Gender, the Camp and the *Muselmann*

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Abstract

This work addresses the relation between the camp, the inmate and the *Muselmann*. I use and refer to the camp in Agamben's terms, as a biopolitical space or as a paradigm of the modern political structure. Gender and the figure of the *Muselmann* are used in order to challenge Agamben's theory and to analyse how and if the structure of the camp changes if we introduce these variables in it. I first focus on the distinctions created between the *Muselmann* and other inmates in the discourses on exceptionality of the Holocaust in order to show how these discourses exclude 'gendered' inmate from the structure of the camp. Through inclusion of the inmate who is not the *Muselmann* I then examine if the paradigm of the camp as a space of exception can be changed through this inclusion. The final part focuses on gender and gender relations inside the camp. I juxtapose the Muselmann conceptualized as genderless person to other inmates and analyse what implications the presence of gender may have on the concept of the camp.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

The idea behind this paper developed from a try to understand the possible implications of gender on Agamben's conceptualization of the camp from the Second World War. Agamben, in his analysis of the political space of modernity, focuses on several topoi such as the camp, bare life or *homo sacer,* and the figure of the *Muselmann.* This figure is the product of the camp system, and conceptually coincides with bare life or *homo sacer*. Agamben grounds his approach in juridical theory developed by Schmitt, who focuses on the figure of the sovereign as the power to decide on exception (1985, p. 5). Juridical framework allows Agamben to connect the Holocaust to contemporary state and to abstract the camp as the "*nomos* of the political space in which we are still living" (1998, p. 166). In this paper I will use and refer to the camp in Agamben's terms, as a space which structures exist even today. Then I will add gender and analyse how and if this structure changes if we introduce this new variable in it.

The analysis of the Holocaust and gender has been the focus of many scholarly works. These works rely mainly on testimonies of survivors as one of the sources from which conclusions on gender were drawn. Politico- philosophical implications of such findings have rarely been investigated further. Such attempts to fill the theoretical gap between historical facticity and political critique usually provoked anxiety among historians (Kleinberg, 2007). The implementation of deconstruction in historical 'objective' findings and deconstruction of historical events has been much refuted and negated approach among the "more vocal" historians, as Kleinberg characterizes them (2007, p. 113). As he imaginatively describes:

> "A small cadre of historians has welcomed this specter as a benevolent guide that would reveal aspects of the past and the future hitherto undetected. A larger, and a more vocal, group takes this spirit to be malevolent *Poltergeist* hell bent on causing mischief and ultimately destroying the historical profession" (Kleinberg, 2007, p. 113).

The historical 'truth', a concept on which historical research is usually grounded, and which has been vehemently defended by historians, has proved to be a stumbling block for any probings in the conceptualization of the Holocaust in relation to the present, and to analysis of its implications for contemporary world. The relation between the present and the past has been usually seen in a progressive light in historical works and therefore the links between past and present based on structural similarities were refuted. The past has been analyzed as closed in its temporal borders, and effective in the present only as a reminder or as a warning.

With deconstruction and structural approaches to historical facts, this tension between the past and the present started to loosen, and ethical and political implications of the past on the present became the points of interest. The narrative of progress, conceptually developed in Enlightenment, ceased to be seen as dominant driving force in historical analysis and history in general (Brown, 2001). Positive dialectics of constant development negates the possibility of linking the past to the present through the dismantling of the temporal and structural divisions. Only by abandoning the idea of progress it is possible to approach present through the structural framework of the past.

The question of how to approach the relation between the present and the past in order to make a sense of the past to the present has been effectively analyzed in Brown's *Politics out of History*. She raises a number of questions regarding the issue at stake, as she tries to analyze the possible implications of the past on the present

when the mutual relation is not preserved any more inside the discourse of progress (Brown, 2001, p. 139). Her findings are especially important for the understanding of the anxieties currently circumscribing deconstructionists' approaches to the Holocaust.

Facticity and empirically 'true' account of the Holocaust can help us little to understand the implications of the event on the lives we live today. We can ask two questions regarding the event – whose account has more veracity and how this event influences the present- but only the second question can bring meaningful insights and understandings (Brown, 2001). The anxiety among historians when faced with the questioning of the objectivity of history or historical 'truth' was usually materialized through strong assertions of the event's facticity. This is especially evident in the case of the Holocaust where deconstructionists' challenges were rebuked with assertions that "Holocaust really happened" (Brown, 2001, p. 140). The questioning of the occurrence of the Holocaust appeared as a possibility for radical revisionists after the deconstructionists' challenges. This, however, should not prevent the further analysis of the Holocaust in relation to present. As Brown concludes, "the questions about history that matter for the political present are not answered by factually precise accounting...no empirical or materialist history can answer this questions..."(2001, p. 141). In what follows I will outline the theoretical framework of this paper in a more detail, and the ways the different theories used in the analysis will be structured together.

Theoretical Framework and Structure

In order to analyze what implications gender and the figure of the *Muselmann*, conceptualized in Agamben's terms, have on the concept of the camp, and how these concepts change, relate and overall function in the paradigm of the camp, I will draw from several theoretical sources.

The basis of the analysis will be structured around Agamben's concepts and ideas. I will complement his findings on the camp and the *Muselmann* with the works of feminists who analyzed gender in relation to the Holocaust by focusing mainly on women's experiences. Although the final part of my analyses will be also dedicated to the analysis of female presence in the camp, the body of the text presupposes the distinction between the *Muselmann* and other inmates, whom I perceive as 'gendered', but not necessarily as female. The female presence in the camp has particular importance for the change of the paradigm of the camp from the space of thanatopolitics to the space of indistinction between thanatopolitics and biopolitics, and this relation will be analysed in the final part of this paper.

Biopolitics is the general political background of Agamben's theory and therefore the same political structure will form the theoretical basis of this paper as well. The concepts I am using will be defined in the body of the text, as they appear in analysis, and as I find it necessary.

Agamben's conceptualization of the camp is of particular interest, since he abstracts the camp from its historical temporality in order to assume the whole of the modern political space under its specific structure. In *Homo Sacer* and *The Remnants of Auschwitz* he develops the theory on the camp and the *Muselmann*. In both books he uses the space of the camp and the figure of the *Muselmann* as paradigms of the

Holocaust, and of the modern political space as well. The camp as a paradigm of the modern political space is an example of biopolitical space of exception, while the *Muselmann* can be observed as a biopolitical body created through the activity of the sovereign power (Agamben, 1998, p. 10). The creation of the biopolitical body, or bare life in Agamben's terms, as the center for power interventions, represents the changes in the power structures from the end of the 18th century. These changes were first observed and noted by Foucault (2003) who nominated them biopolitics . State power in this new biopolitical system focuses on the body of the population instead on the body of the individual.

This new biopolitical state developed fully with the emergence of Nazism and fascism as examples of biopolitical movements focused on 'natural' life as a "place of the sovereign decision" (Agamben, 1998, p. 129). The politicization of natural or biological life is a theme of the book *State and Health*, written in Germany during the Nazi regime, and later circulated in France. One of the authors, Hans Reiter, outlines the state's relation to a new biological subject. He asserts that besides material wealth Germany is rich in "living wealth" as well (Agamben, 1998, p. 145). This living form of wealth became the center of political interest of the Reich and induced the politicization of the body of the citizens.

Focus on the body of the citizen is in contrast with the liberal theories on citizenship. While active citizens could only be embodied in the figure of man (Scott, 1997, p. 33), the embodied presence of this figure, or its biological body, was observed as less important than his political stance. Distinctions between biological and social, conceptualized also as body/ mind binary presumed also the sexual difference where women existed as bodies while men were observed as mind. With the emergence of biopolitics the focus changes and the body of the citizens became

the main field of interest for biopolitical state. Preservation of life and care for its population are the main political programs of the new biopolitical state.

While Agamben did not make distinctions in gender among the biopolitical subjects, historical works on the Holocaust start to analyse these distinctions from the experiences of the survivors and inmates. The inmate's experience of the camps and the Holocaust in general was usually conceived as equal in its horrors for both men and women by the scholars during the first decades after the war (Bos, 2003, p. 24). Only from the early 1980s onward was the female experience singled out as particularly different from male. First writings on the Holocaust experience, produced mainly by male scholars tend to focus on male testimonies since male scholars empathized more with other male survivors and their experiences than with females (Bos, 2003, p. 24). The memoirs of men who survived the Holocaust were used in generalization of experience, as it was presumed that male and female experiences were identical (Bos, 2003). Gender as an analytical tool was not present in this early discourse on the Holocaust, so the male voices became dominant and only relevant for this type of analysis. Women were marginalized in most of the male narratives of the Holocaust. They were usually represented as defenseless victims, the absent loved ones, as in need of a rescue, or were completely silenced (Horowitz, 1994).

The first scholarly writings on female experience of the Holocaust, published immediately after the Second World War, focused on German women. The interest in Jewish women was raised only decades later. Jewish women and their experiences came under the scholarly interest in the late 1970s (Vasvari, 2009). Although the first memoirs of the female survivors appeared immediately after the war[1], in the years following the 1945, they did not evoke particular interest among scholars. These

[1] Among the published memoirs are those by Ruzhka Korcag, Zivia Lubetkin, Olga Lengyl, Gisella Hart, Kitty Hart, Mary Berg, Justine Davidson and Anna Frank. For further reference see J. T. Baumel, Double Jeopardy, Gender and the Holocaust, (Vallentine Mitchell, 1998), 41.

memoirs described women's daily life and activities in ghettos, camps, and in resistance groups (Baumel, 1998, p. 40). Focus on resistance and coping techniques remained the main themes examined and analyzed in the later works on female experience of the Holocaust. The importance of resistance and detection of this mode of activity in the testimonies is a result of a specific post- war climate where passive behavior of victims- as was emblematized in the phrase "going as sheep to the slaughter"- was particularly attacked (Baumel, 1998, p. 42). Demise in academic interest in women and the Holocaust characterized the years of 1950s and 1960s. Baumel describes this period as "semi- dormant".

The interest in the field was renewed from mid 1970s. First academic studies- a new genre in the field- complemented memoirs and testimonies from this period onwards. The emphasis in these works was placed on gender as a new analytical tool in analysis of the Holocaust. Point on which authors focused was mutual assistance and cooperation as a survival strategy (Baumel, 1998). A particular turning point in scholarly research on women in the Holocaust is marked by a two day conference, organized by Joan Ringelheim and Esther Katz in 1983 (Baer & Goldenberg, 2003). The points of inquiry established at this conference remain the guiding parameters for subsequent research in the field. Women's survival and coping strategies, daily lives, and vulnerabilities were the prevailing issues addressed by the scholars (Baer & Goldenberg, 2003). Next to this conference, there are several notable works which established the grounds for the feminist readings of the Holocaust. Among them are Vera Laska's *Women in the Resistance and in the Holocuast: The Voices of Eyewitnesses*, Andreas Lixl- Purcell's *Women of Exile: German- Jewish Autobiographies since 1933*, *When Biology Became Destiny: Women in Weimar and Nazi Germany* by group of authors, and *Gender and Destiny: Women Writers and the*

Holocaust by Marlene Heinemann[2]. Heineman's book has brought the novelty of literary study inside the field dominated by historical approaches. In these works women are polarized in two recurrent figures of victim and resistance fighter. Their biological or sexual functions are addressed in *When Biology Became Destiny* but the general conflation between gender and sex can be detected as one of the common traits in these works. Menstruation, rape and childbirth as embodied experiences are linked and explained through gender as a differentiating tool for male and female experiences. Beside gender/ sex unity, the emphasis and search for the evidence of resistance, bravery or endurance is another recurring element.

Several further studies, such as Baer and Goldenberg's edition *Experience and expression: women, the Nazis, and the Holocaust,* Baumel's *Double jeopardy: gender and the Holocaust,* and *Women in the Holocaust* by Ofer and Weitzman, depart from the previous group of works mentioned above in interpretation of the women's Holocaust experience. While the works of Laska, Lixl- Purcell and others are reserved for the presentation of the collected women's narratives, this other group of works, developed mainly from the 1990s onward evaluate and interpret the material they are dealing with. This distinction is noted in the introduction to *Experience and Expression* by Baer and Goldenberg (2003), another book focused on analysis of collected material and comprised of articles on different subjects ranging from the analysis of Roma and Sinti women's experiences during the Holocaust to the reinterpretations and representations of women's experiences in film and literature.

Distinction between sex and gender in these works reflects traditional approach. Gender is perceived as social marker and the "axis of all social organization" while sex is seen as biological sign (Ofer & Weitzman, 1998, p. 2). The actions performed

[2] For more details on these works see Baer, E. R., Goldenberg, M. (ed.), *Experience and Expression: Women, the Nazis, and the Holocaust,* (Wayne State University Press, 2003).

by women were related to the practices learned before the war, which were then deployed in the changed condition of the camp. Prewar knowledge and skills are often referred to as an origin of gendered performance in the camp (Ofer & Weitzman, 1998).

I will problematize such understandings by applying Butler's theory of gender performance and sex/ gender distinction and Foucault's theory on power. At the same time these theories on gender as outlined by feminist scholars will help me develop critical understanding of the space of the camp and the *Muselmann* which differs from Agamben's main thesis.

This paper is divided in three chapters. In the first chapter I will present different theories on exceptionality and singularity of the Holocaust and analyse how they influence the conceptualization of the inmates of the camp in two separate groups- survivors and victims. I will argue that this distinction enhances exclusion of the survivor, to whom I will later refer as the other inmate in relation to the *Muselmann*, from the space of the camp as conceptualized by Agamben.

Second chapter will examine what conceptual changes happen if we include this other inmate in the space of the camp, while the third chapter brings gender in this framework.

Exceptionality, Survivor and the Victim

In this chapter I will outline the ways singularity and exceptionality of the Holocaust has been approached in historical and theoretical works by different scholars. The goal is to trace the development of such ideas, how they have been accepted or refuted and how they have been reused in a more conceptual analysis of the event. I argue that the framework of singularity and exceptionality has a bearing on theoretical understanding of the position of the inmates in the context of the camp, and on their conceptualization, as developed in Agamben's theory.

By analyzing the implications of exceptionality I will show how such understandings precluded the possibility of looking at the inmate from any other position except as the *Muselmann*[3], or bare life. By stating that the *Muselmann* is the only 'true' victim of the Nazi regime who can fully testify to the horrors that happened, Agamben excludes the figure of the survivor, or the "other" in this relation, from the conceptualization of the camp. Agamben's theory related to the figure of the victim is similar to Lyotard's understanding of the same figure. Both authors make distinctions between the survivor and the victim. I will analyse this distinction through the frameworks of exception and singularity.

Singularity of the Holocaust in historical narrative has been defended by scholars who tried to example the event from the historical framework of continuity and progress. Crimes committed during the Holocaust have been explained as incomparable to any other historical event and therefore singular in its horrors. Lyotard's and Agamben's approaches give a basis for specific take on the Holocaust focused more on the conceptual framework of the event. The singularity and

[3] I will provide detailed description of the figure of the *Muselmann* in the next chapter, where I outline his relation to other inmates.

incomprehensibility of the Holocaust, as seen from Lyotard's work, is based on the idea that the event cannot be comprehended since the victims who could testify did not survived. His approach makes distinction between victim and survivor, where survivor is the one from whose testimony we cannot fully comprehend the Holocaust. Agamben's theory focuses on the singularity and exceptionality of the event but from juridico- political perspective. In his work *Homo Sacer* exceptionality is the constitutive element of the norm, although excluded from it (Agamben, 1998). His reframing is important for the analysis of the relationship between the inmates and the figure of the Muselmann, who can be observed as the victim who cannot testify, and to whom I turn in the second chapter.

Terrence des Pres outlines three rules that comprise the convention of the singularity of the Holocaust (Kansteiner, 1994). By these rules the Holocaust should be represented as a unique event; its representation should be true to circumstances and conditions that characterized it and particular level of honor and respect should be shown (Kansteiner, 1994, p. 152). The idea of singularity of the Holocaust has been developed in historiographical research over several decades, and only younger scholars, as Kansteiner defines them, try to question this position. As he explains, the emergence of different approach and understanding of the Holocaust have been a "generational phenomenon" developed by scholars who were further removed from the event (Kansteiner, 1994, p. 147).

Microhistorical and poststructuralist approaches were defined as two main lines in new understanding and conceptualization of the Holocaust. These approaches question several aspects related to the Holocaust such as historical discontinuity, qualitative distinction and incomprehensibility, defined as such by Kansteiner (1994), and developed in the works of Eberhard Jäckel, Berel Lang and Saul Friedlander,

among the others.[4] These authors defend proposed concepts from different positions but common trait in their theories is the understanding of the singularity of the Holocaust as a consequence of historical facticity, where "the facts speak for themselves" (Lang, 2003, p. 116). The focus on the facts, decontextualized from broader historical circumstances has been attacked by younger scholars.

The necessity to observe the Holocaust in the broader framework of modernity and contemporary societies influenced the change in the analysis. As two positions were outlined- one still arguing for the singularity of the Holocaust and the other supporting the reinterpretation of the event as understandable or ordinary- the limits of historiographical approach and narrative history became evident (Kansteiner, 1994). These two options proved to be too limiting and different scholars turned to political and theoretical issues related to the Holocaust as a starting point of their analysis.

These differences and turn towards more theoretical and conceptual approach to the analysis of the event were based on the idea that singularity cannot be defended from the position of "factual occurrence"(Kansteiner, 1994, p. 152), and from the awareness of the limits that historiographical methodology imposed on analysis. Dehistoricization of the event based on the concept of singularity was abandoned as the new approaches developed.

One of the reasons for defense of singularity of the Holocaust came from the need to dehistoricize Nazism. This was the first point of intervention for younger scholars who began to argue that the Holocaust cannot be observed outside the historical circumstances that lead to it. These circumstances were seen as imbedded in the broader structures of modern society and therefore cannot be excluded from the

[4] For full bibliography on these authors and discussion on their approaches see Wulf Kansteiner, "From Exception to Exemplum: The New Approach to Nazism and the 'Final Solution'", *History and Theory* 33, 2. 1994, pp. 145- 171.

analysis. Several authors approached this issue in their works and contributed to the change in understanding of the Holocaust from "exceptional to exemplary historical event" (Kansteiner, 1994, p. 152). Christopher R. Browning initiated the change by focusing on the history of the perpetrators by avoiding the practices of distanciation. As he asserts the perpetrators were not essentially different from ourselves and their actions can be repeated - they are latent but present danger of any modern society (Browning, 1993). He creates link between the Nazi Germany and the present circumstances by emphasizing the historical analogies between the periods which were observed by older scholars as discontinuous and distinct. Saul Friedlander engages further in theoretical analysis of the Holocaust by comprising the volume *Probing the Limits of Representation* (1992) where particular theoretical and conceptual issues on the Holocaust were developed by different scholars.

It is important to note the influence of the *Historikerstreit*[5] debate in these articles- especially in the arguments dealing with the enlightenment tradition and the Nazi state. The link between the Holocaust and the Enlightenment has developed from the conceptual approach to the event. Habermas emphasized the return of the German state to the enlightenment ideals after the end of the Nazi period, but this approach was later questioned and refuted by the scholars present in Friedlander's volume, particularly by Vincent Pecora (1992). Pecora problematizes separation between 'enlightened' tradition and ideas fostered in Nazi Germany. The separation between these two periods is not justified except from the point of taking the historical burden from the new German state. German historians engaged in this

[5] *Historikerstreit* is debate among the German historians developed around the issue of the singularity of the Holocaust. Two positions were question in this debate- the idea of the singularity of the Holocaust and the argument that the Holocaust was similar to other crimes and atrocities committed elsewhere, such as in Stalinist Russia. For the overview of the debate see Dominick LaCapra, "Representing the Holocaust: Reflections on the Historians' Debate", in Saul Friedlander (ed.), *Probing the Limits of Representation*, Harvard University Press 1992.

process in order to make an ideological distinction between pre- and post- war period, which will help legitimize the new state. In Pecora's text, however, such a move is avoided. The criminal acts and "barbarity" of the Holocaust (Pecora, 1992, p. 163) are part of the Western traditions, and do not represent the disruption from historical current and ideological framework of Enlightenment.

> "If the specific and terrifying suffering endured by the victims of Nazi persecutions is not mobilized to remind the West of the barbarity folded into even its most admirable traditions, but instead serves to obscure it, and perhaps to foster surreptitiously a smug sense of political complacency and assuredness, then that suffering will end up serving barbaric purposes all over again"(Pecora, 1992, p. 163).

The debate on singularity of the Holocaust and its relation to ideological tradition of the Enlightenment stimulated the abstraction of the event from its strict historical framework. The event ceased to be observed as singular and incomprehensible, but different options for its abstraction developed. Younger scholars that I mentioned, approached the Holocaust not just as an event with specific place in historical narrative but started to analyze its particular relation to contemporary situation, especially in the domain of concepts and ideas that spring out from it. The singularity of the event remained a fruitful ground for theoretical inquiries into the possible use of the Holocaust in the analysis of contemporary condition. Lyotard and Agamben developed their positions from the debate outlined above, and helped further conceptualization of the event.

Lyotard's questioning of the concept of singularity deserves particular attention since his philosophical approach establishes the basis for further analysis of the Holocaust displaced from strictly historical framework. His conceptualization of singularity and Agamben's juridico- political theory on exception bear similarities important for theoretical framework of this paper.

Lyotard focuses on the Auschwitz as the paradigm of the whole event and from there he develops his argument on singularity. As he states in his book *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute* (Lyotard, 1988) Auschwitz is the example of the impossibility of any example. The events are always singular but their singularity comes from the impossibility of framing them inside any possible 'example'. They surpass the limits of already known frames of significance and therefore cannot be interpreted or understood. In his well- known metaphor Lyotard links Auschwitz with earthquake. Auschwitz has destroyed all known sign systems and therefore it cannot be represented or understood (Lyotard, 1988). It is an event which significance exceeds all the possible frameworks of the cognitive system. Therefore the event itself is bind to double exclusion. This exclusion is evident if we compare Lyotard's understanding of the singularity with other scholars.

Lyotard's approach to singularity differs in a way that in his theory singularity stays outside the language. While singularity of the Holocaust explained by the historians remains factual but incomprehensible, for Lyotard it is both inexplicable within the present sign system and cognitive practices and incomprehensible. For him any attempt to define what happened during the Holocaust is futile. His approach, as noted by Kansteiner, allows for complete disintegration of standard concepts of 'subject' and 'history', and it is "the only chance to escape the forces that have set the "Final Solution in motion"(1994, p. 169).

For Lyotard the singularity of the Holocaust is a consequence of our cognitive impossibility to represent events in language. All events are singular in his theory since the excess of signification they are carrying cannot be adequately explained or represented. If we use this Lyotard's notion on singularity then historians' positive dialectics on the Holocaust and "final Solution", which presupposes singularity

framed in the historical truthfulness, is a false approach which rely on the idea that impossibility of comprehension imbedded in the framework of singularity could have its basis in historical truth. Historical truth as such cannot be verified if the event itself cannot be explained and if we lack tools to explain it. Truth needs empirical basis to be validated but this basis cannot be determined if we cannot address the event as a whole, with all its excess, but only its parts. Lyotard's approach based in negative dialectics shows that judgments historians have on the Holocaust are based on previous cognitive genres which cannot serve the new purpose when one side of the story, in this case the story of the victims, is not represented.

The importance of comprehending the whole picture regarding the Holocaust seems to be the main impediment for Lyotard. The incomprehensibility and exceptionality of the Holocaust relies for him in the impossibility to adequately represent both sides in the conflict- perpetrators and victims. His questioning of the singularity of the event comes from- as he describes it- break in the historical understanding, which is the consequence of the impossibility to hear the voices of the ones who perished during the period of the Nazi rule (Kansteiner, 1994, p. 168). The victims cannot testify and therefore the event cannot be fully comprehended.

> "...the events remain indescribable since the victims cannot testify because they have been killed. From the vantage point of our cognitive rules of representation the events remain indescribable since the victims were robbed of any "legitimate" way to voice their resistance to the process of extermination"(Kansteiner, 1994, p. 168)

If the victims cannot testify to what happened during the Holocaust or in the camps, than the victims are the incomprehensible part that creates the incomprehension of the event itself. If they cannot testify, and their testimony is singled as the missing link for the full understanding of the event, than the victims became the constructive part of the exception. A willingness to fully comprehend

them thus becomes obsolete since it is impossible to comprehend incomprehensible. In this way the 'true' inhabitant of the camp becomes the figure of the inmate who cannot be comprehended and therefore cannot be included inside any normative system, which is, in this framework the victim, or in Agamben's terms- the *Muselmann*.

Agamben's approach, built on different basis, and focused in particular on the paradigm of the camp, resumes similar positions regarding the singularity as Lyotard. The singularity of the Holocaust or indeed concentration camp is grounded and developed from juridico- political framework where singularity and exceptionality have their functions inside the prescribed system. If for Lyotard the singularity of one event is founded on event's excess regarding the signification, Agamben's exception presupposes that the excess of the event does not breach the prescribed signification but instead becomes sign for itself. If the state of exception, in this case the exception proclaimed in the Nazi Germany during the Holocaust became the norm, as Agamben points out (1998, p. 168), then we can 'situate' the excess of this event in a camp. The focus on the importance of the voice of the victims, the ones who perished in the camps, is therefore the need to hear the 'excess' of this event, or its incomprehensible part. But since the need to hear 'the incomprehensible' cannot be satisfied, the impossibility to comprehend the incomprehensible, built inside the need to comprehend, reframes the subject of theory as incomprehensible as well. The impossibility to comprehend inside the need for comprehension is the exceptionality which at the same time is, in Agamben's terms, a member of the norm or the whole from which it is excluded. The incomprehensibility of an event is a formative element of the comprehensibility or need to comprehend the incomprehensible.

Agamben uses the idea of incomprehensibility in his theoretical work on the camp in order to situate the figure of the victim, or the *Muselmann* as the 'norm' of the camp's exception. The figure of the victim who cannot testify, and therefore cannot satisfy the need to comprehend incomprehensible is incomprehensibility or excess of the event which is comprehensible through the testimonies of survivors. By framing the relationship between the survivors and victims in this way, both theoretical approaches remove the figure of the inmate, the one who survived, from contextualization of the camp.

The relationship built between the survivors and the space of the camp is the one based on the binaries presented above. The exceptionality of the camp is built on the incomprehensibility of the victims who perished there. In other words, the lack of the testimonies from the victims created the possibility to frame one part of the camp experience as incomprehensible and therefore as exceptional from norm. Survivors became excluded from the exception of the camp by the comprehensibility or availability of their testimonies. The binary between victim and the survivor based on the availability of their 'voices' reflects the binary of norm and exception in a way that exception relates to incomprehensible part and therefore the figure of the victim. If the camp is defined by exceptional figure of the victim- the victim itself is this incomprehensible part. Therefore the victim works in a circular dynamic between exceptionality and incomprehensibility where the exceptionality is perpetuated by incomprehensibility and incomprehensibility is created through exception. The victim inside the space of the camp is its incomprehensible part which creates the camp as exception but at the same time whose incomprehensibility is constructed by that exception.

The figure of the victim thus becomes the 'true' inhabitant of the camp, and is in

Agamben's theory presented in the figure of the *Muselmann*. The *Muselmann* as normative figure of camp's exception positions the survivors outside of the camp, and limits the possibilities of theoretical understanding of the space of the camp as anything else but the space of death and destruction.

In the next chapter I will outline the possibilities for reconceptualziation of the camp if we analyze the relation between the *Muselmann* and other inmates.

The *Muselmann* and the Space of the Camp: the Possibilities of Reconceptualization

The exclusion of the survivor from the conceptualization of the camp came out as a consequence of the juridical framework through which the camp was analysed in Agamben's work. The necessity to situate the camp as the exception from the norm, necessitated the structuralization of the inmate as exceptional and "outside" of the norm as well. The *Muselman* was used as the exemplary figure of the inmate, since this figure signified complete surrender to power which operated inside the camp and also symbolized complete destruction of humanity (Agamben, 1999). This exceptional figure worked as the final "product" of the camp system, and as its embodied norm.

This chapter will focus on the figure of the *Muselmann* and his[6] relation to the space of the camp and to other inmates. By making this relation I intend to show how the paradigm of the camp can be changed if we move the focal point from the figure of the sovereign to the inmates. Although the *Muselmann* is also a part of the inmates' population in general, he is at the same time excluded from it. This is particularly visible in the discourses of the inmates, to which I will refer later.

Agamben appropriates the figure of the sovereign form the juridical language. The sovereign as a power which decides on the exception is used in Foucault's explanation of the biopolitics (2003) and in Schmitt work on political theology (1985). Bipolitical framework and the figure of the sovereign allow Agamben to develop his understanding of the camp as a space of death and destruction. Since the camp is the space of exception that has been proclaimed by the sovereign, the opposite of this power is the inmate who is subjugated to it. Since the inmate also

[6] I will use male pronoun when referring to the *Muselmann.* This should not imply gender or sexual distinction but is more an outcome of linguistic limitations.

belongs to the space of exception, which is also the excess of the event- as I argued in the previous chapter- then the figure of the inmate is also the exception in a sense that it is at the same time the norm of the camp. This position renders the inmate incomprehensible and Agamben, while referring to the *Muselmann* as the "complete witness" (1999, p. 47), states that it is necessary to comprehend the *Muselmann* as a necessary move in comprehension of the camp as well.

> Before being a death camp, Auschwitz is the site of an experiment that remains unthought today, an experiment beyond life and death in which the Jew is transformed into a *Muselmann* and a human being into a non human. And we will not understand what Auschwitz is if we do not first understand who or what the *Muselmann* is- if we do not learn to gaze with him upon the Gorgon" (Agamben, 1999, p. 52)

I agree with this Agamben's proposal, but I find it necessary to include the other inhabitants of the camp into this task as well[7]. Only by taking into account the whole population of the camp it is possible to fully comprehend its structure and meaning for contemporary political space. I will start my analysis by examining who is the *Muselmann*, what is the political space he inhabits, how this space is structured in relation to him, and finally how can this space be changed in relation to other inmates.

The *Muselmann* is the most infamous inhabitant of a concentration camp. The *Muselmann* is a human being, or former human being who exists in a space of a camp only as a body; his emotional capacities and reasoning are obliterated by malnutrition. Since he is reduced to a vegetative state, his 'humanness' is questioned. Levi describes that " the divine spark [is] dead within them" (Levi as cited in Agamben, 1999, p. 55). Lack of emotional awareness to the situation that surrounded the

[7] By other inhabitants I understand the 'gendered' inmates which represent the contrast regarding the *Muselmann*. I am not, however, interested in the Nazi commanders who, for me, represent the part of the 'sovereign structure'. I will refer to this 'gendered' inmate in more detail in the next chapter, but for current analysis it is enough to state that the *Muselmann* is just one 'face' of the inmates' community.

Muselmann induced such descriptions. Agamben poses a question what makes the human being human, and whether we can reduce humanity to the biological being of the person (1999). The answer he gives, however, appears to be ambiguous, as he concludes that the *Muselmann* is a "biological machine" (1999, p. 57) but at the same time this "machine" still belongs to the "zone of the human" (1999, p. 63). In this way Agamben tries to avoid the conclusion which would seem to assert the SS success in producing a complete dehumanized person. Instead, he situates the *Muselmann* in the zone of indistinction between life and death, human and non- human (Agamben, 1999, p. 55) which implies different structuring of the camp as not only the space of destruction and death. However, the other inmates seem to exclude the *Muselmann* from the inmates' community because of his apparent lack of humanity.

> "No one felt compassion for the Muslim, and no one felt sympathy for him either. The other inmates, who continually feared for their lives, did not even judge him worthy of being looked at. For the prisoners who collaborated, the Muslims were a source of anger and worry; for the SS, they were merely useless garbage. Every group thought only about eliminating them, each in its own way" (Ryn and Klodzinski as cited in Agamben, 1999, p. 43).

The term *Muselmann* originated in Auschwitz, and was derived from the meaning of the word Muslim - "the one who submits unconditionally to the will of God" (Agamben, 1999, p. 45). Due to lack of any emotional response or action, the *Muselmann* is seen by the inmates as a "nameless hulk" (Agamben, 1999) over whom the power completely triumphed. The *Muselmann* no longer belonged to the circle of humans regarding the inmates. In their testimonies he is referred to as a non- human, living dead or a walking corpse (Agamben, 1999). No matter how the Muselmann is referred to- as political, anthropological, or medical concept- Agamben concludes that he is "the perfect cipher of the camp, the non- place in which all disciplinary barriers

are destroyed and all embankments flooded" (Agamben, 1999, p. 48). If the *Muselmann* is conceptually equaled with the space of the camp than the camp itself is the space where 'disciplinary barriers' are non- existent. However, if we observe the *Muselmann* in relation to other inmates and through the context of biopolitics, then the barriers and divisions in the space of the camp became evident.

In *Remnants of Auschwitz* Agamben defines the *Muselmann* as the "final bilpolitical substance" (1999, p. 85). The emergence of biopolitics, which Foucault situates in the late 18th century, signals a turn or a rupture in a state's approach to life (2003). The old structure of power which was emblematized in the sovereign's right to take life or let live was changed with different structure in which the life gets primacy and preservation of life becomes more important than its destruction (Foucault, 2003). However, these two positions do not exclude each other, but are correlated, and function together in the modern states (Foucault, 2003, p. 241).

> "...one of the greatest transformations political right underwent in the nineteenth century was precisely that, I wouldn't say exactly that sovereignty's old right- to take life or let live was replaced, but it came to be complemented by a new right which does not erase the old right but which does penetrate it, permeate it. This is the right, or rather precisely the opposite right. It is the power to "make" live or "let" die. The right of sovereignty was the right to take life or let live. And then this new right is established: the right to make live and to let die." (Foucault, 2003, p. 241).

In this new biopolitical system the sovereign control turns towards population as a group or a mass and population's biological body becomes the main point for power's intervention. The main preoccupation of the biopolitical state is the preservation and protection of the lives of the population. Death, as the negating element of this positivistic structure is positioned outside of the power (Foucault, 2003, p. 248). In this way death becomes exception from the biopolitical norm. If we

relate this idea to Agamben's theory of the camp, then the camp, since it represents exception, is the space of death which produces the *Muselmann*. This notion, however, is limiting in a way that excludes other inmates from the camp's structure. By focusing only on the sovereign position, Agamben constructs the camp as the ultimate space of destruction where life in itself ceases to exist in a meaningful form. If the space outside of the camp can be understood as biopolitical space focused on the protection of life, than exception and its spatial form of the camp are excluded from it in a way that are at the same time the constituents of this space (Agamben, 1998, p. 25). However, such distinction cannot be fully preserved if the camp should be observed as the norm of the political space today.

Agamben defines concentration camp as a paradigmatic space of modernity (1998, p. 166). In his politico- philosophical theory camp is both a camp from the Second World War but also a paradigm of the political space of modernity. Its creation corresponds with the proclamation of the state of exception, but it is only spatially situated when state of exception becomes a rule.

> The camp is the space that is opened when the state of exception begins to become the rule. In the camp, the state of exception, which was essentially a temporary suspension of the rule of law on the basis of a factual state of danger is now given a permanent spatial arrangement, which as such nevertheless remains outside the normal order "(Agamben, 1998, pp. 168- 169).

The figure of a sovereign, which should not be connected only with a singular, embodied figure of a ruler, but functions also as a state, society or a universal power, has a right to proclaim the state of exception. This possibility positions the sovereign both inside and outside the law, while the state of exception suspends the rule of law by allowing its existence at the same time. Schmitt asserts that there is no law or norm in exclusion since "no norm is applicable to chaos" (1985, p. 13). The decision

between normal situation and chaos, and therefore the decision on the norm, is for Schmitt and Agamben a decision of the sovereign.

The camp should be a place outside of every norm, since it is created out of the state of exception, but it is not quite so. The decision on the state of exception, as in the Nazi Germany, which is not provoked but as Agamben said "willed", creates a paradoxical position for the camp (1998, p. 170). The camp is "willed" as long as its appearance is not provoked by the state of exception but is conceived by the sovereign. The factual situation does not influence its creation, but the will of the sovereign. As long as the camp is "willed" it is at the same time part of the order, or the norm. As a geographical place, or a piece of land, it is taken outside, it is excluded, but at the same time it is included, since the state of exception becomes the rule.

> "The camp is thus the structure in which the state of exception- the possibility of deciding on which founds sovereign power – is realized *normally*. The sovereign no longer limits himself, as he did in the spirit of the Weimar constitution, to deciding on the exception on the basis of recognizing a given factual situation (danger to public safety)...he now de facto produces the situation as a consequence of his decision on the exception" [original emphasis]. (Agamben, 1998, p. 170)

The rule and the fact are mixed here, and impossibility of their discernment allows for everything to be possible. This zone of indistinction dependant on the sovereign decision obliterates the divisions between outside and inside, illicit and licit, exception and rule. The space of camp and atrocities committed there are considered as unintelligible due to this indistinction.

The persons who entered the camp, and were subjugated to direct sovereign power, are conceptualized as bare life by Agamben. Bare life, or sacred life, a life that has no value, is the inhabitant of a camp. Bare life circulates in the zone of

indisitinction of a camp but also represents the zone of indistinction itself. “It is a threshold in which law constantly passes over into fact and fact into law, and in which the two planes become indistinguishable” (Agamben, 1998, p. 171). The sovereign power in the camp thus produces bare life in its most radical form- the *Muselmann*.

The *Muselmann* is the figure that has particular meaning in the structuring of the space of the camp. As a body deprived of human comprehension it is a perfect ‘product’ of the camp system, and a symbolical representation of it. His presence in the exceptional space of the camp is the embodied norm of that space. He represents the destructive potential of the space he inhabits, but for the other inmates, besides being the constant reminder of the death that awaits them, the *Muselmann* also symbolizes their eventual transformation into bare life- a life that has no value, meaning or dignity. Through their attempt to preserve the dignity of the human being, the inmates also tried to fight off the imposing image of the *Muselmann*. Death was just one step away after becoming the *Muselmann*. If “beyond the *Muselmann* lies only the gas chamber” (Agamben, 1999, p. 85), then it was important to distinguish oneself from this figure, and to draw the lines of distinction between the space he and the other inmates inhabited.

The death or annihilation of human life in the camp had less importance than total destruction of humanity for the inmates. The death itself ceased to function as a meaningful event inside the camp (Agamben, 1999, p. 70). In the zone of indistinction of the camp the death was omnipresent and visible on a daily basis that its presence stopped bearing any significance. It became “trivial, bureaucratic, and everyday affair” (Levi as cited in Agamben, 1999, p. 76). It was a probable outcome for the most of the inmates. The first coping strategies with the exceptional state are visible in this description. In order to be digestible, the immensity of death was regulated inside

the space of a camp as usual and everyday event. The camp thus becomes a new referent upon which the inmates made a sense of their position. This tendency to normalize the experience of a camp has a particular bearing on the performance of gender inside it, which I will elaborate in the next chapter.

The functioning of power in the camp is evident, and well documented. The relation between power and the sovereign's decision on exception has the ultimate importance for the experience of the camp by the inmates. But far for being just the living corpses waiting to be annihilated, the inmates started to work they way through the atrocious existence in the camp, by changing the paradigm of the camp as an exception into a camp as the only possible norm.

The destruction of human dignity posed a greater threat to inmates than the pure physical destruction. The preservation of humanity through the established norms of behavior and customs were the points of hope for the inmates in their struggle for existence. The space of the camp was recontextualized in their daily practices from the space of exception into a 'normal' space with its own laws. The view of exception as outside of normal situation, but also as a necessity for this 'normality' to exist, was removed from the space of the camp. The zone of indistinction, where clear lines between inside / outside and exclusion/ inclusion are blurred, facilitated this change. As survivors testified, the only way to cope with the situation was to perceive the camp as an ultimate space, beyond which nothing else existed (Langer, 1998, p. 352). The statement of Mado, one of the survivors from Auschwitz asserts this claim. "My life started over there. Before there was nothing." (Langer, 1998, p. 352). Levi also gives the camp this ultimate position. In his poetic description of a dream, he situates the camp as the central place with which his being was intertwined, and outside of which everything was just an illusion.

> "I'm alone at the center of a gray, cloudy emptiness, and at once I *know* what it means, I know that I've always know it: I am once again in the camp, and nothing outside the camp was true. The rest- family, flowering nature, home- was a brief respite, a trick of the senses" (Agamben, 1999, p. 101)

The 'normalization' of the camp by inmates represented also a resistance towards SS 'will' to conceptualize the camp as a death space. Through 'normalization' the camp ceased to be seen as the place of destruction. If we frame this idea in Agamben's terms of norm and exception, it is possible to refer to the camp as exception from the position of the sovereign, but for the inmates this exception became the only possible norm. The space of a camp was normalized, or at least the effort was taken to do so. Only through the normalization it was possible to cope with its horrors.

The testimony of one member of a 'special team'[8] in Auschwitz, retold by Primo Levi, demonstrates this point. During the break in work, the chosen members of a special team would play soccer with the SS members.

> "Other men of the SS and the rest of the squad are present at the game; they take sides, bet, applaud, urge the players on as if, rather than at the gates of hell, the game were taking place on the village green" (Levi as cited in Agamben, 1999).

One of the members elaborated this position further. As he stated "doing this work, one either goes crazy the first day or get used to it"(Agamben, 1999, p. 49). This getting 'used to it' is a process of normalization of experience which changed the perception and functioning of a camp for the inmates. As evident from these testimonies, the normalizing processes undertaken by the inmates changed a space of the camp into a habitual one. Agamben also notes this transformation although he frames it differently.

[8] The role of a special team was to remove corpses from the gas chambers and to burn them in the crematorium.

> "Auschwitz is a place where exception or extreme situation shifts into its opposite. The paradigm of exception is transformed into its opposite- the habitual daily life, but this erasure of borders between the two testifies for the immanence of the exception, where "everything [is] being in everything" (1999, p. 50).

In this context of coping with the exceptionality of a camp the figure of the *Muselmann* comes to play a dual role. At the same time, the *Muselmann* can be observed as example and as exception. As a product of the camp system, the *Muselmann* is seen as example or norm of the state of exception. This example is not positioned out of the system of a camp but it is at its core, it is its necessary prop that works inside it. It is a product of the camp and final destination for all the inmates. Agamben describes the position of the *Muselmann* as a center of the camp's structure.

> "The space of the camp...can even be represented as a series of concentric circles that, like waves, incessantly wash up against a central non- place, where the *Muselmann* lives. (...) The entire population of the camp is, indeed, nothing other than an immense whirlpool obsessively spinning around a faceless center" (Agamben, 1999, pp. 51- 52).

At the same time, when observed from the position of an inmate, the *Muselmann* represents the exception. In a space that is normalized through the different daily practices and performances of the inmates, the *Muselmann* is the figure that shows the feebleness and fragility of their construction. If space of a camp is no more considered as exception by an inmate, then the *Muselmann* became the embodied exception for the camp's 'normality', which is excluded from the camp through its inclusion.

The erasure of human dignity from the figure of the *Muselmann* is one of the most horrid sites for the inmates. The death is less intimidating that this image of complete surrender to power. The annihilation of humanity, embodied in the figure of

the *Muselmann* worked as a constant reminder that any dignity and resistance ultimately are useless. The inmates stated how it was impossible for them to gaze at the *Muselmann*. They didn't want to see him, since they all feared of becoming one. *The Muselmann* designated a point of no return which led only to gas chambers.

> "...the prisoner's most pressing concern was to hide his sickness and his exhaustion, to constantly cover over the *Muselmann* who at the every moment was emerging in him"(Agamben, 1999, p. 52)

The quote from the beginning of this chapter connects the idea of gazing with the *Muselmann*. As Agamben concludes, we need to learn how to gaze together with the *Muselmann* upon the Gorgon, in order to understand what the Auschwitz was. The Gorgon he refers to is a creature from the Greek mythology which has a power to kill with its gaze. Her face or anti- face, the *gorgoneion*, "represents the impossibility of vision, [it] is what cannot *not* be seen [original emphasis]"(Agamben, 1999, p. 53). But the Gorgon is not the *Muselmann.* It is the impossibility to see as inherent in the inmates who have become the *Muselmann*. The unwillingness of other inmates to gaze upon them is the refusal to see what is impossible to see; it is the refusal of seeing the impossibility of seeing. It is a refusal to accept the seeing-less and knowing-less position of the *Muselmann.*

This refusal is the refusal to accept the exceptionality of the camp. As inmates strived to normalize the space of the camp, they at the same time excluded the *Muselmann* from their community. The 'normalization' of the camp is achieved through the efforts of the inmates but on conceptual level it is achieved also through their mere presence in the camp. This becomes evident if we bring the gender in the framework of analysis.

Gender, the *Muselmann* and the Camp

In my analysis of gender and the space of the camp the figure of the *Muselmann* has a particular significance. As seen from the previous chapter, the *Muselmann* is a point of reference to inmates in their attempt to normalise their position inside the camp. Seen as an exception regarding the space of the camp, the *Muselmann* represents the borderline between life and death, but also between human and inhuman and these distinction gain more importance if related to 'gendered' figures of the other inmates.

In this chapter I will outline the theoretical possibilities for analysing the inmates and their experience, and how gender functions in this relation. I will focus on female inmates. This choice is induced by the general tendency in the literature on gender and the Holocaust to focus on female experiences, but also by the particular implications female body and its potential to reproduce have in the space of the camp. The figure of the *Muselmann* is important element in this relation, since his body and presence in the camp function as an axis of signification through which different views towards the camp are interpolated.

Regarding the previous chapter, where I discussed the relationship between the *Muselmann* and other inmates in connection with the space of the camp, in this one, I will focus on the gender performance in the camp and how gendered body influences the conceptualization of body and sex inside the space of the camp. These elements have a particular importance on the conceptualization of the camp as well, which is different from Agamben's abstraction of the camp as a destructive place dominated by bare life and death, where biopolitics turns into thanatopolitics (Agamben, 1998).

There are two conditions that define women in the camp- their embodied experience and socializing strategies with other women. These two conditions were explained in detail in literature on this topic I presented in theoretical chapter at the beginning. Here I will outline basic elements that define female experience as female, and then I will analyse what implications this gendered presence may have for the conceptualization of the camp.

Female inmates possessed political agency which is related to the potentialities of their bodies. This politicization of female presence is the first instance where it is possible to note the change in the structure of the camp as Agamben defined it. If the bare life or the *Muselmann* was considered as a paradigm of the camp in a way that it was an 'outcome' of the power system that operated inside the camp, than women presence is the exception from this structure. But this distinction cannot be fully preserved. Women's bodies were subjects for the particular exercise of power in the camps as well. Women's potential to reproduce was in the context of a camp a dangerous attribute. More women were sent directly to gas chambers than men (Goldenberg, 1996, p. 2), while pregnant women had virtually no chance of survival.

The concentration of biopolitics on women's bodies and their reproductive possibility had as its goal control and prohibition of reproduction in the camp. It was directed toward the control of the womb as a site of possible reproduction of 'enemies' or 'lower race'. Miller defines the womb as a more effective example of biopolitical space than the camp (2007). She conceptualizes the womb as the paradigm of the biopolitical space in contrast to Agamben's positioning of the camp in that place (Miller, 2007, p. 148). This assertion grants the female inmate a political agency removed from the bare life in the camp. By regulating their biological functions, the sovereign power in the camp allowed women to assert their biological

position as politically significant. By rendering them biologically passive, the same process has made women politically active. As Miller argues "physical passivity is directly proportional to political activity" (2007, p. 127). Their biological or reproductive functions became political threat to the structures of the Nazi state. The gain of political importance meant at the same time the overcoming of the form of bare life in a way that bare life understands complete surrender to power. If part of the population of the camp can no longer be defined solely as bare life, than the exceptional space of the camp cannot preserve its exceptionality. The inmates' attempt to normalize their life is framed also by the impossibility of the part of the inmates to preserve the position of bare life.

This political potency of female inmates can be seen as a resisting factor inside the camp. Not just through their physical actions or 'traditional' resisting strategies such were uprisings in the camps, the physical presence of the women can be read as resistance in itself. The assertion of one's sexual or gendered identity in a space of the camp dehumanized through the 'creation' of the *Muselmann* represents deviation from the camp's norm and therefore is a type of resistance or resisting strategy.

Agamben, as noted by Ziarek (2008), does not address enough the question of the resistance of bare life. She tries to show, through the examples of slavery and suffragettes' hunger strike, how bare life can resist the subjugation to power. In the case of suffragettes, she points that they occupy the position of sovereign and bare life at the same time by performing the violent acts upon themselves. In the camps, women often perform abortions in order to save their lives, but this is just one example of the possibilities for thinking about the resistance in the camps. Much more important action is the assertion or performance of one's gender identity. Resistance in the camp is acted out through the process of normalization which had shifted the

paradigm of the camp from exception to 'normality'. Nevertheless, this normalization could not be achieved without the attempt to escape the forced framework of bare life.

Women's narratives testify to the enhanced conceptualization of oneself as a gendered subject. Bodily experiences and daily practices women performed in the camp were described as gendered in the literature on the topic. One of the works that grounded this approach of reading women's practices as gendered is Goldenberg's article on women's Holocaust narratives (1996), where she argues that women's experience of the Holocaust is significantly different from men's. Practices and experiences she explains as gendered are often repeated in other works and comprise a general account of what was female experience and how being a woman was asserted in the camp.

The bodily experience in the camp is regularly connected with gender, so the shaving of the head or the discontinuation of menstrual cycle has been perceived as directly related to the inmate's status as a woman. The caring for the weak, providing and preparing of food, and creation of surrogate families were some of the daily practices women deployed in order to normalize their position in the camps. They also exchanged recipes, and tried to keep their appearances as tidy as possible (Goldenberg, 1996). These practices are important in delineation of the camp as different from Agamben's approach.

As analysed in the previous chapter, the space of the camp loses its exceptionality if the materiality of the space is linked to the inmates and their physical presence inside it. The *Muselmann,* as the embodied norm of the camp's exceptionality is preserved as the point of reference, but his embedded norm is exceptional for the 'normality' of the camp as the inmates perceived it. Sexuality or gendered presences in the camp framed other inmates as different from the

Muselmann. This gendered subject creates the possibility to rethink the space of the camp as well.

Although perceived just as a body, dehumanized entity and a product of the camp's power system, the question of *Muselmann's* sex is evaded in the discussions and memoirs of the inmates[9]. He appears as a sexless person; a person who loses 'the divine spark' (Agamben, 1999) and at the same time the sexuality of the body itself. Sex, perceived as a biological given, the position that is questioned by Butler in *Bodies that Matter* (1993), seems to disappear from the body of the *Muselmann*. His sex appears not to be relevant, and is removed from the discourse about him. This discursive conceptualization of the *Muselmann* as a sexless body allows analysis of the specific sex/ body/ gender interaction inside the camp.

The *Muselmann* is the body disembodied from its sex; it is a site of discursive play where body and sex work as two separate entities. Having a sex or gender precludes existence of the body in a sense that the *Muselmann* embodies it. If the body is desexualized materiality as in the case of the *Muselmann*, then the opposite is the sexualized body that surpasses the limiting framework of the sexualized materiality just by being different from the 'pure' body of the *Muselmann*, who is liberated from this sexual stigma. Therefore the sexualized body in the camp can be seen as the container of social meaning in a way gender was conceptualized in older feminist theories. Distinction between sex and gender in this way disappears, and it is possible to conclude, like Butler did, that " perhaps the construct called "sex" is a culturally constructed as gender; indeed, perhaps it was always already gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all" (1990, pp. 9- 10).

[9] Personal observation based on the readings of the inmates' testimonies in which they talk about the *Muselmann*.

Following this line of argumentation, and focusing on the specific space of the camp, construction of sex/ gender relation does not seem to have a particular importance. In relation between the *Muselmann* and the inmates the sexuality or gender performance has similar function as the assertive elements of humanity of an individual. The *Muselmann* as the dehumanized body resembles the abject being from Butler's theory (1993, p. 3), which is 'created' in a discursive practices of power that constructs gendered subjects.

> "...field of discourse and power...orchestrates, delimits, and sustains that which qualifies as "the human." We see this most clearly in the examples of those abjected beings who do not appear properly gendered; it is their very humaneness that comes into question. Indeed, the construction of gender operates through *exclusionary* means, such that the human is not only produced over and against the inhuman, but through a set of foreclosures, radical erasures, that are, strictly speaking, refused the possibility of cultural articulation....These excluded sites come to bound the "human" as its constitutive outside, and to haunt those boundaries as the persistent possibility of their disruption and rearticulation." (Butler, 1993, p. 8).

Gender therefore becomes the mark of humanity while 'not properly gendered' person seems not to be properly 'human'. What precedes humanity is therefore gender; body, in itself a construct, is meaningless without this mark of gender (Butler, 1990, p. 13). Inside the context of the camp as observed by the inmates, desexualized presence of the *Muselmann* becomes the excess and aberration from the norm.

The body of the *Muselmann* therefore becomes exceptionality inside the norm of a camp and symbolizes, through its lack of sexual and gender differentiation, the excess of meaning which cannot be comprehended. If gender is a marker of 'humanity' and 'normality' then exception from this norm is at the same time the

excess of meaning which cannot be comprehended. The lack of gender/ sex becomes the excess which is incomprehensible and therefore ostracized from the inmates' community. The *Muselmann* is a body but not a sex, or a sexed body, both at the same time. Therefore the *Muselmann* is excluded from the inmates' community by the lack of possibility to be conceptualized inside the heterosexual matrix or dyad as Butler defines it (1993, p. 16). Being outside of sex is the exceptional position which the *Muselmann* inhabits in the camp.

The *Muselmann's* place inside the political matrix of the biopolitics as bare life that is deprived of any value (Agamben, 1998, p. 139) is not qualified in Agamben's theory regarding its gender or sex. Bare life, as defined by Agamben assumes the sexless position. If two elements incorporated in bare life- *bios* and *zoē*- are joined in indistinguishable way (Agamben, 1998, p. 185), then what is 'natural'- biological life or *zoē*- cannot be separated from political life or *bios*. The biological turns into the political and political becomes biological in this equation (Agamben, 1998, p. 148). But since gender as a component is not situated in this relation, bare life that is both political and biological entity loses its meaning. Hence, it becomes incomprehensible to other inmates. This will be clearer if framed in the concepts of matter and form as Aristotle developed them.

The relation between *bios* and *zoē* is similar to matter/ form relation defined first by Aristotle in *De Anima* (1907). As he asserts "matter is identical with potentiality, form with actuality" (Aristotle, 1907, p. 49). In order for bare life to become politically significant, matter or in this case political part needs to be 'materialized' through biological, or in other words, political needs to be 'formed' as biological. As other inmates excluded the *Muselmann* from their community, they negated his actuality or form as politically significant. The body of the *Muselmann*

was reduced to matter, to a potentiality which actualization preceded his entrance into the camp. The matter of the body of other inmates is materialized through its positioning inside the existing matrix of gendered bodies, and therefore gained its form. The body of the *Muselmann*, by evading this positioning, loses its form, and its meaning at the same time, since to matter is to mean.

> "…to be material means to materialize, where the principle of that materialization is precisely what "matters" about the body, its very intelligibility. In this sense, to know the significance of something is to know how and why it matters, where "to matter" means at once "to materialize' and to "mean" (Butler, 1993, p. 32).

The *Muselmann* as not "materialized" materiality or rather de- materialized materiality, which at the same time lacks the meaning, is the point at which sexed body turns from its intelligible position into the unintelligibility, or desexualized form. In this way it functions as an excess or exception in the camp. The body or the matter of the *Muselmann* therefore represents the negation of ancient principle of coincidence of matter and its appearance, advocated by Aristotle. By appearance or "soul" he understands the form under which matter materializes itself. As he states "the soul...is the actuality of the body" (Aristotle, 1907, p. 49), but in the case of the *Muselmann* the form and materiality are separated. This is evident on the level of the inmates' discourse where materiality of the *Muselmann* does not have a 'soul' or form under which could be actualized.

This form is not an autonomous element created and "willed" by an individual but is for Foucault the normative ideal which shapes the body and which functions in reciprocal relation with power (1977, p. 25). It regulates the contours of the body and therefore keeps the body restrained. "The soul is prison of the body" (Foucault, 1977, p. 30). The relation between the body and the power in case of the inmates is mediated through the space of the camp.

The camp should not be exclusively referred to as a site of power's reducibility of actuality of form into its material, but potential base or matter. The power structures of the camp did not just reproduce or create bare life or the *Muselmann* out of the inmates. Foucault criticized this understanding of power as actualized upon matter in his work *Discipline and Punish*. Power has for him not just the oppressive or subjugating influence but also works in production or formation of the elements it subjugates.

Foucault defines the prison as "a vector and instrument of power" (F. p.30). The same equation can be used for the space of the camp which is materialized through particular workings of power defined by Agamben as thanatopolitics (1998). There is no originary camp existent before the markings of power. In a similar way, the body exists as the vector of power which materializes and at the same time intervenes on it. The figure of the inmate is therefore not an entity that underwent the change from matter to form by doings of the power which inflicts a change from the external position, but the power is internalized into the subjectivity of the inmate. It is present in its formation, and therefore the subject is implicated in the workings of power. The inmates which suffered the harsh power regimes in the camps were constitutive elements of the camp in a way that their physical presence formed the materiality of the camp. In Agamben's view, the power 'created' the inmates, their formation as bare life was an outcome of the sovereign decisions but in order for this decision to be forced through, it is necessary to take into account the materiality of the inmates as well. Their physical presence constitutes the camp and therefore it is not possible to observe the camp only from the sovereign perspective.

As physical constituents of the camp, the inmates change the paradigm of the camp as explained in the previous chapter. The exceptionality changes into norm if

we count for the presences of the inmates. Their materiality is the effect of power, but also it possesses the power in the act of its constitution. The position of the *Muselmann* is therefore, regarding the inmates, the position of exception since the body of the *Muselmann* is disembodied in a way of framing it into the desexualized body. If the body is politically important only as a sexed body then any conceptualization of body which is preserved in its state of matter, in the state of potentiality still awaiting its formation, is depoliticized body. The *Muselmann* is shaped into matter by the negative intervention of power which destructs the form and reduces the subject to materiality.

Gender or gender performance in the camp is usually described and linked with pre- war socialization, where women learned certain practices, which then were revoked and used inside the camp. Gender performance is therefore observed as a given, learned during the prewar life and than transposed and modified inside the camp. The workings of the power particular to the camp were conceived as inductors of certain behavior but not necessarily constructive of it. Gender is observed as a core, or a natural given from where women draw useful practices that helped them in their survival (Baumel 1998, Goldenberg 1996). In thus observed relation between the space in and outside of the camp, the space outside appears as an ontological place of gender creation while in the camp gender serves as a useful tool in survival. Creation of this ontology is linked with workings of power, or as Butler explains:

> "Insofar as power operates successfully by constituting an object domain, a field of intelligibility, as a token- for- granted ontology, its material effects are taken as material data or primary givens. These material positives appear *outside* discourse and power, as its incontestable referents, its transcendental signifiers. " (34-35).

Gendered inmate is perceived in this way, as a given, formed outside of the camp and not as something created inside the materiality of the camp. By this I do not intend to

give the space of a camp an ontological primacy in the creation of gendered figures inside it, but to question theories which give ontological currency to the space outside the camp. Gendered inmate as a constitutive element of the camp is in stark contrast with its ultimate inhabitant the *Muselmann*. If the gendered body comes out as a product of camp's power system, as well as desexualized body of the *Muselmann* then the camp is the system which materiality and dominance over the 'material' inside it are true zone of indistinction, although this time between biopolitics and thanatopolitics.

This becomes even more prominent if we focus on the female inmates. Female body, as the site of reproductive potency changes the singular image of the camp as a place of ultimate destruction. Higher rate of immediately killed women upon the entrance in the camp, and particularly those ones who displayed their reproductive potency by being pregnant, testifies to a need to exclude this potency from a space which has been conceived as a death space- space ideated as a space of destruction of human lives and as a space of life's creation. The women's mutual relations in the camp, construction of new families, and the caring for each other also problematize the space of the camp as 'non- relational' space. Focus on the *Muselmann* as the ultimate inhabitant of the camp allows for the conceptualization of the camp as a death space of thanatopolitics; the space which precludes the human capacity to generate life. Female presence usurps this position and allows for a different kind of intervention in biopolitical theory.

After explaining the shift in the technologies of power in the 19th century, and after describing the new biopolitical state Foucault asked how it was possible for power that should preserve and protect life to also destroy that life (2003, p. 254). He described this possibility through racism, which is for him "inscribed as the basic

mechanism of power" (Foucault, 2003, p. 254). Agamben frames this possibility with juridical language of norm and exception where exception is situated in the space of the camp inhabited by bare life which has no value and therefore it can be easily killed. Biopolitics therefore functions outside of the camp, while the camp is linked with thanatopolitics. This distinction, however, does not appear completely cogent if we have in mind that the camp is also a place of gender performance and possible creation of life. The camp has the potential of reproduction of lives, through the presence of gendered subjects, and therefore cannot be observed strictly as a death space. As a paradigm of the political space of modernity the camp is, because of these possibilities, the zone of indistinction between biopolitical and thanatopolitical powers, and therefore a conceptual place which structures remain more or less hidden in the modern society. Although focused only on the figure of the sovereign, Agamben seems to address similar issue when he states the following:

> " If there is a line in every modern state marking the point at which the decision on life becomes a decision on death, and biopolitics can turn into thanatopolitics, this line no longer appears today as a stable border dividing two clearly distinct zones. This line is now in motion and gradually moving into areas other than that of political life, areas in which the sovereign in entering into an ever more intimate symbiosis not only with the jurist but also with the doctor, the scientist, the expert and the priest." (Agamben, 1998, p. 122)

Conclusion

Through the several chapters of this paper I have outlined the possible ways Agamben's theory on the camp can be approached if we include in it variables such as the *Muselmann* and gendered inmate.

First chapter was dedicated to the analysis of the development of the concepts of exceptionality and singularity in relation to the Holocaust. Through outlining the basic theoretical issues I presented the idea that figure of the (gendered) inmate can be seen as removed from the camp if we apply to the camp Agamben's notion of exceptionality. This implied that the inmate inside the camp, the *Muselmann* presents the exceptional figure in itself, constructed through the exceptionality of the camp but also helping in construction of this exceptionality through his position of excluded and incomprehensible figure regarding the other inmates.

This relation between the inmates, the *Muselmann* and the space of the camp was further elaborated in the second chapter. The aim of this chapter was to problematize the conceptualization of the camp as the place of exception through the change of focus from the figure of the sovereign, to the inmates. The figure of the *Muselmann* served as a particular signifying agent through which conceptualization different positions can be analysed. As I concluded, the *Muselmann* changes his position as embodied norm of the camp's exceptionality when observed from inmates' position. In their try to adjust to new circumstances inmates tried to observe the camp as the ultimate space or as a habitual space. This change in perspective questions the imposition of the singular, sovereign perspective upon the space of the camp. As observed from the inside, the camp becomes the norm, and all the exceptional elements in it, which were seen as a threat to this norm, were positioned as exception.

In this relation the *Muselmann* presents the dual position as the norm, for the

sovereign, or SS officers whose goal was to annihilate all traces of humanity from the inmates, and as the exception, for the inmates who tried to resist this process.

It is not necessary to observe the gendered practices in the camp or presences of gendered bodies necessarily as the resistance strategies. The space of the camp was regulated by the power structures that equally influenced the *Muselmann* and other inmates as well. The differences that persisted between them should be attributed to differences in age, duration of the stay in the camp and other factors which does not belong in the conceptual framework of this paper.

The distinction between the asexual, non- human or genderless figure of the *Muselmann* and other inmates who performed their gender roles helped me rethink the political framework behind the Agamben's conceptual propositions. Biopolitical structure, which is defined by Foucault, and used further by Agamben is connected with thanatopolitics as its opposite. However, the camp, due to the presence of potentially reproductive bodies cannot be seen exclusively as a space of thanatopolitics. It is rather the zone of indistinction between the biopolitics and thanatopolitics. Further analysis on this subject could address these changes and their implications for the space of the modern state and the function of gender inside it.

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