



Contradictions and Antagonisms in (Anti-) Social(ist) Housing in Serbia

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Abstract

This article tackles contradictions of social housing in contemporary Serbia. It shows how residualised social housing does not bring justice to marginalised groups affected by capitalist expropriation. In this article, the term (anti-)social(ist) housing will be introduced to describe the historically grounded, incomplete, and contradictory solutions that social housing is currently offering in Serbia, as well as its anti-social nature. By focusing on a particular case study, the Kamendin project situated in Zemun Polje, one of the very few social housing projects in Belgrade, the article explores debt crises produced by mechanisms of social housing; the production of racism, segregation, and responsabilisation; and mechanisms of passing responsibility on all levels in an attempt of the state to spend as little money as possible. (Anti-)social(ist) housing is further assessed as a space of struggle that includes different survival and resistance tactics that are used in order to oppose social housing violence. Following that, the article will focus on the possibilities of the activist art project Kamendynamics and the theatre piece *How does fascism not disappear?* Zlatija Kostić: *I sued myself* to confront the racialisation and culturalisation of problems by introducing collaborative visual, class-based, and historical-materialist analyses. By documenting and conceptualising mechanisms of social housing and reflecting on the role of activist art within housing struggles, I aim to contribute to anti-segregation and anti-racist housing struggles in Eastern European cities and beyond.

Keywords

Social housing; Serbia; Kamendin; post-socialism; social justice; activist art

Introduction

Housing is an important battlefield of struggles for social justice. The Serbian housing system is built on complex Yugoslav housing histories and an anti-socialist housing “transition” that occurred after the 1990s, when housing became, to a large extent, a for-profit domain. In this process, many people became “losers” of the privatisation and subsequent financialisation of housing and the lack of adequate social housing provisions. Contemporary social housing in Serbia is a segment of the institutionalisation of (capitalist) social order (Fraser, 2016:163) that emerged as an effect of a global neoliberal anti-socialist transition and its neo-colonial implications. Today, social housing in Serbia does not ensure decent, affordable, and secure housing and accordingly fails to provide social justice to marginalised groups who are affected by capitalist expropriation. By betraying the promise of social housing through the relativisation, political use, and suppression of social justice (Kuljić, 2018:361), social housing produces a toxic patchwork of geographies of isolated and indebted populations made dependent by mechanisms of responsabilisation and racism.

Yet, there is still a particular confusion regarding social housing that has emerged, as one cultural activist put it, from the clash between Yugoslav experience and the aggressive, rapid changes during the last decades. “We see that nothing works, but we still cannot believe that the system is not there for us.”¹ In order to underline the anti-social nature of social housing provision in peripheral capitalism, and instead of using the term social housing—which promises justice to those deprived of housing—I will introduce the notion of (anti-)social(ist) housing, which underlines its negation. Legal adviser Danilo Čurčić came to a similar conclusion at a meeting with tenants in Kamendin in 2015: “I am thinking often about how the social housing system doesn’t exist. You are living the negation of that system. When everything is summed up, it’s the complete opposite to it.”²

The anti-social nature of social housing will be analysed using the case of Kamendin, the biggest social housing project by the City of Belgrade, geographically situated in Zemun Polje on Belgrade’s outskirts. Kamendin is a symptom and a materialisation of (anti-)social(ist) housing in Serbia, which includes technologies of segregation, the production of debt slavery, and racism. In 2013, after an outburst of racist protest in the settlement against Roma newcomers—organised mostly by their white neighbours from nearby neighbourhoods—the mainstream media reporting in newspapers such as *Večernje Novosti*, *Politika*, *Alo!*, and others created a smokescreen that led to confusion and disorientation regarding the events and the real problems in the settlement. In parallel to the outburst of racism, a number of social tenants were facing eviction due to accumulated debt that emerged because of structural problems in the benefits system and (anti-)social(ist) housing provision.

Together with analysing the institutionalisation of (anti-)social(ist) housing, I will look at different resistance strategies. I will show how tenants left by the state to fight violence using their own devices employed the support of human rights NGOs and cultural organisations in order to fight the state and change the narratives about their struggle. The main focus will be on the Kamendynamics project—which started one year after the racist protest and was established by cultural activists Nebojša Milikić and Tadej Kurepa, connected to Cultural Centre Rex in Belgrade—and on the play *How does fascism not disappear?* *Zlatija Kostić: I sued myself*, both carried out in collaboration with a group of tenants. These activist art projects are attempts to construct alternative understandings and meanings of social problems in the neighbourhood. They contribute to housing struggles as they improve the understanding

¹ Conversation with a cultural worker, Belgrade, April 2017.

² Hot potato: What is the social problem in Zemun Polje?, Cultural Centre Rex, Belgrade, June 6, 2015.

of the (anti-)social(ist) housing “transition” and challenge dominant knowledge production by mainstream media.

This article is the result of research that was conducted from 2015 to 2019. The data was collected through ethnographic fieldwork. The reported material is based on participant observation, numerous conversations with residents of Kamendin, local housing experts, and NGO workers involved in activist work in the neighbourhood, and media reports and policy analyses. I observed three public meetings of tenants, one meeting in the neighbourhood, and made four on-site visits to observe the situation. The Kamendynamics project and the performance were analysed on the basis of audio recordings, visual material, and discussions with the actors involved in the project. In May 2015, as a member of Who Builds the City group I took part in organising a meeting in Belgrade, which gathered groups and individuals active in housing struggles in Serbia, including tenants of Kamendin. At the time, I also had a chance to observe and discuss issues about organising regarding Kamendin. In June 2018, I organised the conference *Art and housing struggles: Between art and political organising* at London South Bank University, where Nebojša Milikić from Cultural Centre Rex and Zlatija Kostić, a tenant from Kamendin, presented their collaborative work.

This research is theoretically framed by the current debate on “transition,” post-socialism, peripheral neoliberalisation, and social housing crises, including segregation, the racialisation of space, responsabilisation, tenants’ resistance, and housing activism. The study tackles the contradictions of Serbia’s social housing provision system not as a technical problem but as a political-economic problem (Madden and Marcuse, 2016:4). It combines an ethnographic account of social housing alongside in-depth readings of the economic, cultural, and social forces related to the conditions of specific spaces and subjects.

This paper contributes to scholarship on social housing in Eastern European cities by looking at mechanisms of segregation, the creation of public debt, and race and racism in Eastern European social housing. It provides empirical knowledge about local mechanisms, including the role of artistic activism in shaping narratives about social housing, and hopefully contributes to the anti-eviction struggles that lie ahead for tenants in Kamendin as well as anti-segregation and anti-racist housing struggles, including struggles for social housing in Eastern European cities and beyond.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. First, I discuss of the emergence of the (anti-)social(ist) housing in Serbia. Social housing in Serbia plays out not only at the meso level and through state policy and politico-economic arrangements, but also at the macro level of international EU arrangements. Next, I empirically analyse contradictions in the social housing project Kamendin in Belgrade by looking at segregation, debt slavery, responsabilisation, and racism. I discuss the micro level of shared assumptions, normative conceptions, and forms of knowledge. I consider social housing as both a material and a symbolic dynamic, connecting local issues with broader socio-political dynamics. In the third section, I will look at how attacks on social housing are resisted. I will discuss attempts of tenants and their allies to resist and fight back against systemic housing violence in the long and exhausting battle. The main focus will be on the potentials of cultural production for bringing out counter-narratives about social housing in Serbia. In the conclusion, I will reflect on the main findings in the light of the need to change the direction of “transition” towards new, socially just possibilities.

(Anti-)social(ist) housing in Serbia

Throughout the world, the social aspect of housing is suffering from attacks and defeats in the overwhelming process of housing “transition” that emerged as the effect of the global post-socialist condition (Fraser, 1997) and the outbreak of housing financialisation (Aalbers, 2017; Mikuš, 2019; Rolnik, 2019). Housing “transition” in Serbia emerged as part of the global tectonic changes in the organisation of capital and culture that began in the second half of the twentieth century and triumphed

after 1989. Social housing in Serbia was created on the ruins of the Yugoslav societal housing system, which organised housing for Yugoslav workers more or less successfully until the 1990s. The academic literatures describes the period after the 1990s in ex-Yugoslav states largely as post-socialism and an unfinished or failed transition to capitalist political, institutional, economic, and socio-spatial standards (Kovacs, 1999; Tsenkova, 2009; Hegedus, Luz and Teller, 2013; Lux and Sunega 2013, Neducin and Krklješ, 2017). The process of “transition” in housing effectively meant the abolition of socialist institutionalisation, and with it the exorcism of class justice from the housing system. What we face today is a residual form of social housing based on legal justice, dosed and imposed through controlled procedures, which cannot effectively respond to the needs of the population and accordingly serve social justice. Although social housing, through legal documents, promises housing for all those who are not able to procure housing on the market, in practice it creates deprivation, marginalisation, expropriation, and repression.

In this article, I insist on the notion of anti-socialist transition as an overturned insight into post-socialist transition in order to call things by their right name. In the transitology discourse, the term transition has been used in order to describe the self-compliant and logical process of “transition” in former socialist countries from the totalitarian, backward, and rigid system of socialist production and reproduction into democratic, standardised, advanced, and modern capitalism (Kirn, 2017:47). Nevertheless, “transition” did not form part of a standardised version of capitalism but of a tectonic change in the overall organisation of capitalism and its culture globally (ibid:3). Specific forms of “transition” have been emerging in Western capitalist countries as well as in the East. In housing, it took the form of phasing out the social(ist) elements from the housing sector. In the UK, for example, this process included teachers’ right-to-buy in the 1980s and has reached new heights today with processes of regeneration by demolition and the social cleansing of working-class people from the central parts of London (Watt, 2017: 1–9). In ex-Yugoslav countries, “transition” did not start in 1989, as Gal Kirn has shown (Kirn, 2017:46).³ The history of Yugoslavia is the history of post-socialist discontinuities within socialism under the influence of changes in global dynamics. These post-socialist discontinuities were followed by the transition to civil war in 1990, led by national(ist) elites. This led to the nationalisation of spaces in national-state-building processes and their subsequent privatisation, including the replacement of class justice with de-economised national and philanthropic justice, and resulted in Yugoslavia and its socialist housing experiment disappearing. What emerged was a new, anti-socialist, peripheral, financialised, and neoliberal housing model, with neo-colonial implications, similar to the one that was spreading in different rhythms globally.

On an ideo-political level, social justice was the leading imperative (Kuljić, 2018:329) in Yugoslav “socialism,” which was never fully implemented. The Yugoslav socialist experiment in housing saw adequate housing for all as a pre-condition for the general development of society, which was supposed to lead to the total liberation of each individual. The new housing provision system was based on the principles of socialist self-management established in the 1950s. After WWII, initial partial nationalisation of the housing stock was carried out in the cities (1958). From 1956 onwards, workers had to allocate a percentage of their income to a common housing fund, with the perspective of gaining the right to use a socially owned apartment. The right to housing was connected to one’s work status in a country based on a never fulfilled ideal of full employment. However, in practice, the housing system was caught up in numerous contradictions and difficulties, including austerity measures imposed by the

³ In the book chapter “A Critique of Transition Studies on Postsocialism or How to Rethink and Reorient 1989?” Gal Kirn returns to the Althusserian concept of the aleatory and contingent processes of history in order to show that Yugoslav socialism has itself been a transitional form that has constantly shifted between capitalist and communist elements.

IMF in 1980, which led to a decline in the production of socially owned flats and to the parallel existence of massive informal housing and proto-market relations (Krstić, 2018:147).

In Belgrade in the 1980s, social property in housing barely exceeded 50 per cent of the overall housing stock (Vujović, 1987:97, quoted in: Archer, 2016:10). The housing shortage was especially severe in the big cities because of rural-to-urban migration. This created phenomena of tolerated informal housing construction as well as “hidden homelessness,” namely people living in substandard and precarious conditions, many as renters (Tsenkova, 2009:29). The main dividing line in society was between those who had a housing right of occupancy (*stanarsko pravo*)⁴ and those who did not (Archer, 2016:9). One’s housing status depended on a set of parameters, including family status, years of employment, health condition, rank in the company or institution, etc., which materialised in one’s position on the ranking list. Nevertheless, employment criteria favoured groups of workers with a higher education and informally the higher ranked in a company and – frequently coinciding – those with a party membership card. Yugoslav enterprises were responsible for the construction and distribution of apartments. After 1950, the position of one’s enterprise in Yugoslavia’s more and more market-oriented economy was of prime importance – for various reasons, some companies were able to generate more income and, especially after the economic reforms in the mid-1960s, gained more and more rights to decide about housing distribution.

With the final disintegration of socialist Yugoslavia in the 1990s and the nationalist wars, the framework based on social justice was lost in pursuit of the promise given by Western democracy and full-scale entrepreneurial capitalism. With the expropriation of social property, the economic and political framework that defined “us” as a society, and with it the possibility to formulate collective interest, has fallen apart. In the field of housing, social property first had to be converted into state property by unconstitutional laws, and then the apartments were sold to the users of the residential rights. This process produced the so-called losers of the transition, who were not in a position to turn users’ rights into private ownership (mostly because they were renting on the private market or because they were the users of housing that was for other reasons non-eligible for privatisation). The privatisation of housing by its users for low prices cemented inherited inequalities and – together with restitution on property nationalised after WWII (Bodnař, 2001:7) – created the basis for a new anti-socialist project. Similar to other Eastern European countries, today Serbia is a country with a high home ownership rate (Tsenkova, 2009:124); around 98 per cent in 2011 (RZS, 2017). Housing is to a large extent a for-profit domain, with home ownership as an ideal, where the dictates of the market have blocked access to social justice (Kuljić, 2018:283). The response to the challenge of defining new social housing politics was moved from an approach based on the principles of collectivism (and solidarity) to an approach based on efficiency in providing housing solutions to those who cannot compete on the market (Petrović, 2013:246, etc.). According to the 2011 census, less than 0.9 per cent of 2.4 million inhabited units was social housing (Vuksanović-Macura, 2017:70). This shows that social housing is currently in a residualised state (Petrović, 2013:256; Tsenkova, 2009:161). The essence of this system is the decentralised competition of various types of justices that focus on different groups of those in housing need. In effect, social housing serves to a large extent as a decoration of anti-socialist neoliberal democratic relativism. This new social (housing) justice has been normalised by the discriminatory legal positivism of national justice⁵ and by means of EU tactical philanthropy (characteristic for the relationship between the centre of capital and its periphery), which serves as a material surrogate of social justice (Kuljić, 2018: 297; 303). This surrogate of social justice has also generated its by-products in the

⁴ Other English terms in use are: specially protected tenancy and occupancy-tenancy rights.

⁵ Or a set of contested legal regulations and restrictions without reference to social consideration.

face of the increased capacities of “soft social housing,” including slums and new unethical housing solutions like social housing in metal container settlements.

Strategic donations coming from the EU had a large influence on the articulation of social housing policy in Serbia. In this way, the boundaries of the EU work both within and outside its territory (Sardelić, 2018:491). After the fall of Milosevic in the 2000s, the social security system was “re-stabilised” with funds from the World Bank and the IMF (Vuković and Perisić, 2011, quoted in Schwab, 2013:10). In the following years, as a candidate for EU membership, Serbia had to comply with the imposed EU neoliberal standardisation. The neoliberal reforms led to decentralisation, minimal institutional intervention, flexibilisation, and the creation of temporary social housing networked regimes. This included the establishment of a new model based on municipal agencies, with 15 million euros in donations from the Italian government through the Settlement and Integration of Refugees Programme (SIRP) carried out between 2005 and 2008 (Vuksanović-Macura, 2017). The EU was interested in investing in Serbia’s social infrastructure because of the regulation of migration. Social housing on the periphery has been treated as a pull factor that can be used to control unwanted migration to countries of the old core.

For more than twenty years, Serbia’s housing legislation was scattered over numerous inadequate legal documents that gave way to a patchwork of solutions (Petrović, 2013:250) that were unable to respond to actual needs. By relying on project-based social housing construction and foreign donations, the Serbian state has failed to create stable and sustainable financial resources (Čolić-Damjanović, 2015:171) and create coordinated housing construction for the poor. The privatisation mechanism created a so-called “privatisation trap,” a form of social norm promising that all public tenants will be given the right-to-buy (Lux and Sunega, 2013:310). That created expectations that social housing would be temporary, and would subsequently be expected to be turned into privately owned housing. Social housing projects in Serbia are usually mediated through municipal housing agencies or different NGOs. At the level of towns and the municipality, criteria for the allocation of social housing and property uses are based on local regulations and regulations that can be adapted to the requirements of donor agencies that finance the construction of apartments. “In Belgrade, there are at least five systems of social housing at work,” explained Danilo Ćurčić, at that time legal adviser from YUCOM – the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, at the event organised by Cultural Centre Rex in 2015: “In one building from one project, people are paying 1000 RSD [8.5 EUR] rent and in the block next to it from another project, they don’t pay anything.”⁶ This temporary project-based, networked regime of social housing proved to be inefficient because of its disregard of the local context, its fragmented and uncoordinated actions due to the absence of political will to solve the problems on the long-term, and its non-compliance with its assigned role in adopted policies (Vuksanović-Macura, 2017:73).

There is no official estimate of the need for social housing and no documentation that would give a clear idea of who has the lowest income and how much of their income they can spend on rent and utilities. Nevertheless, thanks to EUROSTAT data for 2016, we know that more than half the population lives in overcrowded households; that for more than 71 per cent of households in the Republic of Serbia, housing expenditures presents a great burden; that 17 per cent are exposed to a severe housing burden; and that 70 per cent would be eligible to claim help from the state, according to EU standards (EUROSTAT, 2019). The trouble with the social housing challenge in Serbia is precisely the failure to define in clear terms who the beneficiaries of housing provision should be (Petrović, 2013:249–250). According to the Social Housing Act from 2009, all those who cannot resolve their housing needs on the market because of social, economic, and other reasons have the right to social housing. Recently, this

⁶ Hot potato: What is the social problem in Zemun Polje?, Cultural Centre Rex, Belgrade, June 6, 2015.

ambiguity got normalised on a symbolic and legal level by eliminating the very word “social housing” from the latest Housing Act (Law on Housing and Building Maintenance from 2016) and replacing it with the ambiguous term “housing support.” “The term social housing has a negative connotation. Many people need housing support but they don’t want to feel like social cases.” said an architect who took part in drafting the new Housing Act.⁷ This circumstance made it possible for the focus of social housing provision to shift from those who need it the most, namely the poor, to those on middle and lower-middle incomes who cannot compete on the market. Besides providing housing to the middle-income groups, the state also subsidised housing loans for this group, thus decreasing banks’ risks and interest income (Damjanović and Gligorijević, 2010:49; Petrović, 2013:254 etc.). For the 18,290⁸ of those registered as homeless in 2011 (Bobić, 2014), this implies very slim chances of obtaining adequate housing. Special housing programmes have been created, targeting mostly refugees from the wars in 1990s and internally displaced persons (IDPs) (Petrović, 2013:251–252).⁹ Other vulnerable groups were targeted occasionally, in some cases with evident pressure from European institutions – whose goal was to prevent unwanted migration, especially from the Roma population.

In order to alleviate the permanent housing crises, the (anti-)social(ist) housing regime in Serbia has developed a tolerance towards informal housing for the urban poor. Slums or “unhygienic settlements” (as they are called by the mainstream media and representatives of authorities) are “soft social housing” – the tolerated informal housing that emerged after WWII and escalated in the 1990s with the influx of refugees, IDPs, and those deported from EU countries of mostly Roma origins (Schwab, 2013:9–12).¹⁰ Those living in slums only occasionally come into authorities’ view, and this is mostly when they find themselves in the way of a profitable development plan. From 2009 to 2012, in the face of new urban regeneration project(s), slum dwellers were treated by city officials as communal municipal waste blocking the development of the city (see “Protest Roma zbog rušenja naselja,” 2009). During this period, violent mass evictions of slum settlements in profitable locations became one of the imprints of (anti-)social(ist) housing in Serbia. These evictions were induced by a big communication infrastructure project of significance to the EU¹¹ and a sports event, the 2009 Summer Universiade,

⁷ Conversation with an architect, Belgrade, October 2015.

⁸ These are homeless people registered in the 2011 census. In Serbia, this is not an official register of homeless people.

⁹ Even among those registered as IDPs, discrimination was/is significant. As the representative of A11 – The initiative for economic and social rights – told me in a conversation, conditions for getting a flat in the special programs have been privileging ethnic Serbs, while for example Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptians had much less access to these programs.

¹⁰ Roma had an unequal housing status in Yugoslavia, largely due to their position as low-qualified workers (Vujović, 2017). The anti-socialist period accelerated their downward mobility, while the increasing pauperisation of the majority population led to a widespread perception of any provision to Roma as a privilege at the expense of the Serbian majority (Petrović, Berescu, and Teller, 2013:109). Poverty itself became racialised and crystallised into discrimination of Roma people. Those in disadvantaged situations are now seen by the white majority population as parasites, depleting public resources to their advantage (see comments under Skenderija and Ljutić, 2013). Nevertheless, from 6,410 social flats in Belgrade in 2011, only 134 – or 2 per cent – were inhabited by Roma (Macura and Samardžić, 2017:52). Many Roma tried to find better living conditions abroad, where host countries treat them as temporary and deportable visitors (Sardelić, 2018:491). In order to comply with demands for joining the EU, Serbia had to sign an agreement on the readmission of all those who were not granted asylum. In the course of the Schengen visa liberalisation process, thousands of people, mostly Roma, were deported to Serbia. For many of them, the only way to resolve their housing situation was to move into one of the slum settlements.

¹¹ The most disadvantaged population living in slums, mostly Roma, became the first victim of the “soft social housing” cleansing project that started in 2009 in preparation for the reconstruction of the Gazela bridge as part of works on the Pan-European corridor X, a communication infrastructure project of European interest. In this endeavour, the City of Belgrade, together with European Investment Bank, created a new type of governmentality over Roma tenants in an attempt to jointly manage the fulfilment of credit (Schwab, 2013:41). Inadequate attempts to rehouse Roma were followed by continuous racist

which was intended to create a “new and better” image of Serbia, and which enabled new profitable investments.¹² The new (anti-)social(ist) housing solution for tenants of slums was found in the form of container settlements. Ex-tenants of the informal settlements, with address registration in Belgrade, were rehoused in five settlements scattered over the outskirts of Belgrade, where 14 m² metal containers became the new form of transitional social housing for the surplus population the state wanted to get rid of.¹³ The container settlements became places for the resocialisation of Roma, a condition of earning their right to social housing (Schwab, 2013:49–57).¹⁴ In the years to follow, a few lucky container dwellers became tenants in social housing programmes¹⁵ as a result of pressure applied by the European Investment Bank.¹⁶

As has been shown, social housing in Serbia is an outcome of structural processes, including privatisation, dispossession of the poor, migration management, and the racialisation of cities. These processes became powerful organising forces of the conditions of the “absence of society” (Buden, 2012: 92). New (anti-)social(ist) housing emerged as a residualised field, where different groups compete for a roof over their heads within a fragmented and uncoordinated project financed by foreign donations. This process, as I will show in the example of social housing project Kamendin, has resulted in segregation, indebtedness, and racial conflicts and created irreconcilable antagonisms rather than smoother opposites.

Contradictions in the social housing project Kamendin

The Kamendin project started in 2003. By 2016, 622 flats for social rent had been built (Čolić-Damianović, 2015: 350), representing 80 per cent of all social flats constructed by the City of Belgrade at the time (*ibid.*). Kamendin is a satellite type of settlement, situated on two plots of land: Kamendin 1 and Kamendin 2. It was built in a peri-urban part of Belgrade, 17 km from its centre, far from any places of work. Kamendin has come into public focus when local newspapers started reporting on mass protest against Roma tenants in Zemun Polje:

The inhabitants of Zemun Polje have been campaigning for days against families of Roma origin who live in social apartments in the settlement of Kamendin, due to whom they do not feel safe in their own home. They pointed out that Zemun Polje, once a quiet neighbourhood, has become unsafe because their basements have been robbed, their neighbours enter their terraces, they burn containers, dump garbage and do not take care

rejections and demonstrations by local white residents of potential neighbourhoods for Roma families’ new homes (Amnesty International, 2010).

¹² For this occasion, the city of Belgrade entered into a private-public partnership – with a company owned by local tycoon Miroslav Mišković and with the Hypo-Alpe Adria bank – in order to build a new business-residential complex to accommodate Universiade athletes, which was intended for sale after the event was over (see Vilenica and kuda.org, 2013: 12–13).

¹³ Those without an address in Belgrade were deported to the official places of residence stated in their personal documents.

¹⁴ Rules in container settlements were based on stereotypes regarding the Roma people’s ways of life, which they were supposed to change, from hygiene to family planning.

¹⁵ “The majority of the families have now been moved out from the container settlements. Few have been moved to social housing; about sixty families. Others received houses in rural areas all over Serbia, and several received construction materials. They were part of the “social housing” program if we see the purchase of the rural homes as one of the social housing models. However, they are not tenants but owners” (Email exchange with Dr Zlata Vuksanović-Macura, September 2019).

¹⁶ “The European Investment Bank, which co-financed the reconstruction with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, announced in March 2010 that it was not satisfied with the Roma displacement and that the contractor Roads of Serbia should pay back a tranche of 10 million euros if a sustainable housing solution for the displaced Roma was not found” (Ombudsman, 2012).

of hygiene, which caused mange to occur – forty citizens got sick within the previous two months.

The residents of Zemun Polje are asking the city and the state to solve the problem urgently, otherwise they will protest again and “take things into their own hands.” They also demanded that all those who threaten the safety of the settlement and the health of children leave Kamendin (Perović, 2013.).

This sensationalist report says little about anti-social elements of social housing in Kamendin. Furthermore, it creates a smokescreen that conceals the problems that people have been facing in Zemun Polje, as one cultural activist said to me.¹⁷ If this is not the whole picture, what are the problems of Kamendin then?

They threw us all there: Social housing and segregation

Through a public competition, a number of Roma families displaced in container settlements have been moved in the city apartments in Kamendin.

In 2011–2012, Roma placed by the City of Belgrade in the container settlements have been moved into apartments in Kamendin for the first time in greater numbers. This relocation has been fuelled by the pressure from international and local organizations on the City administration to provide a solution, due to the catastrophic conditions in the container settlements, and the need to find a permanent housing solution for the displaced people. Thus, the City of Belgrade has squandered a competition for social housing, to which families from the container settlements applied in significant numbers. In this (applying) they were assisted by the city administration and some NGOs. Participation of these families in the competition was possible because the City of Belgrade had previously made changes to the rules for potential users of social housing, where priority was given to social and housing vulnerability (over the previous criteria, such as years of service and education). Overall, the Roma from container settlements were not privileged when applying for and moving into flats in Kamendin. They were (unfortunately) the poorest and the most vulnerable of all, which made them easily reach the top of the housing allocation rankings.¹⁸

Unlike some other settlements, where Roma were moved into one block of apartments, in Kamendin, Roma were successively moving into apartments with other ethnic groups (Vuksanović-Macura, 2017:81). A major characteristic of this settlement is that 80 per cent of its tenants belong to so-called socially vulnerable individuals: those displaced from slum settlements, severely disabled people, and people in need of care and assistance whose household incomes is less than 60 per cent of the national average. This created a high concentration of poor and unemployed people (Čolić-Damianović, 2015: 351). “They threw us all there together: children from foster homes, heavily disabled, people with mental health issues, internally displaced people, Roma, we who worked our entire lives,” the tenant

¹⁷ Conversation with a cultural activist, Belgrade, May 2016.

¹⁸ Email exchange with Dr Zlata Vuksanović-Macura, September 2019.

told me in a conversation.¹⁹

In Kamendin, segregation was imposed (Marcuse, 2002) on the tenants. They were deliberately selected according to specific socio-economic criteria used to determine their right to live there. The criteria according to which these people were selected, their subsequent inability to pay bills, and the long-term unemployment of many turned the area into a ghetto of the excluded (Marcuse, 1997:232–233; Wacquant, 1993). Although a significant number of Roma tenants already went through a process of forced “resocialisation” in the container settlement, according to tenants, policing continued in their social flats. Tenants reported that representatives of the Centre for Social Services and representatives of the Office for Collaboration with Users of Social Housing keep invading their homes through unannounced visits in order to regulate their behaviour. “It is not right for civil servants to come and spy on us, yell at us and drive our friends from the house.”²⁰ Residents were never consulted about their housing preferences and needs (Vuksanović-Macura, 2017:81). In this way, they ended up living in a ghetto with an integrated corrective function.

Due to their characteristics, segregated social housing projects very often prove to be spaces that generate conflicts and public protest. The beginning of construction work in 2003, as reported in *Zemunska hronika*, was marked by a conflict of interest between a group of citizens from Zemun Polje and municipal authorities responsible for the project. In collaboration with the local community council, Zemun’s citizens formed a crisis headquarters in order to express their protest against the new social housing project in close proximity to their homes (Zemunska hronika, 2003). Citizens expressed discontent because they were not consulted in the planning process. They asked officials to improve their living conditions and not exacerbate them by increasing the population. Protesting citizens claimed to have enough of “their own Roma” in need of adequate housing and that they did not need unfortunate people from other places. Crisis headquarters organised mass protests in Zemun Polje, including road blocks and obstructing the construction site. The protest wave was interrupted by the murder of prime minister Zoran Đinđić and the subsequent declaration of a state of emergency, which included a ban on public gatherings, protests, and strikes. Antagonism towards the poor and racialised tenants of Kamendin continued throughout different phases of the project, which is still in progress.

Spatial segregation mechanisms through social housing have to be seen as a political project of a peripheral state that structurally gave up on the social justice project based on equality; a state that has embraced extreme class divisions and racism as its mode of functioning. Although segregation was not eradicated on the territory of Yugoslavia, there was a will to change some of its implications, mostly by means of new high-rise housing construction that was supposed to house residents of different educational profiles (Čaldarović, 1975:58–66). Today, housing segregation in Serbia is an effect of housing and social policy, speculations on land value, growing economic inequality, the residualisation of social housing, and structural and cultural class and race mechanisms. The Kamendin project shows how the segregation of the lower social strata on the periphery has increased through means of social housing. Regardless of the size of the problem, the segregation issue has not been on the political agenda in Serbia.

If I knew, I would never have moved into this flat: Social housing and debt slavery

The problems for Kamendin’s tenants surfaced when they realised that the state provided them with flats whose maintenance they could not afford. The very conditions to apply for these flats included a household not exceeding 23,000 RSD [~195 EUR]. The Centre for Social Welfare invited future tenants

¹⁹ Interview with a tenant, Belgrade, May 2017.

²⁰ Hot potato: What is the social problem in Zemun Polje?, Cultural Centre Rex, Belgrade, June 6, 2015.

to apply for flats whose monthly costs would not exceed 3,000 RSD [~25 EUR]. But this turned out to be the monthly rent only. There are two main models of social housing programmes in Serbia: social housing for rent (from 2004) and social housing in protected conditions (from 2002). The users of the first type of social housing pay preferential rent and all housing costs, while users of the second type of social housing benefit from various social services. Instead of offering tenants social housing in protected conditions, the authorities misled most of the supposed beneficiaries in their explaining of the conditions they would find themselves in. “I feel deceived,” a tenant in debt told me, “I was told that the rent was 2,000 [17 EUR] and then it turned out that the total expenses are in excess of my income.”²¹ Many tenants had similar stories: “If I knew about this, I would have never moved into this flat. My bills were twice as small in the flat that I was renting in Vračar.”²² What contributed to the confusion, whether intentionally or not, is that the words “stanarina” or “naknada” were used in the contracts, which refer in everyday language to all expenses of the flat except electricity bills. People living on the street, in informal slums, or containers, as some explained, were too eager to get decent housing to check the variety of meanings in a contract that was presented to them as a hugely merciful act by the authorities. On top of rent and market price utility bills, they had to pay a property tax on social housing introduced in the amendments on the Property Tax Law in 2014 (Ćurčić, 2015). Moreover, the trouble with the welfare system in Serbia is that those who are able to work receive welfare support for nine months a year (Zakon o socijalnoj zaštiti, 2011), but have to pay their bills the entire year. In the course of months and years, many tenants inevitably accumulated debt because of their inability to pay the utility bills. “When the state thinks poverty is asleep, you still have to pay the bills,” Danilo Ćurčić said, in conversation with tenants.²³

Using the right to evict tenants who fail to pay their utility bills for three consecutive months, the City of Belgrade and “Infostan” (the municipal utilities company) sued a number of people, aiming at debt collection or eviction. According to the local initiative that organised the endangered tenants, up to a hundred families were exposed to such measures. For those who constantly failed to pay the electricity bills, a cut-off was the final step. Cultural activists told me that they met a single mother with four kids in Kamendin living without electricity in the flat, and her case was not unique (many people refused contact and meetings with activists but informed neighbours and members of the local initiatives).²⁴ This situation reveals the utter violence of the social housing system. Under the excuse of care, the state was taking part in the ghettoisation of social tenants and their further marginalisation, and burdened them with unexpected debt. Up to the present day, the tenants of the Kamendin social project live under a permanent threat of losing the roofs over their heads, and many of them have no means of sustaining themselves as their income is blocked due to their debts. As the representative of a local organisation for social and economic rights told me in a conversation we had in 2019, the families who have debts with Infostan are now essentially without a contract, since the old contracts expired and the City is unwilling to extend new agreements with those who do not pay regularly.²⁵

Until the beginning of 2019, there was only one attempt of eviction, which tenants stopped by blocking the execution by the executors, as several tenants reported in informal conversation.²⁶ There

²¹ Conversation with a tenant, Belgrade, April 2017.

²² Hot potato: What is the social problem in Zemun Polje?, Cultural Centre Rex, Belgrade, June 6, 2015.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Conversation with a cultural activist, Belgrade, April 2017.

²⁵ Conversation with a representative of A11, Belgrade, May, 2019.

²⁶ Conversation with tenants, Belgrade, March 2017, and conversation with a representative of A11–Initiative for Economic and Social Rights, Belgrade, May, 2019.

are many reasons for this lack of eviction, including tactical postponement, and the structural incapacity of local authorities to implement violent measures. During the local election campaign held in 2012, the Serbian Progressive Party (Srpska napredna stranka) formally promised to continue supporting poor citizens. Representatives of the SPP (SNS) informally spread some sort of vague guarantee that there will be an alternative solution for the people endangered by evictions in exchange for votes, according to tenants.²⁷

Bureaucratic debt itself has to be seen as a specific form of systemic violence that harms vulnerable groups (Degirmencioglu and Walker, 2015). The debt of Kamendin's tenants is framed as individual or personal, but there is very little that is personal about this individualised form of structural inequality. This debt was produced by the aggressive, class-based, and racist policing of the population and was illegitimate from the very start. The debt of those in social housing arrangements in Serbia is a consequence of the overall politics of social housing, including the constant transfer of responsibility, the non-harmonisation of social legislation, the absence of political will to organise the sector of social housing, the absence of so-called social cards (socijalne karte) that would show how much the users of social housing are able to pay, and a general state of austerity in the social sector. "If this contract is not proved to be void, we are really in a lifelong problem. They are sitting on our social benefits and on our pensions," said a concerned resident in a conversation with a little hope expressed.²⁸

I am ashamed in thousand ways: Governing by responsabilisation

In addition to policy measures that induced responsabilisation, widely spread public narratives affected attitudes and reasoning around the situation in Kamendin. The first articles about problems in Kamendin appeared in newspapers in 2012, when they reported on the decision of the Housing Commission for the Allocation of Social Housing (following a proposal of the Secretariat for Social Protection) to terminate contracts with tenants who accumulated debt. According to an article in *Večernje Novosti*, the City Administration proposed to those who were unemployed and who had accumulated debt to apply for jobs in the public sector (Počinju iseljenja iz Kamendina?, 16.10.2012.). From thirty-two people who applied, only one accepted the job, as a representative of the City told the media (ibid.). The families were also offered to settle their debt in instalments. As the journalist reported, some of the debtors signed a debt repayment contract but did not comply again, or paid new bills, while refusing to settle the old (ibid.).

Official statements and media narratives of this type indicated that the debt was caused by the irresponsibility and laziness of tenants. This ideological campaign is a standardised part of the neoliberalisation of subjects, which are now supposed to take full responsibility for aspects of their lives that were previously seen as unproductive and burdens-for-the-advancement-of-society collective/socialist concerns. The discursive production related to Serbia's social housing problems has a strategic importance in individualising and personalising responsibility and reproducing a system based on profound inequality. In this way, structurally produced and basically illegitimate debt is internalised/individualised and thus legitimised, although the people taking part in this arrangement did not have any power over the development of the situation they ended up in. "I am ashamed in a thousand

²⁷ Conversation with tenants, Belgrade, March 2017.

²⁸ Conversation with a tenant, Belgrade, April 2017.

ways for bringing myself into this situation,”²⁹ said a tenant in an interview. “It is all about my bad choices,”³⁰ she underlined.

One of the dominant narratives towards the end of Yugoslavia talked about societal property as “everyone’s and no one’s.” Problems in society were interpreted in the light of the absence of an efficient base for responsibility. That base was supposed to be created by the introduction of private ownership. In the residential sector, this new “responsibility” was introduced by pushing the users of residential rights into home ownership. The anti-socialist privatisation of housing and the dismantling of societal property in Serbia helped the state get rid of the expensive management and maintenance of properties by transferring it to a majority of poor owners. In social housing, the absurdities of this new responsabilisation can be seen, among other things, in the tax on social housing. This “social tax,” “tax on poverty,” or “solidarity tax” has been introduced for the purpose of filling budget holes, together with a number of controversial decisions such as the reduction of pensions and compulsory socially useful work for all able-bodied recipients of welfare assistance (Ćurčić, 2015). This shows how society and higher authorities transferred responsibility for solving their own problems and the problems of the state budget to communities and individuals, which has become an important mechanism of peripheral housing governmentality.

I have nothing against Roma, but...: Social housing and racism

In November 2013, a new and more aggressive dimension was added to the campaign intended to prepare the terrain for the eviction of “undeserving beneficiaries” in Kamendin. Following rumours that an epidemic of mange had appeared among schoolchildren in the local primary school, residents of nearby buildings started demanding the eviction of Roma residents (Perović, 2013). Serbian daily newspapers immediately started to report on an inflaming and “threatening to get out of control” mass protest against members of the Roma population (Skenderija and Ljutić, 2013.). Representatives of citizens in the protests blamed their neighbours, the Roma settled in the Kamendin social housing project, for the spread of the disease, for a petty crime epidemic, for prostitution, drug dealing, and state robbery, and for having no respect for the culture of communal living. Protestors called on the authorities to stop any further settlement of Roma residents in the area and to evict those who do not follow tenancy rules and hygienic procedures.

This is how one of the tenants protesting against his Roma neighbours described the situation for the daily newspaper *Večernje Novosti*:

I have nothing against Roma, nor do I hate them! But the ones who moved in here are completely unsocialised. Because of them, we cannot keep the windows open; they are entering and stealing. They’re robbing the shops, they are violent, but there is also prostitution and drug dealing. It is not enough that they do not pay for utilities, electricity, nothing (Skenderija and Ljutić, 2013).

These kinds of statements based on racialising poverty were followed by public calls for violence and lynching and by expressions of hatred and intolerance. Many Roma tenants reported having been threatened and forced to hide in their homes during these events (Skenderija and Ljutić, 2013).

The discourse employed in this case is not new. Discriminatory stereotypes about Roma are deep-seated in Serbian society (Simeunović-Bajić, 2013). Members of the Roma community are widely perceived as being unemployed, parasites on state resources, bending human rights laws to gain benefits,

²⁹ Interview with a tenant, Belgrade, March, 2017.

³⁰ Ibid.

and always already cheating the system, whereas in fact, the system itself was designed to fail them. On top of this, there is a widespread denial that the expression of intolerance towards Roma is racism. During the racist protest in Kamendin, some white inhabitants claimed that they themselves as having become an endangered category when the vulnerable tenants settled (Skenderija and Ljutić, 2013). The word racism was widely seen as invented to serve the interests of the Roma, who supposedly get more privileges and benefits from the state than the white majority.

Race is very much a spatial issue and an axis of exclusion (Fassin, 2017:XII; Picker, 2017). In Serbia, the racialisation of Roma has become a measure of Serbian whiteness and ethnic purity, and racism against Roma has become functional to spatial segregation in the country. In the last decade, in parallel with informal Roma settlements, social housing has become a new site of racial segregation and violence. The 2013 events created a new situation around issues in Kamendin that allowed the media and officials to ascribe all tensions to a problem of coexistence arising from so-called cultural differences. This representation situated the political debate around the coexistence problem and was to a large extent misleading: not only did it obscure the state's responsibility for creating a segregated neighbourhood for the poor and pushing tenants into debt slavery, but it also contributed to redefining class-based social fragmentation in cultural terms. For the activists engaged in this case, who took the time to understand the situation, it was clear that the protests were used by the government to support their attempts to remove "undeserving beneficiaries" from their homes.³¹

Resisting attacks on social housing

The "death of the social" (Trnka and Trundle, 2014:140) in (anti-)social(ist) housing has not remained unanswered. Dwellers of Kamendin have been trying to cope with injustices by using what is at their disposal: human rights NGOs, cultural organisations, and their own capacities to confront the legal system and fight back.

The racial outburst of violence in 2013 provoked a wave of humanitarian and philanthropic responses from different state and civil society actors. Several NGOs have publicly condemned the racial riots and called for an immediate response by the state (Perović, 2013.). Apart from providing the conditions for a larger police presence in the neighbourhood, the state did nothing essential to solve this conflict and improve the living conditions in Zemun Polje. It left tenants to their own devices in coping with the structural and symbolic violence. Moreover, several tenants whom I had a chance to speak with during a visit to Kamendin in 2017 reported that the ruling party used their situation to exert pressure on them during the last presidential elections. Tenants were intimidated by representatives of the ruling right-wing, neoliberal SNS party by phone and pressured to vote for Aleksandar Vučić, the Serbian prime minister who was at that time running for president.³²

Although the state has been working on confusing tenants, infantilising and blackmailing them, groups of tenants have been organising to fight back. Some of those forced into the bureaucratic battlefield in time became amateur experts in housing legal matters. Together with other tenants, they pressure city authorities and various institutions in charge of juridical, social-welfare-related, and political aspects of the problem by writing complaints and petitions and organising small-scale protests. "We must put pressure on the City to null and void these contracts. Then the debt will have to be written off as well," a tenant told me during the so-called housing question event in Cultural Centre Rex.³³ Several human rights NGOs, such as Praxis, A11, the initiative for economic and social rights, YUCOM

³¹ Conversation with a cultural activist, Belgrade, April 2017.

³² Conversation with tenants, Belgrade, April 2017.

³³ Conversation with a tenant, Belgrade, October 2015.

– Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, and legal experts in socio-economic rights dedicated themselves to supporting individual tenants in the legal fight against evictions and unlawfully accumulated debt.

The serious problem in this case is that you are complaining to the same institution that you have signed your contract with. You sign the contract with the City of Belgrade and they get to decide about the termination of the contract. When you complain, they are again the ones who get to decide on the legality of the termination of the contract. After the decision of the Mayor, you don't have a right to legal protection anymore.³⁴

This is how an expert in socio-economic rights explained the situation to me during the same event. An additional problem in this situation is sudden transfers of responsibilities between institutions that have been happening in a non-transparent way. The responsibility for social housing, according to a representative of A11, has recently passed from the Secretariat of Social Protection to the Secretariat for Property and Legal Relations.³⁵ What is obvious to tenants, legal experts, and activists alike is that social housing in Serbia does not serve its purpose, at least not the purpose we expect it to have: to protect those who need support the most. These fragmented and defensive responses, which work with consequences rather than causes, are condemned to somehow endure in this long and exhausting battle, without much chance of success.

All these activities of individuals and institutions contained many moments that looked decisive, hopeful, or hopeless to the actors involved. At the end, however, exhaustion served as a tactic of draining the physical and mental energy of those affected. It seems that this is how the system creates its hostages. Tenants are still hoping that appeals will bear fruit in order to save them from eviction, which would mean going to some of the newly established slums or, as a seemingly better option, returning to containers. As an inevitable result of these continuous struggles and tensions, more and more people report physical and mental health problems. This experience of profound subjective suffering materialises, as tenants report, in depression, anxiety, and other severe conditions. “How many people have died by now? No one is reporting about that. How many people got sick of those that came here healthy? How long will we endure the terror of the City management? We don't owe them anything. They owe us for maltreatment and causing severe anguish,”³⁶ a woman said during a meeting in Kamendin organised by Cultural Centre Rex in 2015.

How does fascism not disappear? Engaging by means of art

Thanks to their long-term engagement with tenants of Kamendin, activists from Cultural Centre Rex in Belgrade are among their most visible public allies. During the last decades, art has played a significant role in urban struggles. It has been functionalised in processes of gentrification and social cleansing and instrumentalised as a “regeneration” factor in socially deprived areas (Phillips and Erdemci, 2012). On the other hand, artists have been struggling to maintain their position as critical agents in urban struggles by giving a voice to the deprived and creating alternative narratives to those produced in the mainstream. A year and a half after the protests in Kamendin, a group of cultural activists working at Cultural Centre Rex, with a long-term interest in housing, started the project Kamendynamics. These empirical and artistic works recalled the capacity of cultural production and the role that it can play. In this very case, instead of reinforcing the sources of division and alienation among individuals and groups

³⁴ “Hot potato: What is the social problem in Zemun Polje?” Cultural Centre Rex, Belgrade, June 6, 2015.

³⁵ Conversation with a representative of A11, April 2019.

³⁶ Hot potato: What is the social problem in Zemun Polje?, Cultural Centre Rex, Belgrade, June 6, 2015.

in the settlement, it encouraged underprivileged tenants to see the structural obstacles and push for changing the mainstream narratives formed around problems in the neighbourhood.

According to initiators Nebojša Milikić and Tadej Kurepa, the project emerged with the aim of understanding the actual social relations behind the spectacularised narratives produced in the media.³⁷ In order to reveal the roots of a politics that proclaims poverty to be rooted in cultural differences and individual preferences, they started a year's long research project. Project Kamendynamics gradually grew into a struggle for supremacy in the interpretation against the absolutely toxic language that has taken root in and about Kamendin. This activist research started with a survey and individual talks and interviews that included tenants and stakeholders. The collected information and mapped questions were used as a framework for two public seminars named Hot potato 1 and 2, which followed the outcomes of interviews and small-scale discussions that the group of activists realised in Kamendin in June and July 2015. The seminars were an attempt to articulate broader social problems and thus outline a context for particular problems in the settlement of Kamendin as well as for individual problems of tenants. This attempt included a public analysis of the facts about the flaws and failures of social housing and welfare politics as well as political mechanisms and media manipulations.

In one room, the seminar gathered those in debt, those unhappy because of a lack of hygiene, and those who took part in racist protests. The tense atmosphere during both seminars showed the desperation and anger of tenants trapped in a hopeless situation as well as the complex relations among those living in and around Kamendin. There were voices who directed their anger towards the system that divided the tenants into payers and debtors and towards the inefficient welfare system, as well as those who blamed noisy, uncultivated neighbours and an inefficient police system.

The seminars were conceived as a means of setting up a framework to push publicly against a story that serves the interests of elites and intervene with a new one that serves the interests of the people who are the reason that the neighbourhood exists in the first place (mostly the poor). In order to share ideas for confronting and changing dominant narratives, the project introduced a new form of thinking by means of visual art. As an attempt to make sense of all personal stories and policy facts collected during the research and discussions, the moderators of the project, with the help of visual artist Vahida Ramujkić, came up with a drawing for the "reverse side of the building." The drawing was presented to seminar participants as an explanatory model that could be, if accepted by most of the interested actors, realised as a mural in one of the buildings in the settlement.³⁸

The drawing is based on a four-class model society, resembling a four-floor building, including the pauperised working class, those with a middle-class consciousness, and the comprador bourgeoisie serving the interests of the neo-colonial peripheral management of troika and big capital. The poor tenants of Kamendin are positioned at the very bottom of the building. They are presented as carrying the entire institutional apparatus from government office to NGOs on their backs (a class that the initiators of the project in Kamendin themselves obviously belong to), including that of media and people who protested against Roma tenants. On the top floor, one can see well-dressed politicians holding the rooftop with both of their hands. Those are comprador elites that are used to transfer messages and pressure from the EU, IMF, and ECB to those whose lives they manage. EU institutions and politicians

³⁷ Public presentation of the Kamendynamics project, Project Actopolis, Belgrade, May 2016.

³⁸ Meanwhile, during 2016–2017, the development of the concept for a mural was continued within the frame of the project ACTOPOLIS, where further consultations in Kamendin, involved NGOs and governmental institutions, were realised and documented. The drawing and documentary materials, named Kamendynamics, were exhibited along with many newly collected interpretations, reactions, and proposals related to the meaning and function of such a possible intervention in the local public space.

are on the very top. They are separated from the rest of the building by barbed wire. Their role is to oversee the efficacy of social housing in Serbia, serving as a “pull factor” meant to control migrations. The lower parts of the building are represented as a dynamic structure, with individuals from each floor trying to climb the ladder and reach the next one. What we see on the drawing is a struggle, not peaceful coexistence. The “reverse side” actually revealed that the social housing system in Serbia is deployed on a grid of the “class pyramid,” based on economic and ideopolitical domination and subordination. This drawing is a clear attempt to bring class analyses back into the housing issue in order to undermine the analyses based on the ethnification and culturalisation of problems.

In parallel with the development of the idea for the public mural as a means to explain and talk about the class character of conflicts in Kamendin, another seminar in Cultural Centre Rex became the platform for articulating problems in Kamendin. Conceived as a public reading of the autobiographical narrative of tenant Zlatija Kostić, this seminar opened up questions of the historical relational effects of our structural differences and the gradual subsequent construction of individual guilt as a means of transferring social responsibility. Zlatija Kostić claimed in the survey conducted by a cultural activist (engaged in research for the project Kamendynamics) to be ready to sue herself for the hopeless situation she has put herself and her daughters in, due to the decisions that she has made during her lifetime. This paradoxical demand found its detailed articulation in a staged version of an imaginary court case performed under the title *How does fascism not disappear? Zlatija Kostić: I sued myself*.

The performance text was initially prepared by Zlatija Kostić and then gradually developed and finalised in collaboration with project moderators and other tenants from the settlement. The stage was set on September 20, 2016, at Cultural Centre Rex, as part of The Speech Programmes. The scarce scenography indicated the outline of a court room, a resemblance that was referred to in the introduction to the performance, as was an imaginary institution called the Basic Court for Human Rights in the Belgrade Municipality of the Zemun Settlement Kamendin. The audience witnessed the court hearing about “... the case of Zlatija Kostić from Kamendin, Belgrade, against Zlatija Kostić from Kamendin, Belgrade.” Zlatija (who appeared in front of the court as herself) accused the defendant Zlatija (who appeared in front of the court as an incarnation of Zlatija in her twenties) for ruining her life and the lives of her children with a series of mistakes and bad decisions that she made during her lifetime.

The performance narrative includes autobiographical takes and analytical comments meant to create a historical-materialist setting for Zlatija’s story. Consequently, what is felt as individual guilt is revealed in this narrative as an outcome of systemic problems emerging in socialist Yugoslavia and during the so-called transition, showing how workers were robbed of social property and put in a situation of permanent dependency on inadequate (literally and materially disappearing) state apparatuses. This play is intended to encourage people to develop insights about their own lives, but it is also committed to the deeper roots of the problem, to insights into how cause leads to consequence, and to how to influence, shape, and understand the driving forces of contemporary housing regimes in Serbia. This is not a performance about the self, but it is about the self-definition of identity construction (Spry, 2011), the limits of personal accountability, and the state as a domain of un-freedom.

At a time when public debate seems to articulate a rhetoric of exclusion, this play, which is unusual in a Serbian context, crucially provides explanations that illuminate the true roots of social fragmentation. The court set-up, where witnesses, experts, and the audience spoke from their own political and societal experience seemingly lit up – at least for two hours – the collective political imagination. People from the audience were voicing pros and cons of the presented claims and standpoints, even commenting further like some experts or passing witnesses, bringing the event to a kind of forum-theatre ending. “I am the generation of the claimants. The accusations are correct. Young Zlatija was wrong. She didn’t think enough about herself and her family, she believed the state. That’s why she should be declared guilty!” said a man from the audience. A woman, a lawyer by profession,

mentioned the example of the neighbourhood Stepa Stepanovic in Belgrade, where tenants have reportedly been facing similar problems. Many talked about the fact that it is possible to tax social housing and evict poor people from social flats. Many accusations of the state were formulated, including the conclusion that the legal state is only legal when it has benefits. Among the attempts to clarify different issues, there was also an attempt to formulate a proposal for collective direct action: “The next time when the executors show up, we should all come and force the state to reformulate the system.”

Unfortunately, the play was performed in Serbia only once. In an interview conducted in 2017, Zlatija Kostić told me that there were around twenty people in the audience, some of them family members of people from Kamendin that were involved in reading, and others people that she did not know. At the beginning, the seminars and the play were relatively isolated but important attempts to produce counter-narratives about social housing in Serbia. Today, together with other actors in the housing movement – including the anti-eviction movement The Joint Action: Roof over the Head (The Roof) – Cultural Centre Rex continues to bring up this issue in order to include it in a larger process of politicisation that has been taking part in the last two years around epidemics of eviction due to debt after the state has given new powers to private-public executors. But that is a story for another paper.

Conclusion

In light of the main findings of this study, it could be concluded that social housing in Serbia has an anti-social nature. It is a product of anti-socialist neoliberal poverty governance at the EU and local levels. The new accumulation of capital through speculation on land value created conditions in which land for social housing had to be located on the periphery and on the very frontier of social life in cities. Repressive forms of social housing in combination with a repressive welfare system produce pauperised, stigmatised, and segregated urban areas. Social housing promises assistance to all those who cannot obtain housing on the market but, in reality, keeps the numbers of those that should be on the waiting lists suppressed (Petrović, 2013:246). The lucky minority of those in need that actually manage to obtain an apartment in public ownership are threatened by debt slavery and class- and race-based regulatory violence. In order to obscure this situation, institutions use different legal and symbolic mechanisms that function to cheaply hide the most visible victims of neoliberal housing contradictions. The risks and contradictions of a system that institutions and society produce are subjectivised, individualised, and racialised. Media narratives, responsabilisation, and racism are operationalised by the state’s “hygienic governmentality” and directed against an “abject population” accused of threatening the common good (Berlan 1997:175, quoted in: Tyler, 2013:38). Mina Petrović argues that this housing regime is ambivalent (Petrović, 2013:244). This article, however, shows that it is not ambivalent but extremely anti-social, because it does not provide decent, affordable, and secure housing. Instead, it produces spatial segregation, racism, debt slavery, and evictions. Moreover, the state has been utilising the enslaved position of segregated and indebted social tenants to collect votes and maintain its powerful position through pressure and blackmail. Also, the EU has provided funds and turned a blind eye on human rights violations in order to secure social housing in Serbia that is supposed to keep unwanted Roma migrants within the borders of Serbia.

Mainstream narratives that co-constructed the situation in Kamendin employed a particular angle that blamed Roma people for having no respect for the culture of communal living. It is not that racism and disrespect for the culture of communal living are not the problem. The problem is that without a structural approach, every analysis tends to stay stuck in easy-to-manipulate identity politics and individual choices related to the mythology of “equal opportunities.” The analysis performed through the Kamendynamics project and the play *I sued myself* showed that racism and the formation of “identity politics” are important factors, but they can obfuscate the deeper socio-economic vectors of division on which they are predicated. The approach developed in these projects is an important contribution to

analyses of social housing issues in Serbia, as they shift the understanding of housing and open up the process of “transition” to other possibilities.

Resistant practices emerge and converge. Our task is to think about how to bring in new elements and nurture the old ones and prepare them for their lives outside their current (art, activist, or academic) institutional and geographic forms. One thing is certain: resistance practices cannot properly function in isolation and they have to be permanently accountable to those in the interests of whom their actors claim to work.

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