

Distro

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I joined the international group of volunteers gathered in Bihać (for the first time) in December 2020. The primary work activity of this self-organized collective is the daily distribution of humanitarian aid to people on the move who live outside the official migrant camps as homeless people. At the end of 2020, according to the volunteers' estimate, there were around two thousand people living outside official camps in the area of the Una-Sana Canton. The typology of the shelters housing the young Afghans and Pakistanis I met varied from unfinished or abandoned houses to empty factories. International volunteers call these improvised shelters squats, and "distro" became the established term and a frequently used abbreviation for distribution.

Given the criminalization of providing systematic humanitarian aid outside the camps, the volunteer work of unofficial, self-organized humanitarian initiatives in the area of the Una-Sana Canton has to be organized tactically and subversively. In order to maintain concealment, distro was conducted only at night, but the working day of the collective started in the morning, at nine o'clock, with coordinating during a group breakfast. Preparations for distro while preparing oatmeal, toasting bread, brewing coffee. The *Habibi* team (cf. **party in the Afghan squat**), consisting of five people seated in armchairs and a couch arrayed around a low table in the living room. Everyone with a bowl in their hands and a laptop on their knees. The computers are powered up and the plan for the day is reviewed. The playing field between the legitimate and the legal, the criminal and the criminalized, the regular and the irregularized.

One part of the team is in charge of contacting several hundred people via a messenger account opened exclusively for communication with people on the move in the area of Bihać. The work picks up from where it was left at the end of the previous day. Individuals and groups in need contact us, and the conversation usually continues with "hello brother, how can we help you? how many people are you? can you send us your location?". The amount of food and the type of clothing requested are agreed upon or negotiated in a few sentences. The link to the location of their squat and other information is copied into a table. When it is filled with data for the first twenty groups (i.e., for about two hundred people), the daily distro route is organized based on the most practical connection between all the necessary locations. Based on the obtained distances between the points on the route, the exact meeting time with each group is determined. After finally settling on the daily route, pins with the location and time of the meeting are sent to people on the move.

Due to possible police controls, the squats themselves are never visited. People on the move are met at distro points. The internal map of Bihać contains all the territorial knowledge of the volunteers. Around a hundred squats in Bihać and the surrounding area have been mapped, and each individual squat location on the map has several corresponding distro points. Each has its own, usually descriptive name, and *noir* elements are common, such as: *spooky industry, dog street, scary railway, construction site, corner spot, black hole*. Individual map locations are marked with black icons with white skeleton heads, and an explanation is provided in the map key. These are *burnedspots* – distro points where volunteers were seen by locals or intercepted by the police. To be seen – therefore – is to be burned.

While one part of the team deals with correspondence, the other goes shopping. After the list of packages is prepared and the groceries obtained, the collective packing in the warehouse begins. The prepared groceries are grouped in white plastic bags (purchased at the local chain store, Bingo). In an ironic coincidence, the bags feature a framed advertising slogan: "HERE FOR YOU, EVERY DAY". A bag with groceries for fewer than 5 people is called a *half bag*. A *full bag* is a bag with groceries for a group of 5 to 10 people. Once filled, the half bag is tied, while the full bag is left open for easier organization during distribution. *Non Food Items* (NFI), i.e. clothes and shoes, are placed in black garbage bags. The prepared food packages are placed in blue Ikea bags (big bags with practical handles) and loaded into the van. The HERE FOR YOU, EVERY DAY bags are kept in the back seat, and the NFI is stored at the bottom of the van.

The distro is done after nightfall. A new point is reached every fifteen minutes, and the entire distro process lasts around two hours. Arriving at the location (in the middle of the field). The van is parked so that its right side is better protected, because the back door cannot be opened, leaving only the side door usable, and the whole action takes place in front of it.

Turning off the headlights. Turning on the cabin light. The person in the passenger seat checks the spreadsheet on their mobile to see which group they are supposed to meet. Silhouettes of people can be seen emerging from the

dark of the gravel roads – the representatives of the groups are coming. The person in the passenger seat checks the name of the person picking up the packages on their mobile phone and looks for the designation of the corresponding NFI bag in the spreadsheet. The distro has to be done quickly. If the group consists of, say, 15 people, one tied (half) and one open (full) bag is automatically taken from the white pile on the seat. One person is handed the food, and another person from the group is usually handed a black NFI bag.

The van used for my first distro didn't have a handbrake, the battery was in poor condition, the gearshift could barely be moved into reverse with both hands, it had a hole in the floor, a cracked windshield and a broken back door. The side door had no handle and could only be opened with a special technique, and the rear seats were not completely attached to the body of the vehicle. Sergej, who knew how to best maneuver the van, was driving, and I was in the passenger seat.

Sergej's favorite place on the map is *spooky industry*. He recalled his first experience with that location. "I remember driving there with Felix – it was my first distro. We would always go at night, and it was winter at that time. It really looked abandoned – there was a building with three, four floors, and those suicidal dogs were there as well. It's dark outside, and suddenly four or five dogs run in front of the van and you think to yourself: "What the fuck is this?" That was scary in itself, then we drove past some trucks and industrial plants, going further and further, and then Felix says: "Okay, this is our stop; turn off the lights". And then you sit in the dark for some people to come. I don't know – from its name to the atmosphere – it's like a scene from a mob movie. You could use that place to get rid of a dead body (and anything else)."

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