HERE, THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS HOPE[1]

TRACING THE LOST HOPE

OF ROMA FROM YUGOSLAV SOCIALISM TO THE POST-YUGOSLAV ERA

By

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[1] This quote is taken from the interviews with one of the Roma contributors to this paper. It reflects his hopelessness about his and the future of his child in Serbia.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the racialization and abandonment of Roma from Yugoslav socialism to the post-Yugoslav era. The main argument is that Roma face a sense of hopelessness as a result of continual racialization and the increasing state abandonment that began as a consequence of the transition economy. The ongoing shift from socialism towards neoliberalism is accompanied by the refusal of the state to govern Roma. While the biopolitics of socialism provided Roma with the false hope of belonging, the post-socialist, necropolitical era is an increasingly depoliticized space in which Roma are shamed for their failure. The zeitgeist of neoliberalism is promoting the myth of meritocracy and personal responsibility, thereby denying the effects of racialization on the lives of Roma. The racialization of Roma has undergone ruptures as the political, geographical and overall socio-economic landscape of Yugoslavia drastically and frequently changed during the past 75 years. Historicizing the trajectory of lost hope based on the microhistories of Roma and their experience with biopolitics and necropolitics, provides a window into the hopelessness of Roma which is caused by longstanding racialization and state abandonment.

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I dedicate this thesis to all those who are brave enough to face their crushed hopes.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis aims to provide a space for the stories of the Roma who experienced racialization under different biopolitical, economic systems, spanning from the socialist system (1945-1990s) to the transition economy leaning towards capitalism (1990s-present day). Initially my research focused on racialization and Roma resistance to the ways in which the State governs them in different biopolitical projects; my overarching aim was to provide a space for their experiences and feelings related to these social phenomena to be expressed and heard. To do so, I have conducted five interviews with Roma who shared their personal stories with me. However, while conducting the interviews, I underwent a paradigm shift in understanding resistance. As a Roma researcher, I have viewed Roma as not wanting to attend school or viewed the Roma who discourage their children from attending school as a means of reclaiming political agency. As I conducted the interviews and provided myself with space and time for reflexivity, I have realized that my view of what Roma were undergoing was shaped by my hopefulness and eagerness to see that we are able to defy a society which defines the normative practices without us, yet ensures our compliance even though they are racializing in their performativity. A society, which almost makes sure that Roma fail according to its norms, but without providing the necessary (pre)conditions for Roma to succeed. However, after concluding interviews with the contributors to this paper I no longer felt that it was resistance that I should be focusing on, but rather hope and hopelessness. Resistance inevitably relies on the existence of hope as its impetus. As a consequence, I started seeing the ambiguities related to the understanding of resistance. I also understood the dangers of claiming that hopelessness is actually an act of resistance, something far-right parties often use to further shame and blame Roma. As the interviews progressed, and questions focused on Roma experiences in the present

which are shaped by the neoliberal ideology and its focus on personal responsibility, it became clear that the need is not to research resistance but instead to understand the trajectory of lost hope. One statement, in particular, had shifted my focus from the question of resistance to the question of hopelessness.

> *I don't want my child to hear me, but I know that even if she goes to school, the best she can get is a low-level job in a factory or maybe working at a stand. They (referring to Serbs) don't want to see us in big positions. We are pushing her, but I know that she doesn't have a big chance if we stay in this country, maybe somewhere else it would be different.*
>
> Male contributor, 30 years old

A 30-year-old Roma who has an 8-year-old daughter, makes sure that his daughter attends school, although he does not believe that she will see much benefit from it, unless she leaves their home-country, Serbia. He dropped out of school at the age 12 because he was bullied by his peers. Although elementary school is obligatory, he never completed it. The state institutions, school and social care center did not express any interest in him dropping out. If the state had reacted, he would have completed at least elementary school (obligatory by law introduced in 1952[2]), which would have provided him with higher prospects for education and employment. He has no hope that things will change, is very lucid about racialization and state abandonment in his case yet does not resist the system by taking his daughter out of the educational system. On the contrary, he makes sure that she attends school yet underlines that he has no hope that she can have a bright future as a Roma in Serbia, regardless of her educational background. Therefore, my research question is: how does as a subject who is aware of abandonment still live without hope? Furthermore, why do Roma continue engaging with

[2] This law comes as part of the biopolitical communist thought in Yugoslavia, which focused on education and literacy as key of modernization project which socialism was.

some of the disciplinary practices (such as school in this case) if they are hopeless about their future; how are the experiences of Roma shaped by the State which either partially governs or refuses to govern them? In order to respond to these questions, I have undertaken a historical approach and will reflect on the trajectory of hopelessness. I contend that Roma have lost their trust and hope in the state which has racialized and abandoned the generations before them as well. Therefore, the racialization of Roma is continual, although it takes different forms in three different, consecutive biopolitical settings. The uncertainty and the shifts from one to another biopolitical project and the ruptures coming with them are an added burden to the experiences of Roma, which fuels their hopelessness.

Under socialism, Roma were governed as part of the working class. The socialist state needed to increase its skilled population, and Roma arguably benefited from this modernization project. Socialism favored the life of a proletariat member. However, Roma were the proletariat with certain constraints. Roma were the workers who were limited to those particular jobs that Non-Roma were not willing to undertake. This period was the period in which Roma felt most belonging to the State and had the greatest trust in the State as they feel that they were being governed in such way that their lives were made less vulnerable by socialist policies related to social housing, free education and healthcare, easy access to employment (although limited to certain fields). Following the abolition of the socialist era, Roma were under another biopolitical project which was much darker than the socialist. In the 1990s Roma were governed as the worthless life, as the bodies which served the biopower to protect the valuable life – the life of the ethnicity which was building an ethno-nationalist state. For example, in the case of Serbia, the life which the State viewed as the valuable life is the life of the ethnic Serb, in the case of Croatia it is the life of an ethnic Croat etc. The State emerged as the visibly violent, disciplinary sovereign who decided on who dies. This period was also necropolitical as it focused on the right of the State, as the sovereign to the kill, as Foucault contends. (Foucault,

1990; 2003) Furthermore, Mbembe and Povinelli, bring the understanding of necropolitics as the right of the State to subjugate life to the precariousness and exposure to death. In the post-socialist era, Roma are racialized and abandoned by the State, therefore necropolitics are largely at play. (Mbembe, 2019; Povinelli, 2008) As the 1990s were ending and the newly emerging ethno-nationalist countries were undertaking economic transition, a new biopolitical, neoliberal project started to shape the experiences of Roma. Therefore, the focus from that point onwards was put on the liberal capitalism value of not governing the market, which spilled over to not governing the lives of citizens. Roma thus became the victims of necropolitcs, but not as it was during the 1990s when the state was the visibly violent sovereign who has the right to kill. This time necropoltics implied that the State refuses to govern Roma, invoking the personal responsibility claim and exposing Roma to precariousness and/or death, which Povinelli detects to be the case with the Aborginal population in Australia as well. (Povinelli, 2008) This continual racialization along with the abandonment emerging in the post-socialist era, brought Roma into a state of hopelessness, in which they no longer have trust in the state (institutions) and seek their future beyond the borders of the country. Roma are putting their faith in another country, another sovereign, with hope that it will not view them through the concept of race but as working class, productive society members, which (based on their experience with Yugoslav socialism) seems to have been so far the closest to the feeling of belonging to a state.

In line with my understanding of the critical theory by Foucault. (Foucault,1990; 2003), I perceive the biopolitics as a political system in which a state is puts life on pedestal and creates policies which would enable the prolongation of a certain type of life as long as possible. The nation-state was built in an environment which construed the main role of the state to be protection of citizens, a factor Arendt refers to in the Origins of Totalitarianism. (Arendt, 1973) Therefore, the State views its relation to other states as a constant threat, which can be solved by enlarging its population and disciplining it. Racialization, however, is often not taken into

account; based on the testimonies of Roma contributors to this paper, racialization determines who can truly be a part of the governed population. As Foucault maintains, the State is simultaneously the sovereign who decides who lives and who dies; the sovereign who has the power over *bios* (life). The state therefore defines the characteristics of the valuable/deserving and the worthless/non-deserving life. Furthermore, as Foucault asserts, throughout history the State has changed its position towards life and death, which results in some lives being viewed as more worthy, while certain lives are more mortal than others. (Foucault, 1990; 2003) Although I will focus on biopolitics, it is key to underline that necropolitics cannot be dismissed when discussing the worthiness of a human life and the consequences which arise when it is not viewed as such, which Mbembe underlines in his work. (Mbembe, 2019) Hence, the state can, in addition to the two aforementioned mentioned ways, govern life by stripping away any factors which enable life to exist. Based on this theoretical understanding, this thesis will through the stories of Roma, provide a closer look at what happens with human lives when a human (in this case Roma) has limited or fully denied access to humanity. All of the aforementioned modules of state governing *bios (life)* and *thanatos (death)*, are visible in the experiences of Roma contributors to this paper, who due to racialization in Yugoslavia and post-Yugoslav era are not viewed by the State as the bios worthy of being governed.

Creating an oral history and reflecting on the microhistories of Roma is a way to give recognition to the voices and stories of Roma, as well as to support knowledge production on Roma by Roma. This thesis aims to contribute to rectifying the lack of attention given to racialization, abandonment and hopelessness of Roma and respond to the epistemic violence often committed by the legal practice, policy makers and the academia. This thesis addresses the underlying reason for the failures of Roma inclusion policies, the often-lacking field work and historicizing of the context addressed. I argue that the post-socialism transition economy which leans at the neoliberal economy is spurring racialization, which took a less violent form

within the socialist system. Furthermore, with the transition economy occurs state abandonment, which condemns the citizens of Roma origin to hopelessness. Under hopelessness, I understand a passive psychological state in which one's hope is destroyed and therefore their political agency is disabled. By state abandonment, I refer to a visible or invisible violent act in which the state denies supporting and protecting its citizens, which is its main role, thus placing the citizens in a precarious environment and contributing to them leading precarious, fragile lives or/and eventually dying.

The racialization of Roma can be observed in many forms. By racialization, I understand the practice based on the concept of race which is used in order to validate a deservingness of a person of a certain race to do something or simply be. For example, in the absence of or no Roma in the leadership positions; Roma being employed strictly for certain jobs which the non-Roma are not willing to do; shaming of their traditional values such as that of having large families instead of nuclear families as the preferred, dominant model in the societies governed by the *orderliness principle, arguably arising from modernity*. (Bauman, 2000). Under intensified racialization combined with state abandonment, Roma are prevented from developing a feeling of safety, security or belonging.

In some cases, the oppression of Roma results in complete withdrawal from public or community life, including school attendance. Those supporting the far-right see this withdrawal as resistance. By resistance I refer to the practice of refusing to integrate within a prevalent norm defined by the mainstream society or a group, often doing so out of revolt or due to a lack of willingness to engage with the dominant value system. In other words, this is not a form of resistance to racialization, but rather resistance as a deviant behavior. The premise of understanding a behavior as deviant implies that there exists a universal, non-deviant behavior, which is in this case the behavior of the disciplinary non-Roma society. The behaviors among white, non-Roma are thus understood as homogenous and universal, pertaining solely to the

white, non-Roma. The Romani discursive practices are presented as monolithic and compared to the white, non-Roma dominant discursive practices- the pedestaled benchmarking value. The deservedness classification of Roma depends on the level at which Roma are performing the role that the non-Roma are both framing and construing for them. This oppressive character of the values imposed by non-Roma on Roma can be seen in the consequences that it brings about: namely, a host of negative emotions such as shame, rage or hopelessness, a feeling that was recorded among all contributors to this thesis. Building on Ahmed's theory on emotion as an indicator of oppression, this paper will provide space for the emotions of Roma to be acknowledged in order to challenge the (epistemic) violence towards Roma. (Ahmed, 2014)

This thesis is laid upon the subjective interpretivism paradigm with a historical approach. Data collection and analytical methods include the comparative method (comparing the racialization of Roma before, during and after 1990s), a literature review, content analyses and semi-structured interviews that were chosen as a means of avoiding the subjectification of Roma as mere objects of research, a practice often found in academic writings in which Roma are used to extract their experiences and frame them within the prevailing normative practices of the Western academia, thus reinforcing epistemic violence.[3] Furthermore, through the interviews, I have recorded the changes in Roma identity perception among Roma, from socialism to post-war, pro-capitalist era. All contributors are from the capital city of the Vojvodina region, deemed as the most multicultural region in the post-Yugoslav region. This location was chosen due to the implication that in a less diverse and less inclusive and/or rural region, one might encounter an even more violent racialization of Roma. I have used the snowball method in order to reach out to the contributors to this paper. Five semi-structured interviews were made in the first half of April 2020, each lasting 60 minutes on average. The second round of interviews with the same contributors was undertaken during the last week of May 2020. Due to the

[3] This is also the reason why I am using the term contributor instead of subject/ interviewee.

COVID-19 pandemic, research was conducted online which has limited the experience of conducting the interviews and potentially influenced the openness of all parties included in the process of personal storytelling and recording. Contributors include the following:

- a 79-year-old female housewife who completed four grades of elementary school, was born in Kosovo and moved to the Vojvodina region in the early 1950s. Her husband worked at a local wire-producing industry;
- a 62-year-old female, born in Kosovo and moved to the Vojvodina region in early childhood. She currently works as unregistered domestic labor support in multiple Serbian households, but used to work in one of local state-owned industries;
- a 54-year-old male, born in the Vojvodina region, who is a plumber by vocation and currently resides in the EU;
- a 52-year-old female, born in the Vojvodina region, who completed elementary education and has been working as cleaning staff within the public utility company for the past 26 years;
- a 30-year-old male, born in the Vojvodina region who has not completed elementary education and works as a self-taught freelance carpenter. His father worked as cleaning staff within a local, public utility company during socialism and the 1990s.

Interviews included thirty questions in total, divided in four key segments:

1. **Views on trust towards the state**:

   All contributors have stated that the pre-1990s period (socialist era) is the period of strongest trust of Roma towards the state, which they depict as the omnipotent protector and provider. The 1990s are described as the period in which they lost their trust in the state, and the period following that time towards present day is referred to by all contributors as *neither as good as socialism nor as bad as 1990s*.

2. **Views on safety and security:**

   All contributors pointed to the socialist era as the period at which they felt most safe and secure while the time following the fall of Yugoslavia was followed by a rapid plummeting of those feelings.

3. **Views on meritocracy**:

   Four out of five contributors stated that not being Serbs plays a significant role in (not) attaining success and that the "work hard - gain your goal" logic does not apply for Roma, due to racialization.

4. **Views on Roma identity**:

   When given a choice on how they would declare themselves among the following categories: Yugoslav, Muslim, Roma, Cigan (Gypsy), Serb, Albanian, Ashkali, Egyptian or Madjup[4], all contributors have ranked their sense of belonging in a similar way. Yugoslav coming as first, Muslim ranking as second, Madjup ranking as third. In the fourth place was Roma and Cigan, while they would not declare themselves as Serb, Albanian, Ashkali or Balkan Egyptian[5]. Their choices imply that they still highly regard the socialist era as a safe space in which they felt a sense of belonging. This sentiment was evident even if the contributor had not been not born at that time, which was the case for one of the participants. Their religion comes as second place and is followed by that of Madjup, an Albanian slur word for Roma, which raises the question of how they perceive the meaning of that word.[6] When asked to define the meaning of word

[4] Madjup is a derogatory word used in Kosovo and Albania to describe Roma. It is important to underline that all participants have family origin in present day Kosovo and they come from a Muslim Community. Roma are not a people which is connected to observing one religion only, which can be deemed as problematic in the ex-Yugoslavia and wider Balkans region. It is a specificum of the Balkans that a belonging to an ethnicity implies also a belonging to a religion, for example being a Serb would imply being of Christian Orthodox faith.

[5] In this paper Ashkali and Balkan Egyptians are viewed as Romani subgroups, predominantly living in Kosovo and Albania, as defined by European Comission see: https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combatting-discrimination/roma-and-eu/roma-integration-eu_it . However, I do see this as a potential act of epistemic violence or naming practice and hope to write about this in the future.

> Madjup contributors described it with the following words: *It is that feeling that you do not belong anywhere; the feeling that you are of a lower value in comparison to others.* To my understanding this implies that their hopelessness is connected to their experience of the State refusing to govern them or doing so in a different way that it governs Non-Roma.

This paper will first provide an insight into the racialization of Roma under the Yugoslav socialism and move further to the experiences of Roma during the rise of violent ethno-nationalism in the 1990s and state abandonment within the transition economy of the present day. In the concluding pages of this thesis, I will provide a summary of my findings and share my reflections on how the process of writing this thesis has influenced the contributors and myself as the author. Notes on this thesis are provided in line with the subjective interpretivism paradigm and in order to avoid the thesis being claimed as objective truth due to my Romani background. Further ethical and political implications were addressed by securing validity and reliability of data in the form of member check and peer review of data.

Personal information such as the names of contributors is not shared in order to ensure that the contributors felt comfortable with sharing personal experiences, especially experiences related to violence committed by the state or persons from their immediate surrounding (e.g. neighbors, colleagues etc.).

CHAPTER 1: CHASING THE SOCIALIST DREAM

After many centuries under the rule of Ottoman Empire and Austro-Hungary, the 1918. monarchist Yugoslavia (or the State of South Slavs in translation from Serbo-Croatian) was born. The historization of the emergence of Yugoslavia (See Figure 1 for the border changes of Yugoslavia) is important in order to understand the socio-political climate which shaped a unique performativity of racialization in this particular part of the European continent. The Ottoman period, for example, is often not given the recognition for its unique policies, which promoted a certain idea of multiculturalism and were drastically less violent then for example, those declared by Isabelle I, often referred to as the first Queen of Spain. However, both empires (Ottoman and Austro-Hungary) contributed to a unique experience of being under imperialism and arguably influenced how people of Yugoslavia perceived race, religion, ethnicity and nation and set the grounds for future ethno-nationalism. Not long after WWI, Yugoslavia found itself in the dark hour of WWII, following which in 1945. the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (further on Yugoslavia) emerged as a biopolitical response to the horrors of WWII.

Figure 1: The map of the Yugoslavia across times. [7]

[7] Source: https://www.britannica.com/place/Yugoslavia-former-federated-nation-1929-2003
Yugoslavia represented on the third image, under year 1992, has seen further changes until present day. Montenegro has declared its independence from Serbia in 2006. and Kosovo has declared its independence from Serbia in 2008. To this day, Serbia has not recognized the independence of Kosovo and views it as under the United Nations Security Council resolution 1244. For more information see:
https://unmik.unmissions.org/united-nations-resolution-1244

Socialism in Yugoslavia was a peculiar, endemic type of socialism. Yugoslav socialism differed from socialism in USSR or China, for example. It underlined a humane dimension of this unique modernization project. Yugoslav political leadership promoted and supported modernization in other countries rebuilding their statehood after the colonial period. There were no long periods of hunger recorded under Yugoslav socialism, and from a strictly economic perspective it was not socialism de facto but de jure, which is often referred to as *market socialism*. For example, under Yugoslav socialism, micro-entrepreneurship was allowed although the state had the monopoly and regulated the prices and imposed a planned economy. During the 1960s Yugoslavia had pushed for industrialization and recorded significant economic growth. It also became severely indebted, consequences of what will follow from 1980. when its leader Tito will pass away. [8]

Yugoslavia was among the leaders of the Non-Aligned Movement[9] and the only country on the European continent to participate actively in the movement. It maintained a close, supportive relationship with the Non-Aligned movement countries, as they all had at least one common denominator: their past as colonial/imperial subjects. Therefore, racialization in Yugoslavia took a unique form as did socialism. However, this unique compassion and solidarity with the people of Egypt and India, and the praised victory of the Yugoslav people in WWII, made racism a topic of high sensitivity. Therefore, in daily conversations with people from ex-Yugoslavia racism, is often denied even today. Assuming this, racialization of Roma

[8] For more information about the market socialism in Yugoslavia, please see: https://doc-research.org/2018/03/rise-fall-market-socialism-yugoslavia/ and https://www.liberal.hr/jugoslavija-je-imala-najhumaniji-socijalizam-u-povijesti-covjecanstva--i-zato-jos-uvijek-placamo-visoku-cijenu-398

[9] Non-Alignment movement was a response of the countries not willing to make military alliances with any of the parties involved in the Cold War. More information available at: https://www.criticatac.ro/lefteast/yugoslavia-antinomies-non-aligned-movement/. and for more information on the Non-Aligned movement members in 1961. Please see Figures 2 and 3.

in the ex-Yugoslav countries[10] had a greatly different trajectory and modus operandi in comparison to how racialization of Roma was operating in other parts of Europe. Unlike the eastern bloc, Yugoslavia was open and welcoming of American pop culture, it welcomed rock and roll, Hollywood stars, Disney and even Playboy magazine in the late 1960s.[11] As a modernization project, Yugoslavia focused on heavy industrial development in order to guarantee economic growth. This meant that the working class was key to the survival of this biopolitical project and also presented a chance for Roma to develop a Romani working class. As Roma activist and journalist Robert Kasumović states, during socialism the unemployment of Roma was roughly 18%, while at present day (the interview was given in 2019) it is approximately 80%.[12]

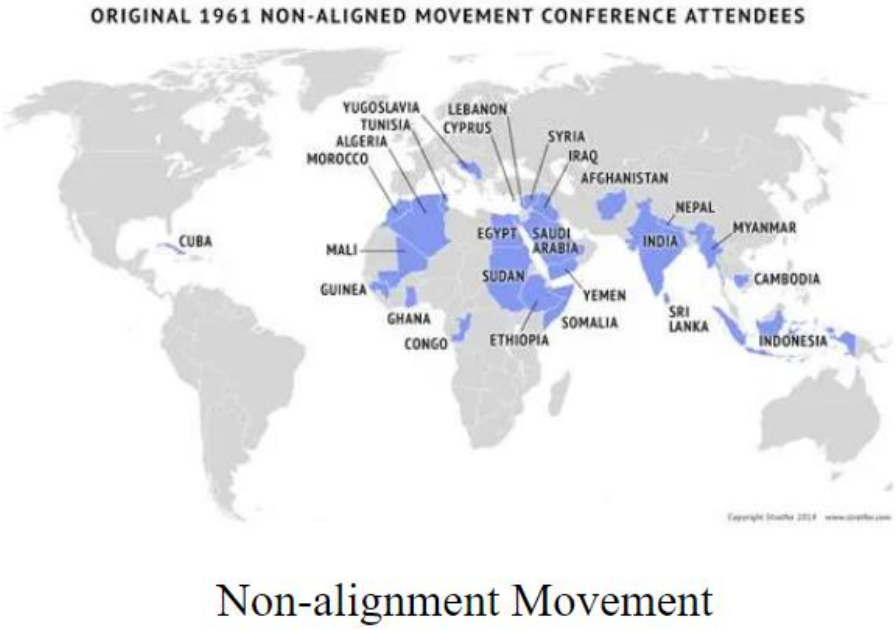

Figure 2: Members of the Non-aligned movement in 1961.

[10] However, special attention should be placed on Croatia which although one of the Yugoslav republics, initialy had cooperated with Nazi Germany as the Independent State of Croatia. To this day, Croatian political establishment is seemingly vague on its position in regards to the genocide of Roma.
[11] For more information, please see: https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/koka-kola-socijalizam/24716003.html
[12] For more information, please see: https://mediareform.rs/gde-su-nestala-prava-roma/

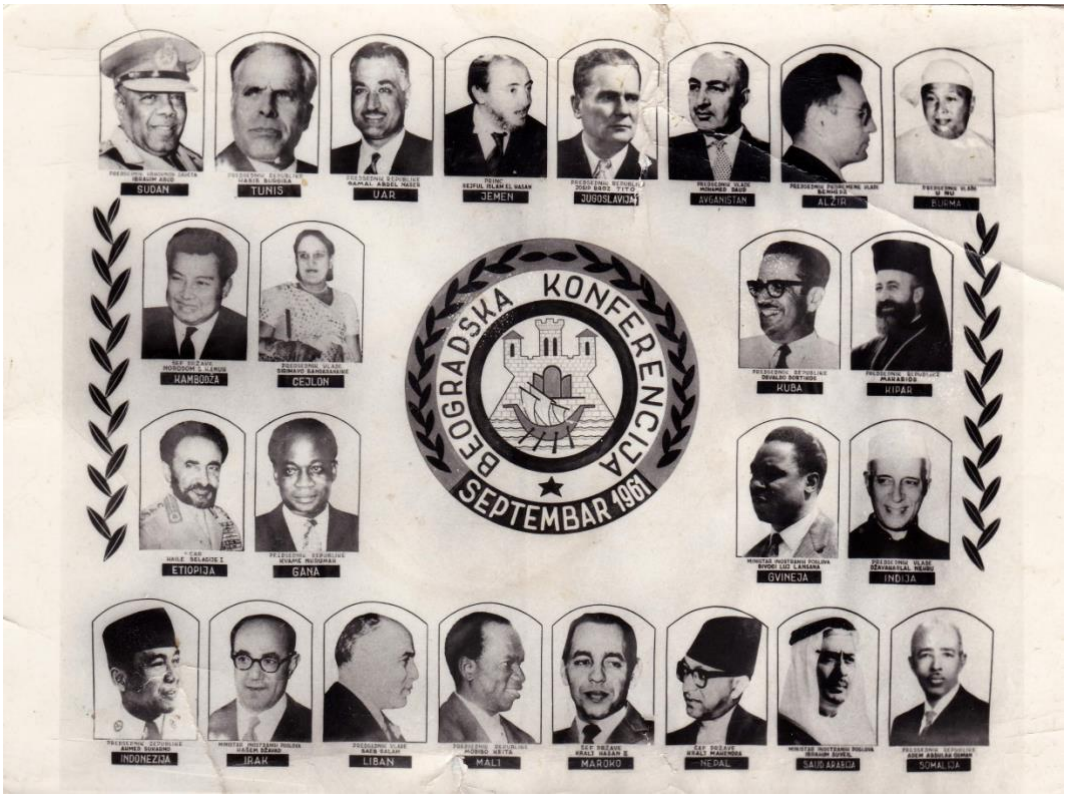

Figure 3: Images of all leaders who have participated at the first meeting of the Non-Aligned movement, held in Yugoslavia in 1961.[13]

In line with its biopolitical values, socialism made sure that all workers were provided with healthcare, housing, education and schooling. This was a chance for Roma to move from segregated mahalas[14] and obtain a new identity, the identity of a Yugoslav working-class member. As Šaip Jusuf, a Roma leader in the 1970s states: "Yugoslavia is the only country in the world where Roma are equal to all other citizens."[15] Yugoslav Roma had a prominent role in hosting the first World Roma(ni) Congress in 1971; arguably the relations between Yugoslavia and India as the alleged country of descent of Roma helped that the movement gain international recognition. On the other hand, there is the question of Roma as ethnic or national

13 Source: https://www.criticatac.ro/lefteast/yugoslavia-antinomies-non-aligned-movement/
14 Mahala is a word, probably of turkish origin, often used by Roma to describe informal, segregated Roma neigbourhoods.
15 http://www.yugopapir.com/2015/04/saip-jusuf-jugoslavija-jedina-zemlja.html

minority in Yugoslavia which remained vague in Yugoslavia. (Acković, 1992) Furthermore, all contributors to this paper have stated that they (or their parents) felt 100% safe and secure during the socialist era. They did not feel safe or secure during and after the abrupt ending of socialism and have never felt as safe or secure since. They have depicted the socialist era as the period of sturdiest trust of Roma towards the state, which they refer to as the omnipotent protector and provider. While describing their experience under socialism, one of the contributors stated what others have also confirmed to be fact for many other Roma:

> *We were the same as anyone else when Tito was alive. Both myself and my ex-husband got a job at a state-owned industry. We were there until it got closed (in the 1990s) and never found a job after that.*
>
> Female Roma contributor, 62 years old

Yet, from the interviews, it was obvious that they did not know any Roma who had undertaken management or any leading-position job roles. Roma under socialism obtained physically demanding jobs and jobs which Non-Roma did not want to do. Although Roma performed low-skilled labor, they obtained certain skills that could easily lead to further employment. This period also incurred a higher number of Roma women on the labor market; therefore, it can be inferred that socialism supported the participation of Roma women in the labor market. One of the contributors stated the following in relation to the jobs which they obtained:

> *My husband had a job in the wire producing state industry. It was a hard and dangerous job. Many Roma women were cleaning in two local state-owned industries.*
>
> Female Roma contributor, 79 years old

As Vincze maintains, Romanian Roma under socialism were the precariat, a class of racialized people working under precarious employment conditions, undertaking demanding and dangerous jobs. (Vincze, 2015) The same applies to the Roma in Yugoslavia. They were expected to undertake jobs which required limited skills and which non-Roma refrained from doing, such as cleaning staff or physically demanding and dangerous jobs in the metal, wire and mining industries. Most were not active members of the syndicates and felt that the state (meaning Non-Roma) was not interested in listening to them or supporting their job-promotion, which implied that Roma were in the words of Spivak *subaltern* of Yugoslavia. In my reading of Spivak, Roma as the *subaltern* were viewed as those who cannot speak and if they were either no longer viewed as Roma or they were not listened to, about which the contributors claim the following (Spivak, 1988):

> *Syndicate was for the educated people, but even if I had school I wouldn't have been on a high position in the syndicate. Who would listen to a Madjup?*
>
> Male contributor, 54 years old

> *The one closer to the fire gets warm. And that was Serbs. We were cleaning street and it was all Roma working there. If the state wanted to push us to some better job it could have, but they didn't want us.*
>
> Female contributor 52 years old

While the first statement shows that decision-making environments such as involvement in the syndicate were not inviting towards Roma, it also implies that Roma were not able to voice their opinion, as due to racialization their opinions were not viewed as relevant. This also an example of how Roma are viewed as unable to govern themselves, as the Non-Roma impose themselves as the ones who have the relevant knowledge, even the knowledge on the Roma lives. In this sentence I read that Roma were, in the words Said *orientalized* by the Non-Roma during the socialist era (Said, 1979). The second statement shows that an extant sense of

hierarchy based on ethnicity (and arguably race), already existed in the socialist system. However, all contributors stated that they still view themselves as Yugoslav and are nostalgic for the socialist era. They have emphasized the free public schooling and excursions for pupils and workers being covered by the state and free public health, during socialism. Land ownership was limited in size per person, which also influenced a flattening out of inequalities. The state was almost invisible as, in the words of Foucault, a sovereign which decides on who lives or dies. (Foucault, 1990; 2003) Instead, it was hidden behind the Tito's personality cult and the concept of the people, the working class, who built socialism which was not imposed upon them as it was in other parts of the world.

As the end of the socialist era became more obvious, the state grew more visible as the sovereign which decides who live and who dies. 1990s, or the years of war and international sanctions, came as a shock. Among Roma the sense of belonging to the newly emerging ethno-nationalist states was put into question, as declaring one's self as Yugoslav was no longer a viable option. The 1990s brought ethnic violence and pushed Roma into a state of shock due to a swift and sudden loss of both sense of security, safety and belonging. The newly established economic order under the ethnicity-based state made Roma even more susceptible to racialization and condemned them to leading precarious lives, a result of state abandonment.

CHAPTER 2: THE LOST YUGOSLAV PROMISE AND THE DARK BIOPOLITICS OF THE MILOŠEVIĆ ERA

In the 1990s, across what was becoming the post-Yugoslav soil, Roma could no longer rely on the state as the omnipotent protector and provider of equality. Yugoslav identity was unquestionably challenged during the nineties as mass killings became a daily reality. As neighbors shot at each other the media, under the rule of the totalitarian regimes, propagated ethnicity as the basis of solidarity and the new backbone of the collective identity. While the former socialist state was drowning in the blood of its own people, Roma were invisible as both victims and perpetrators. Therefore, war and post-war times reinforce an image of Roma as invisible and depoliticized yet monitored and catered to by the international humanitarian community. Although socialism was abandoned in the 1990s, the racialization of Roma has remained persistent and more visible and violence-invoking, in all ex-Yugoslav republics, ever since.

The fall of Yugoslavia, which started in the late 1990s meant that new states were established with geographic demarcations and territorial division of space and borders based on ethno-nationalism. [16]These new states therefore relied on blood ties, thus invoking new orders of inequality based on biopower. In this period, we see the emergence of the state as the violent sovereign, making a clear demarcation between winners and losers, the deserving and undeserving bodies. This rupture from socialism to a transition economy, brought the visible, violent face of the sovereign to the forefront. Police and army started exercising their might over the people. In Serbia, Serb life was the life to be protected while other minorities (and

[16] For a cartographic representation of Yugoslavia in different periods addressed in this thesis, see Figure 1.

Roma in particular) were just bodies used to reach that goal.[17] As one of the contributors to this paper states, Roma were among the first to be compulsory drafted to the Yugoslav Army and sent to the most violent battle fields in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Vukovar, Croatia, locations with the highest political tensions and what the politicians present as inevitable conflict. Many of the Roma from ex-Yugoslavia fled their home-country during the 1990s and applied for asylum in either Western Europe or countries in the immediate region. As the Council of Europe reports, more than 10,000 Roma fled Bosnia and Herzegovina in the first half of the 1990s and so have 80% of the Roma in Kosovo .[18] The testimony of one of the contributors to this research reflects upon this period:

> *In the winter of 1994. the state took away the permits they had issued to us earlier, which we needed in order to sell holiday decorations in the city center. A few weeks later we saw the Serbian refugees using what had been our selling spots for many years. They received the permits which we had obtained for many years before they came… When the war started, we fell to the bottom. We were at the bottom of the bottom. In the nineties you could only rely on yourself and it is the same today. In socialism you had the state. With democracy it just became worse. My friends and I became estranged in that period. I started feeling like I do not belong anywhere. I felt weaker than them and helpless. A lot of our people fled Serbia at that time. It was a mass exodus. The moment the war started they mobilized our people first. They would mobilize whomever they could catch. When Tito was alive you could sleep on the street, in the park. No one would do anything to you. They would not even dare to look at you. From the nineties, we felt like we are under them. We felt like we were worthless and don't belong anywhere.*
>
> Male Roma contributor, 54 years old

The emerging ethno-nationalist state(s) did not just use violence to decide who is deserving to live and who dies; in Serbia it was Serbs who were viewed as the bodies deserving

[17] This is also the time in which Dusan Jovanovic, a 14-year-old of Roma was brutally murdered by two Skinheads, an ethnic Serb and an ethnic Hungarian. Source: https://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2017&mm=10&dd=18&nav_category=12&nav_id=1315470

[18] https://rm.coe.int/treca-migracija-informativna-brosura-o-istoriji-roma/16808b1c70 It should be further noted that the Roma in present day Bosnia and Herzegovina are not viewed as constituent people, which is another example of how the state (under Dayton Agreement established after the fall of Yugoslavia) ensures hopelessness of Roma . More information available at: https://www.coe.int/en/web/execution/-/sejdic-and-finci-after10-years-of-absence-of-progress-new-hopes-for-a-solution-for-the-2022-elections

of protecting while in the case of Croatia, it was the Croats etc. This situation became obvious in the job market as well. The promise of equality which the socialist biopolitical project offered to Roma was lost as Yugoslavia was no longer a country. The end of socialist era meant the end of the Romani working class, which had been on the rise under socialism. Privatization and deregulation were slowly changing the economic landscape of post-Yugoslav soil, which remains under transition, moving from socialism to neoliberalism. This economic and political shift along the rise of violent ethno-nationalism implied the destruction of the Romani working class.

From an economic perspective this was a rather disastrous period for ex-Yugoslav countries. Serbia was under international sanctions, the citizens who used to travel freely around the world with a Yugoslav passport were now isolated from the rest of the world and facing hyperinflation, which was "historically unique and significant due to its extreme peak and duration." [19] (Petrovic, Bogetic and Vujosevic, 1999). The Serbia-Kosovo war and the NATO bombing brought extremely low employment opportunities, thereby placing an additional burden for the Roma, who were constantly racialized. All contributors to this paper stated that they felt the most unsafe during the Milosevic era and 1990s period; some of the most vivid reflections on their experiences include feelings related to violence and racialization becoming part of their everyday experience. However, they did not feel as capable to revolt and resist as they were living under constant uncertainty, fear and terror exercises not solely by the military, but from their fellow citizens, neighbors and in general Non-Roma from their immediate surrounding:

> *Until the 1990s only our people worked as cleaning staff. After that, during and after the war most of my fellow Roma were fired. I know it was on nationalistic basis and they brought Serbs in their places.*

[19] More information about hyperinflation in Yugoslavia, available at: https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0147596799915779 and http://www.idealibrary.com

In the nineties…I was scared and worried… I had to go to work every day. I didn't know if I would come back home alive. They (referring to non-Roma) were shouting at us in the streets and screaming slurs on the bus. My neighbor would go out in the street and yell: I will fuck your Muslim mother and then kill each of you. You Šiptar (slur for Albanian), you Gypsies from Kosovo.

Female contributor, 52 years old

My father was so afraid that someone would come in and slaughter all of us. They (referring to Serbs) were throwing Molotov cocktails into our backyard and torches with flame and gas.). It was chaos.

Male contributor, 30 years old

During socialism I felt 100% safe and secure. In the 90s I didn't feel safe or secure. My neighbor wrote on my pigeon box: LEAVE! He hated us in that time. After the NATO bombing, we became friends again. He even apologized. So did his wife. And what could I do. We were ok after that.

Female contributor, 62 years old

As the research of professor Bogdan Durovic concludes, the social distance towards Roma (Bogardus scale) during early 2000s, recorded the following: 30% of Serbs did not want to have Roma in their neighborhoods and 79.5 % Serbs would not marry a Roma. [20] The rise of far-right parties was evident and newly established countries, witnessed violence towards the Roma, including the brutal murder of Dušan Jovanović, a 14-year-old boy, by two skinheads, a Serb and a Hungarian in 1997.The longstanding economic transition, from socialism to the capitalist, neoliberal agenda, which started with the fall of Yugoslavia, has brought a new modus of racialization.[21] The socialist state as the provider and protector of the working class, which included Roma as well, was no longer present. Neoliberalism gradually but steadily and

[20] https://pescanik.net/kratka-istorija-diskriminacije-roma/#easy-footnote-24
[21] https://ouniverzitet.wordpress.com/2014/01/19/uvodna-rec-ekonomska-tranzicija/

unquestionably promotes personal responsibility as the response to the growing economic inequalities among all citizens. However, neoliberalist doctrine is blind to racialization which shapes the necropolitical experiences of Roma in attaining both social and financial capital. Therefore, Roma experience the economic transition in a much more severe form than the citizens who are solely economically deprived, as racialization adds to deprivation of Roma in all spheres of their lives, including the four key areas employment, housing, education and health.[22]

[22] These four areas are often underlined as key by CoE, UN, Roma NGOs and other national and international organisations, as they directly reflect the precariousness of Roma lives.

CHAPTER 3: TRANSITION ECONOMY AND THE FALSE PROMISE OF NEOLIBERALISM

With the collapse of socialism came the economic transition period, which continues to the present day. Some economic sources state that the economic transition in Serbia is still at the level it was in the 1995.[23] Serbia and most of the post-Yugoslav countries are still in the process of delayed transition. The shift towards the liberal market system was followed by large layoffs of workers overall. As one of the contributors to this paper stated before, it was Roma who were among the first to become redundant. Hence, the racialization of Roma intensified in the post-socialist era. Privatization and deregulation became an opening space for furthering the precariousness of Romani lives. The new economic system promises to eradicate corruption and nepotism through meritocracy among other tools, however, it simultaneously creates a space for state abandonment of the marginalized groups such as Roma. Meritocracy is becoming a dominant tool, which pushes forward the neoliberalism or the zero-sum game and promotes pauperization as necessity in order to maintain the free market ideal of anti-interventionist economics, as Venn maintains. (Venn, 2009) However, as Polany asserts, laissez-faire economic approach is not a given, but was made possible by the state. (Polany in Venn, 2009).

As Markovits notes, meritocracy influences the feelings of both those who are provided with a false promise of equal opportunity and those who materially benefit from meritocracy but are under constant emotional distress due to an enormous pressure to keep the positions of power. (Markovits, 2019) Within societies that are leaning towards neoliberal economy, Roma are subjected to the myth of meritocracy. As Shilliam concludes, *the meritocratic calculus of*

[23] See: https://talas.rs/2019/09/04/srbija-protiv-tranzicije/

liberal lore (especially "equality of opportunity") is not distinct from but nested within the racialized calculus of human competencies, thus arises an inference that meritocracy has its roots in racialization.[24] (Shilliam, 2018) Meritocracy keeps Roma chained to feelings of self-blame for "not working hard enough" and subsequently hopelessness, which is imposed on Roma by Non-Roma and some Roma who have internalized values of liberalism. As a consequence, polarization among the Roma and Non-Roma, as well as among the Roma community members, emerges. Roma who have unquestionably accepted the idea of meritocracy as not influenced by racialization are, in the words of Edward Said, *orientalizing* other Roma who have seen through the myth of meritocracy and deal with hopelessness as a result of crushed false hope. (Said, 1979) In order to become competitive for high-school entrance, most parents finance additional classes for their children. Most Roma parents do not have the social capital or financial means to make such an investment in the future of their children, which results in inequality in educational level and employability as well.

One remaining trace of the past economic model, the health care system, remains a public service although it is increasingly underfunded. The delayed shift to privatization of healthcare, as well as the infrastructure which remained from the socialist era, has also been one of the main assets in ex-Yugoslav countries during the current COVID-19 pandemic. However, the healthcare system is overburdened by the lack of financial investment, technological development as well as the massive brain drain of the qualified medical workers. For example, in order to undergo a computed tomography (CT) scanner in a public health institution and avoid financial burden, a patient in Serbia often needs to make an appointment at least one to two months in advance due to the limited number of available scanners. Private hospitals offer this service; however, the price comprises half of the average salary in Serbia. Healthcare, therefore, is also beyond the reach of citizens who are not financially well-off. As one of the

[24] See: https://thedisorderofthings.com/2018/07/11/race-and-the-undeserving-poor-response/#more-16968

contributors to this paper stated, the public healthcare institutions could issue patients a document with which they could undergo medical care at a private hospital and be reimbursed by the state for those costs; however they have only heard about this as a possibility and believe that doctors are not willing to provide such a document. Neoliberal biopolitics thus shows their lethality, as the doctors are becoming the ones in charge of making the decision of who lives and who dies (or continues living with an illness). For most Roma private healthcare is not even an option to be considered as most of Roma deal with unemployment which came into being after the socialist era. All contributors to the paper underline that meritocracy does not work for Roma, because it is racialization that meritocracy does not recognize as outcome-shaping. Those who have a job are doing the best to maintain it and feel that searching for a better job will not be fruitful because of racialization. One of the contributors stated the following:

> *I can kill myself from working, do all I can and still I will not get a better job.*
>
> Female contributor, 52 years old

Another contributor recalls his attempt to gain employment after the public company at which he worked at under socialism was closed, and brings his experience with racialization, which was more obvious then under socialism, right after socialism was abolished.

> *When the public company I worked in was closed, I applied to other companies. My friend who is a Serb and didn't have either work experience as a plumber or a degree like I do, got the job and I did not.*
>
> Male contributor, 54 years old

Furthermore, as the state abandons Roma, right-wing organizations view this effect of the transition towards neoliberalism as an encouragement to act beyond the rule of law, thus

the violence against Roma enacted by right-wing groups is becoming intensified. The violence of the state towards Roma, at present day, could be classified as invisible unlike the violence of the state in the 1990s, which was visible in the actions of the military and policy primarily. This is why many Roma and Non-Roma feel the hopelessness as violence is often not difficult to pinpoint at work only in its devastating consequences. I contend that the racialization and the violence related to it are still existing. Violence of the state towards Roma is less visible than in the 1990s, although still exists, which makes Roma susceptive to blame for "personal responsibility" for failure, and state unquestioned for the abandonment and positioning of Roma under precarious conditions. Under the current COVID-19 pandemic citizens were often reminded of personal responsibility (by the politicians and medical workers) when it comes to undertaking hygienic measures such as, often, regular and thorough hand washing. However, if Roma households do not have access to clean water[25], this is not a question of personal responsibility but of a state abandonment, which could have lethal consequences and be perceived as state killing. Therefore, in the present day, necropolitics is the new face of the State arising from the transition economy which promotes neoliberalism.

[25] This was a case in various Roma neighbourhoods in Serbia https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/pandemija-neuslovna-naselja/30508525.html

CONCLUSION

Subjected to the logic of racialization logic for multiple generations, for Roma falling into a state of hopelessness was inevitable. While living under the socialist biopolitical project, Roma created a relationship of trust with the state which promised equality to all those who worked towards enabling and building a Yugoslav working class. With the fall of Yugoslavia, this false hope of belonging was crushed. Racialization has been a constant in the sense of its presence throughout the socialist and post-socialist period, although it became intensified with the violent emergence of the ethno-nationalism based states in the 1990s. In the post-socialist era, liberal capitalism and neoliberalism are gradually governing the experiences of Roma, through state abandonment, which is lethal for both physical, bodily existence of Roma in an increasingly depoliticized space and for their hope of belonging as equal citizens. However, some Roma still cooperate with a state that shows no interest in them and blames their hardships on them. As the statement from the first pages of this thesis shows, some Roma continue to send their children to school. They do so not because they have any false hope that racialization will stop, but rather because they place their trust in moving abroad, where they can have a chance of becoming working class members, governed subjects. This hopelessness, caused by longstanding and intensifying racialization of Roma and increasing state abandonment, is the reason why Roma look for a better future abroad, where they can be working class members, as they were once in Yugoslavia. Based on the interviews, I have concluded that they do not have even the slightest of hope that state will stop abandoning them and that racialization can be challenged. As I write this, my mother, my father and I live in three different countries, none of which is our home country of Serbia.

Once hope is lost, so is our relationship with the state. A subject who is aware of racialization and abandonment can only live without hope by creating new hope and displacing hope beyond the borders of the home country that keeps producing hopelessness. All

contributors (except for the oldest one, which claimed that she is at this point too old to move) stated that they believe that life abroad, outside of Serbia or the ex-Yugoslavia region, is something that they hope for. The racialization which is becoming a burden for many generations of Roma is pushing Roma to search for a more inclusive society beyond the borders of their ex-Yugoslav home-countries. In conversation with them I have learnt that they are aware that in many of the Western European countries they could be made to feel like a profit-making object. However, they see this as a fairer system as they believe that racialization will not matter in such systems and they will be, similarly to Yugoslav socialism, given the chance to be an equal member of the working class. If a state kills the hope of its citizens to stay in that state and build their future, that is state violence. They are not afraid of feeling like foreigners abroad because they already do not feel at home in their own home country. Thus, they still have hope although that hope is no longer tied to the state in which they live in, but rather to the one in which they plan to live in the future. Yet, hopelessness can be a sobering experience. Coming back to my initial approach to researching racialization, I have realized that if I had not encountered hopelessness, I would not have understood its roots in the need for being governed by a state that should fulfill certain expectations. This need therefore represents another form of addressing our deepest need: the need to belong.

At the end of our interviews, four out of five contributors stated that they feel sad and hopeless, yet happy that they were asked to share their stories, which they had never been asked for before. It is worth noting is that writing this paper has influenced my personal bond with the contributors, which might have influenced this thesis. This thesis is not to be claimed as objective truth and my own Romani background is also a factor that should be taken into consideration. As I do not claim to be an unbiased content creator, I am a contributor who has decided to use both spoken and written language to provide space for the unheard stories of her community. After hearing the stories of other people, our reality is no longer the same.

Hopefully this paper has provided the contributors with space to express themselves. It has surely given me a space to examine my own relationship with writing and the role of racialization in my (political) life. These reflections might bring more hopelessness into another's life, but hopelessness does not necessarily have to imply a final, negative outcome. Facing our hopelessness is never a comfortable place to be at. However, with crushed hope about belonging (in one country), we are provided with a gift, a blank canvas for a new image of belonging in another space, community or just a new vision of belonging itself. This blank canvas sparks my imagination further, and the new questions emerge: Can we belong if we are not governed? Is being governed the only way to feel safe? Not just safe and protected physically but safe in the sense that if one belongs, they are reassured of their existence, which is through being governed confirmed by another. Maybe we can find hope in acknowledging our suffering which comes as a consequence of facing the fact that we are abandoned, that we are not seen as worthy of being governed. Maybe our most viable resource is our crushed hope, as Inayatullah underlines. (Inayatullah, 2018)

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