who cannot enact them, the victims of the absolute denial of right. For all this, they are not void. Political names and political places never become merely void. The void is filled by somebody or something else. [...] if those who suffer inhuman repression are unable to enact Human Rights that are their last recourse, then somebody else has to inherit their rights in order to enact them in their place. This is what is called the “right to humanitarian interference” – a right that some nations assume to be the supposed benefit of victimized populations...

Here “human rights” turns out to be nothing but the ideology of modern liberal capitalism.

The people of the Balkans commonly perceive themselves as permanent victims of history and very often they have been consequently subjected to other nations’ right to humanitarian interference.

What could be a new form of political agency which would disrupt the present situation? Contrary to the politics of accepting the position of victimized populations,
Balkan politics today should be about expanding political possibilities, about a passionate search for the alternatives and about new, possible freedoms.

In this sense, the phrase “impossible necessity of Balkan politics on its road to the EU” suggests that if there is any road for Balkan countries to the EU it is necessary to keep the possibilities of other roads or the roads for the others - roads without any determined directions and/or destinations, or even, there must be possibilities of not taking and not choosing any particular road, even if it is the road to the EU. Otherwise we are literally obliged to follow the so-called “map of the road.” The very matrix of Europeisation of the Balkans understood as inclusive exclusion is being constantly repeated within the Balkans itself: one of the last examples has already been mentioned, the way in which the Roma population is treated during Universiade in Belgrade. (The City Government decided to restrict the movement of Roma people who live nearby Universiade Village to an enclosed location (by erecting a fence around them they are made invisible), and at the same time they decided to ‘help’ them by providing them with food and water.

Belgrade’s Mayor Dragan Djilas said on that occasion that “a few hundred people cannot be allowed to halt Belgrade’s development, nor can two million Belgraders be held anyone’s hostage.” 10 On the same occasion the Mayor announced that it is necessary that Roma citizens should be removed from that area so that “we can build a new boulevard necessary for the development of the city, and are able to hold events planned in the future.”

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Како што може да се види, градоначалникот го гради својот аргумент произволно. Во зависност од тоа што му одговара, Ромите се претставуваат или како граѓани ки ги држат во заложништво другите белграѓани, или – имајќи ги на ум задолжителните стандарди и политики на ЕУ около човековите права и интеграциите – на нив се гледа како на незаштитени човечки суштиства кои треба да се подложат на „хуманитарно“ вмешување и да им се обезбедат храна и вода во тоа оградено место. И уште еднаш треба да се постави истото прашање: дали Ромите во Белград имат правата како политички субјекти или, пак, нивните права се засноваат врз човековите права? Изгледа дека правата на Ромите се прави на оние што немаат права, права што Ромите не можат да ги спроведат, ами може некој друг, „некој што заедно со лековите и облеката ќе им ги испрати на луѓето лишени и од лекови, и од облека и од права“.

Што може човек да мисли и да направи за да ја поткопа оваа логика на постојано исключување? Каква може да биде иднината на политиката што ќе ги смени претежните нехумани начела и вредности кои се во самата суштина на политиката и политиките за човековите права?

Една од најзначајните задачи на денешната мисла е редефинирањето, реконструирањето, прочитувањето и преиспишувањето на самиот концепт на политиката и/или на политичкото.

Концептот на политичкото за кој зборувам – е множински; станува збор за животот со сите негови сложености, за некои тешки одлуки што треба да се донесат, за отсуството на извесност; тоа е влогот секогаш и секаде кога она „Ja“ и она „другите“ се изложени/поставени едни пред други; тоа, парадоксално, во себе ги содржи вклучувањето и ис-

As one can see, the Mayor builds his argument arbitrarily. Conveniently, the Roma people are presented either as citizens that are holding as hostages other citizens of Belgrade, or - given the required EU standards and policies concerning human rights and integrations - they are seen as unprotected human beings who need to be subjected to a “humanitarian” intervention and be provided with food and water within an enclosed location. One more time the same question should be posed: Do the Roma in Belgrade have their rights as political subjects or are their rights are based on human rights? It seems that the rights of the Roma are the rights of those who don’t have rights, the rights that Roma people cannot enact, but someone else can and “sent them abroad along with medicine and clothes, to people deprived of medicine, clothes, and rights.”

What can one think and do in order to disrupt this logic of permanent exclusion? What could be the future of the politics that will change the dominant inhuman principles and values which are at the very core of human rights politics and policies?

One of the most significant tasks in today’s thinking is the one of redefining, reconstructing, rereading and rewriting of the very concept of politics and/or of the political.

The concept of political that I am speaking about – is (in) plural; It’s about life in all of it’s complexities; It’s about some hard decisions to be made; it’s about the absence of certainty; it is at stake whenever and wherever the “I” and “the other” are (ex)posed to each other; it contains in itself, paradoxically, inclusion and exclusion, transcendence and belonging, absolute external
appearance of somebody and something unknown and strange as well as intimacy of the familiar and close, in other words, distance and intimacy at the same time.

Who is then this other that is constitutive for the political, the other who is both a stranger/foreigner and someone closest, both “I” and “the other”? In the spirit of Heidegger's terminology, Derrida offers the following answer:

“(it) has no shape. No sex. No name. It is neither a man nor a woman. It is not selfhood, not “I,” not a subject, nor a particular person. It is another Dasein that every Dasein has, through the voice, a voice it hears... At a distance which is neither absolute – absolutely infinite – nor worthless in the absolute closeness of one’s ownership... This range of voice, to-be-in-the-range-of-voice ... makes the other someone of a different kind.”

Political requires ear for the other, listening of the other; thus, politics is always the others politics, it requires the other, demands the other and is responsible to the other.

Every relation to the other would be, said Derrida, before and after anything else, an adieu.

In this sense, an adieu to Europe invokes the gesture of hospitality towards the moment of separation, of departure, sometimes forever (this can never, in fact be excluded), without any return; in this sense, and precisely in this sense, it is a gesture of welcoming the unknown, foreign and strange, of what is new and different; adieu to Europe must be a response to the others responsibility.
Белешки:


2. Ibid.

3. „Инверзијата на аргументите“ во српските јавни дискурси може да се следи во фактот дека од нас постојано се бара да се соочиме со своето скорешно воено минато како и во фактот дека постојано се настојува да претемеме одговорност за воените злосторства што се извршиле во наше име, бидејќи излегува дека тоа е неопходен услов за процесот на интегрирање во ЕУ.


7. Поновата балканска историја нуди разни примери за таканаречениот „западен“ интервенционизам во името на защитата на универсалните човекови права – заштита на недолжните, дискриминираните, страдни поединци од недемократските, насилини, „недоволно цивилизирани“ машинерии на културата, државата, војната, етничкиот судир, племенството, патријархатот итн.

8. „Темелниот категорички пар во западната политика не е парот пријател/непријател, туку парот сушт живот/политичко постојење, зое/биос, исключение/включување. Има политика затоа што човекот е она

Notes:


2. Ibid.

3. The “inversion in argumentation” within Serbian public discourse might be traced in the fact that we are constantly demanded to face our recent war past as well as in the fact that we are insisted upon to show responsibility for the war crimes committed in our names since this turns out to be a necessary condition for the EU integration process.


7. Recent Balkans history offers different examples on so called “western” interventionism in the name of universal human rights protection - protection of the innocent, discriminated, suffering individuals against non-democratic, violent, “not enough civilized” machineries of culture, state, war, ethnic conflict, tribalism, patriarchy, etc.

8. “The fundamental categorical pair of Western politics is not that of friend/enemy but that of bare life/political existence, zoë/bios, exclusion/inclusion. There is politics because man is the living being who... separates and
живо существо што... се издвојува и спротиставува на сопственото сушт живот и, истовремено, се држи во однос на тој сушт живот во едно инклюзивно включување”. Види Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer* (Stanford University Press, 1998).


References: