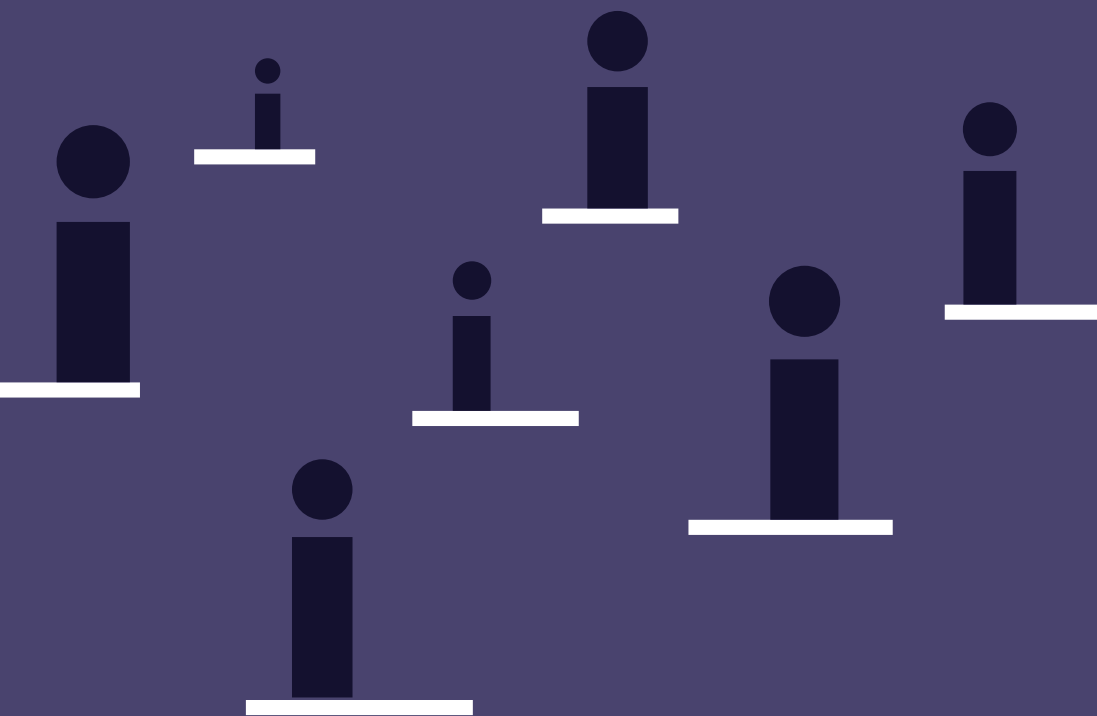


ROMA LIVES **MATTER**



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– ***Roma Lives Matter!***

In the context of world events, we could remember this year, above all, by the resistance of the oppressed all over the world and particularly in the United States of America. The second thing that marked 2020, on the world level, is the epidemic of Covid-19. Yes, the resistance is in first place, and the pandemic in the second. Even if the coronavirus did not appear so unexpectedly, all of a sudden and without any connection to the capitalist treatment of nature, it is more on the side of the spectrum on which for most people something happens without them being able to control it. The former, though – the resistance – is much more fascinating: the scope and the strength of the protests, strikes and revolts, despite the epidemic conditions that impede organizing; strengthening solidarity despite the fact that neoliberal discourse uses the pandemic to further

insist on individual responsibility and shifts the blame on individuals; pointing out that the power resides in the people and their actions and not in something that seems to attack people from the outside; greater strength of what helps us to robustly, persistently, humanely and in solidarity resist than of what makes us sometimes feel helpless, small and scared.

The world will remember this year by turbulent events that have spurred an organized resistance and denounced the scope of police and state brutality towards the oppressed. Now almost everyone has heard of the *Black Lives Matter*, movement which exists and has been active for many years. Well known – and well rooted in capitalism – racialized practices of criminalization of the poor have their own loud and clear colour of resistance: the colour of humane. Because the message of the *Black Lives Matter* is not that only the lives of black people matter but also the lives of all the oppressed, queer persons, trans persons, gender non-conforming, persons with disabilities, oppressed women, persons without documents, migrants, workers... They unite and together affirm the lives of the oppressed.

Certainly, this affirmation of life does not signify a mere emphasis of those who oscillate between animal and human existence. It means the affirmation of a human life, the life for humans according to their needs, for humans who – regardless of their skin colour, sex norms, sexual preferences, body abilities, ethnic recognitions – truly desire a dignified life which would not be entangled in the relations of exploitation, domination and submission. This struggle shows that every life matters, that no life is and must not be a surplus, that people cannot be put in a position in which they are invisible, left to a

bare survival or in predefined conditions' clutches. And just as *Black Lives Matter* is a global movement, not just American, so it would be worth connecting all the movements of resistance to racialized capitalism dynamics .

In our regional context, despite the workers strikes and the wave of summer protests which defined itself on the line of resistance to the authoritarian government structures, and state and police mechanisms that support it, there is still not organized revolt of such scale that could seriously shake the system that oppresses human lives. And here in our capitalist context, also, the life differentiates to various categories of “animal humanity”: those who are much needed as labour power which produces the surplus of value (and which can be paid just enough to reproduce as much as it is needed to be able of showing at the workplace every day, until they wear out and can easily be replaced), those who are a *relative* surplus (reserve army of labour which can barely survive and always has the role of competition that puts pressure on those who work) and those who are an *absolute* surplus (those whom the capital leaves to die, without any need for their productive or reproductive labour). Covid-19 seems to emphasize those society's strata that are an absolute surplus: elderly and infirmed ,those for whom the capital has no use, direct or indirect, and thus does not care if they live or die of the disease; racialized communities; extremely poor communities; lumpenproletariat etc.

Dehumanization of human lives is an important part of the capitalist mechanisms of devaluation of labour and seesawing in the surplus of the population: the system needs a structural unemployment to maintain low wages and other key aspects

of market logic; moreover, ideological and psychological layers of divisions between wage workers and non-wage others are also beneficial for the system because they divert the hate towards each other in a useless conflicts between oppressed instead against the system; all of that serves very well the mechanisms of discipline and is shrouded in a morally-ideological robe which implies that the lazy and greedy parasites on state welfare are to blame for the lack of work, as well as those who come from elsewhere and “want to take our jobs” In this way, capitalism sustains itself and constantly naturalizes divisions that it is based upon.

In capitalism, besides the normalized forms of violence related to exploitation, there is also the form of violence that Balibar calls “ultra objective,” and that produces the absolute surplus of the population, or: those who are reduced to the status of completely useless, even to capital, and redundant *objects*. Therefore, this stratum of the population easily slips out of the “let them survive” situation in the “let them die” situation, while their elimination is often underpinned by ecological and biological disasters.¹

Even before the coronavirus epidemic, the Roma community was constituted as a social category of *subhumans*, because Roma people often do not work for a wage and are not even working class but occupy even lower positions in the system of production. Roma lives are not only reduced to animality, but are either erased to the complete invisibility and neglect or are tokenized as an object of fake attention without any affir-

¹ See: Étienne Balibar, *Violence and Civility: On the Limits of Political Philosophy*. Columbia University Press, New York, 2015, p. 69.

mation of those lives. Hence, during the pandemic, the Roma – who mostly live in extremely poor substandard settlements – are pushed even harder in the struggle for survival, because their lives are constructed as unimportant and discarded to the edge of total elimination of this society's stratum.

Even though the Roma community in Serbia lived on the edge of survival well before Covid-19, the full extent of destitution and the situation in substandard Roma settlements now is more alarming and should be addressed and systemically solved. Because, no, the packages of humanitarian aid that help the Roma community to barely survive, are not enough. One should really be cynical to mistake a responsibility of the individuals for a serious structural solution, as if everyone were in the same or similar conditions in which they could protect themselves from the fatal consequences of the disease.

“Hence, the credo *Stay at home* becomes more than cynical when referring to the oppressed who do not have other outlooks but to survive in slams, migrant quarters, ghettoized places, containers, encampments, or social housing places at the edge of towns and cities, substandard Roma settlements, ramshackles, tiny and non-functional spaces in which they become more exposed to diseases [...] Even a more insolent question comes to mind: will the state provide Roma inhabitants of the substandard settlements in Serbia with basic supplies of water, food, hygienic and medical equipment for prevention of the disease and grant them guaranteed access to health care during the epidemic? And what about migrants? In other terms, will there be a systemic solution for ensuring basic conditions for

Roma, migrants and other most endangered ? Or, will they be left to the risks of disease because of the state neglect?" (Maja Solar, *Behind the Coronavirus: Work, Home and Time*²)

The dehumanizing of the Roma in the year of the coronavirus pandemic continues at a galloping pace.³ Thus our outcry that Roma lives matter goes in the direction of building a new politics which will create conditions for a humane life for all.

This year's collection of the *Roma Forum of Serbia* addresses, indeed, these new problems that the epidemic has created but also more: it thematizes some of the key issues of the Roma community that contribute to the Roma lives being treated as unimportant. The publication starts with the text of Jelena and Bojana Krivokapić that analyzes the case of a Roma woman whose social financial assistance was cancelled during the pandemic. They address the continuation and deepening of the social injustice although it had seemed that the virus had made us slightly more sensitive to humanism. How the Roma community survives from the perspective of work and education – this is the question that Jasmina Drmaku seeks to answer. Since the psychological tests and other discriminating evaluation procedures have been an integral part of Roma children segregation in education well before the epidemic and how it

2 Published on 31st July 2020, on the portal *Slobodni Filozofski*. Available at: <http://slobodnifilozofski.com/2020/07/iza-leda-korone-rad-kuca-i-vrijeme.html>

3 One of the example of the process of dehumanization and "animalization" of the Roma in Serbia – in the ideological-political sphere – is the existence of the far-right group *Levijatan* (Leviathan). The discourse that this group and its followers perpetuate on the social networks endorse it: the Roma are addressed as "pest", "plague", "polar bears from the mahalas", "gypsy animals", they do not procreate, they "breed", etc.

continues in situation when the Roma children are trying to continue schooling during the epidemic is the subject that Jelena Savić addresses. Women are more oppressed in Roma communities, as well as they are in general patriarchal-capitalist societies. And in this setting, unpaid female household work is also part of the context of the general unprofitability – from a capital perspective – of paying labor reproduction costs. Therefore, oppression of women is not only a matter of beliefs and prejudices, but also of economic and social relations, and this is what Miljana Marić Ognjenović writes about. Robert Kasumović continues the line of writing from the last year's collection and intends to thematize self-organization of Roma community in regards to other progressive movements, which now has a more concrete framework because the leftist party has been registered and it is important to think about what it could mean for the Roma community. Among other things, the affirmation of the Roma culture is important for a positive characterization of Roma identity and what could be more concrete steps in direction of classifying the Roma intangible cultural heritage on the UNESCO list – writes Iva Barčić. One pioneer article in our region, with the subject of thinking the intersection of oppressions based on gender, Roma ethnicity and class, ends this collection by opening a whole horizon of questions. This requires thorough research on this important and analytically neglected area: Paola Yo writes about the experience of a trans persons who belong to Roma community and lower class, and critically thematizes the categories of sex/gender, ethnicity and class, with a particular emphasis on the class as indispensable variable in thematization of identity-based oppressions.

The program of political education of the *Roma Forum Serbia* had different coordinates this year. Because of the pandemic, the education has often been organized online, which made it harder to organize common actions with those for whom the use of online tools is not taken for granted, for persons who do not have such means and material conditions. We often did not have a chance to meet in person and to organize workshops as we had done before. Still, this has not stopped us from thinking what should be done with the system in which entire groups of people are pushed to the position of subhumans and which direction we should take so that we could make Roma lives (finally) matter.

The whole region will remember this year by Covid-19 and the fear that the most oppressed will be left to themselves, but also by hope spurred by the black movement's struggle for a life as human life.

The need to emphasize the importance of Roma lives does not imply that life should be understood solely as a biological category, because, as we know, people are not (only) biology. Nor is there, in the human communities, such a thing that could be characterized as purely biological and that would not be intertwined with social aspects in many complex ways. The colours of human skin, in fact, should not be important, yet, in capitalism which is *also* racialized, emphasizing the skin colour or the ethnicity of the oppressed is an outcry that we use against the white supremacy. Thus, this struggle encompasses all of the oppressed, and blackness or Romaness, and in that sense stands for the entire humanity. The writings of the Roma activists point out the fact that the Roma are *here*, among us,

that we are *together*, that we must create conditions in which Roma lives could reach their full human potential. This gives us hope that through imagination and inspiration by the existing movements and revolts as well as through persistent connections with progressive structures, we can (at least for now) imagine *Roma Lives Matter* on the horizon.

December 2020,
Maja Solar, the editor of the collection

– **Social Injustice During the Pandemic**

The coronavirus pandemic is a new respiratory disease that appeared for the first time in December 2019 in Wuhan, a large city in the province of Hubei, China. The pandemic spread rapidly around the world and in March 2020 it reached the front door of the Republic of Serbia. Soon afterwards, the social groups that are particularly vulnerable to the risks of pandemic were specifically targeted: elderly persons, persons with chronic conditions, and medical workers. There were many recommendations about the measures for prevention and control of infectious disease COVID-19, including hygienic measures such as frequent hand washing, social distancing and wearing a mask.

Although it was recognised that those who are the most vulnerable to the disease are either the ones who are physiologi-

cally vulnerable (the elderly, sick persons, etc.) or those whose workplace further exposes them to the virus (medical and other essential workers), very rarely has been talk about those whose vulnerability results from their social position. It is true: the elderly and the sick persons, as well as those who risk their lives because they have to work or save other lives, they all are a particularly easy target for the virus. So, it has been very quickly recognised that there are certain groups in our society which are more prone to the risk of infection as well as fatal consequences.

Where are the Roma in this discourse? Where are all those who live in substandard settlements without adequate living conditions such as the access to potable water? Even though the right to water is one of the fundamental human rights and not having access to potable water in the midst of a pandemic is its biggest infringement, one big part of the Roma community in Serbia cannot exercise this right. Why is there no talk about those who mainly live in a very small living space with numerous family members without a possibility to self-isolate in the case of infection? Where are those who cannot afford a bare minimum of living conditions, but neither to buy masks, gloves, disinfectants, healthy food and immunity boosting supplements? Where are those who do not have electric energy, computers or access to television programs and, even more often, computer or internet access and whose children therefore cannot follow online school lessons and regularly continue their education?

Why does no one mention the Roma in Serbia, and the problems that they encounter during the pandemic? Are they

not one of the most endangered groups, considering their living conditions and misfortunes that they face on an everyday basis, which further increase their vulnerability to the virus and the diseases that follow.

The media attention dedicated to the Roma is very small during the pandemic, and even then, it does not address their main issues. Yet, it is interesting that the media in Serbia only mentions the Roma as the most frequent beneficiaries of the social welfare which additionally increases animosity and further strengthens the prejudices against which we have been struggling for many years.

That the majority of the population thinks that the Roma do not want to work and thus are parasites of social welfare, this is not a unjustified commonplace or a non-confirmed assumption that we overheard. In a survey that the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson conducted in 2019, *Discrimination on the Labour Market*,⁴ more than 70% of the participants said that they agree or partially agree with the following sentence: “The Roma people do not like to work”. This opinion exists even among those who condemn acts of discrimination.

According to the law, social protection is an organized social activity of public interest⁵ whose aim is to provide help and support to individuals and families for independent and productive lives in society as well as to prevent social exclusion and eliminate its consequences. Historically, decades ago, the working class fought and won the battle for the institution of social

4 Available at: <http://ravnopravnost.gov.rs/izvestaji-i-publikacije/istrazivanja/>

5 *Law on Social Protection, Official Gazette of RS*, n. 24/2011.

protection which now is not only a legal right but a political and emancipatory achievement for all those who are oppressed.

The basis for calculation of the financial social assistance is proportional to the index of consumer prices in the previous six months. As of October 1, 2020 in Serbia, it amounts to 8.626,00 dinars⁶ (approximately 74 €). Is this amount enough to cover the basic needs? Is it really so huge to imply a negative context each time the Roma are mentioned?

Even during the pandemic, when a big part of the population in Serbia lost their jobs and regular income, some Roma women and men were not able to exercise their right to financial social assistance. Furthermore, due to the working conditions in the state of epidemic, the financial assistance applications are not processed in the timeline defined by the law regardless of the urgency of some cases.

One of those cases is that of a single mother Z. S. from Belgrade, whose right to financial social assistance was denied, however, the decision was not delivered to her home address. Because of the epidemic situation, she repeatedly called the Centre for Social Work, to get information about the status of her request, but she did not receive an answer until she personally went to the institution. Then she found out that case was legally closed because she had received the court's decision about refusal and had not appealed. The reason for refusal was an alleged fact that she is able to work, and that her underage daughter (who has a chronic asthma with frequent attacks and therefore needs special medical

⁶ Decision on the nominal amount of the financial social assistance, *Official Gazette* of RS, n. 126, October 23 2020.

care) is attending a preschool institution, according to the information gathered by the Centre. Why would the fact that a child is attending preschool result with cancelling financial social assistance to the parent? Is that not what we want – for every Roma child to be included in the preschool program that would help them to socialise and have better starting position in the educational process as the majority population? Why is now exercising the right to financial social assistance such an obstacle?

Since this woman had not received the decision and the signature on the acknowledgement receipt was not hers, she filed a complaint. Regarding the fact that she has to take care of her daughter while not being physically able to work (as she had properly notified the Centre) – the financial social assistance remains absolutely indispensable to her. However, this institution did not accept her appeal and had not considered her documentation.

With our legal help, Z. S. has succeeded in the appeal. The second-instance body returned the case to be processed again, and the first-instance body made a new decision to retroactively pay the full amount of financial social assistance from the date of application. She has succeeded, thanks to our help, yet there are many others who have no possibilities to reach us. How many among them are not informed about their rights? Moreover, how can people deal with this in the time of pandemic? Is it possible that such cases are made more difficult to process during the pandemic, especially for the Roma whose social position had already been very difficult before the pandemic?

Also, one of the jurisdictions of the Centre for Social Work is to execute the legal decisions to take children away from their parents or legal guardians – children who work and live on the streets – by an urgent procedure. This measure of taking away the parent’s right remained during the pandemic: the fact is that those children are mostly Roma because of their increased poverty. And children are being taken away from their parents without considering whether the reason of their living on the streets is a case of human trafficking or a necessity caused by the fact that the child and its family do not have sufficient means for life. This measure should be the last one in a line of measures, not the first one, because social protection should mainly aim to improve living conditions of the child as well as of its family.

The Equal Possibilities Ombudsperson has stated that this measure is in contradiction with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and concluded that the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Policy thus “puts in focus the intensification of the activity of the system while the focus should be on the protection of the child’s best interests, finding and eliminating the causes of such situation”. Therefore, taking away the child is not a solution. Rather, the institutions should ask an essential question – who organizes child exploitation and begging as well as what are the circumstances that have put these children on the street. Also, the Ombudsperson has underlined that the activities of the system should go in the direction of eliminating the cause and not the consequences.

Social protection, above all, should at least partially minimize the gap of social differences and alleviate the position of

those who are extremely marginalized and can barely survive. Even though it could seem that the institutions are organizing the distribution of the social welfare to the poorest (who are even poorer now) in a better way, the system unveils its real face: the current pandemic renders social injustice even more severe while marginalization and discrimination become even more acute.

– ***Let Them Eat Tablets!*** **The Roma in the Time of Coronavirus**

On March 15th 2020, the president of the Republic and the president of the National Assembly made the decision to declare the state of emergency in Serbia. Previously, the government had adopted a series of measures as a response to the epidemic. Some of these measures are epidemiological while others, economic and social ones, aim to diminish the negative effects of the Covid-19 epidemic. Today, eight months later, the pandemic is still very strong and we are on the verge of another state of emergency. How does this influence half a million⁷ of poor citizens of our country, according to the official data?

By forming the Crisis Board, the Government of the Republic of Serbia tries, at least declaratively, to focus on solving the

⁷ Available at: <http://socijalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs/sr/социјално-укључивање-у-рс/статистика-сиромаштва/>

problems related to the fight against coronavirus and shore up the health care system as well as by eliminating negative consequences that have hit the economy. Often, we can hear that the president of the state declares that there will be no salary cuts in the public nor in the private sector⁸. So, it appears that the government of one country on the capitalist periphery successfully solves not only the direct impact of the epidemic on public health but also the impact that it has on the economy. The state has not “forgotten” the poorest: the proof is the one-time financial assistance of 100 euros that every citizen of Serbia older than 18 already received during the first wave of COVID-19. Those who wanted to receive this amount “only” had to apply online to the Treasury administration⁹.

Nevertheless, if we do not rely upon the government’s enthusiastic discourse which could lead us to conclude that everything is ‘running smoothly’, we could ask ourselves what is actually happening with the poorest members of our society during the pandemic. As always, the question about the poor Roma who live in 500 substandard Roma settlements is swept under the rug.

According to the *Special Equal Opportunities Ombudsman Report with Recommendations*, there was an analysis of the conditions in Roma settlements during the lockdown and the

8 Available at: <https://www.novosti.rs/vesti/ekonomija/901997/predsednik-ot-krio-evo-plate-penzije-bitu-smanjivane>

9 Available at: <https://www.blic.rs/biznis/moj-novcanik/pocinju-prijave-za-100-evra-mali-pozivam-sve-gradane-srbije-da-iskoriste-jedan-deo/ml152nmy>. On some issues and futilities of the insufficient economic measures, see the text: Stefan Marić, *100 Reasons for Borrowing Money at Double Interest Rates*, portal *Mašina*, June 11th 2020. Available at: <https://www.masina.rs/?p=13720>

implementation of the protective measures against the coronavirus epidemic¹⁰. In reality, the survey comprised only about ten Roma settlements. The report shows a deficient analysis of the situation and conditions in which the Roma live, and the conclusion from the analysis of ten Roma settlements is extrapolated to all the Roma settlements in general, that is five hundred of them. The report repeatedly states that the inhabitants of the settlements did not receive the packages of hygienic products, and that it is necessary to provide them. The questions then arise: is this the only thing to do and is the humanitarianism-based policy the best solution during an epidemic? Do the Roma non-governmental organizations, foreign donors, local and international foundations, municipalities and local authorities only have to provide hygienic product packages for the Roma who live in extremely inadequate conditions and to even be proud of that? If we leave aside moral and moralistic questions about the qualities of humanitarian organizations and individuals, or the act of helping, the key question is whether the humanitarian packages solve the fundamental issues of the poor. In other words: do the humanitarians help the poor to improve their position, and is there any long-term change? Or, does this policy of charity and humanitarianism help maintain the system in which there are those who have (and thus can give something) and those who do not have? As much as this help can alleviate one's situation in the short run, ultimately the fundamental social structure does not change: the gap be-

10 See the *Special Equal Opportunities Ombudsman Report with Recommendations* about conditions in the Roma settlements during the coronavirus epidemic state of emergency. Available at: <https://www.ombudsman.rs/index.php/izvestaji/posebnii-izvestaji/6608-19>

tween those who have (enough to be able to donate) and those who do not have is thus maintained and even enhanced. So, no kind of humanitarianism will solve the problems of the Roma community in the long term. What we need is a politics that will create systemic conditions in which the Roma will not be in the position to depend on someone's charity, in this case, the charity of the humanitarian packages.

The Report, mentioned above, gives ten recommendations that local authorities and units of self-government do not have to implement. Some of these recommendations actually concern structural problems – like those about access to water, electricity or school programs – however, the question is whether they remain a part of yet another phraseology which confirms the difference between the documents and the reality. The second recommendation states: “It is necessary to provide a sufficient number of containers for garbage disposal in all the settlements and make sure the utility services are regularly emptying the containers.” This recommendation leads us to conclude that, during the epidemic, it is necessary to provide enough garbage containers for garbage disposal if the local authorities organize themselves (or, as the “humanitarian wording” suggests, to “have mercy” to do it). So, have they implemented this measure? I have personally regularly visited one of the Roma settlements in Novi Sad while other Roma activists have visited others, and we can confirm that this problem was not solved either.

¹¹ *Special Equal Opportunities Ombudsman Report with Recommendations. Conditions in the Roma Settlements during the State of Emergency Due to the Coronavirus Epidemic and Implementation of Protective Measures, p. 20*

Is there work for the Roma in the time of pandemic?

While Covid-19 is ‘celebrating its first birthday’, the Roma in Serbia are still struggling to survive on an everyday basis. This is, actually, nothing new nor different from their everyday life before the pandemic. According to the unofficial data of the Serbian Association of Packaging Waste Recyclers, there are more than 30,000 secondary raw materials collectors of which 70% are members of the Roma ethnic minority. The hardest and socially undervalued jobs are regularly reserved for the Roma¹². Before Covid-19, according to the data of the Association, those who work eleven hours a day manage to collect a maximum of 2,000 dinars (17 euros) worth of recyclable materials. The data of the *Republic Union of the Secondary Raw Materials Collectors* from 2010 show us that it is necessary to walk about twenty kilometres to collect 200 kilograms of paper for which the collector can get 500 dinars (4 euros).

Today, during the epidemic and the state-implemented restrictive measures, the secondary raw materials collectors do not have the possibility to work eleven hours per day nor to walk twenty kilometres so that they can provide basic living subsistence for themselves and their families. Of course, the collectors are not the only ones who suffer the consequences of the situation in which they face even worse obstacles in the struggle to survive. Many green market vendors, of whom, again, majority are Roma, have lost their income, especially during the

12 Collection of texts *Education and Politicization*, Vol. 2, Roma Forum of Serbia, 2017, p. 52. Available at: http://www.frs.org.rs/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/FRS_Obrazovanjem_do_politizacije_romske_zajednice_2017.pdf

lockdown and the state of emergency. Musicians (another very precarious occupation of many Roma) have become particularly vulnerable in the current situation. Will they get help from Roma and other non-governmental organizations, different foundations, donors, and, first and foremost, from the state?

When it comes to the meagre 100 euros financial assistance, which is yet significant for the poor, the question arises as to whether the Roma – who often cannot obtain the proof of citizenship – had the right to apply for this assistance? Then, was it possible for them to obtain this financial assistance? And finally, is 100 euros enough for large households which are barely surviving and, in addition to that, have lost a considerable part of their income?

If we look at the data about the gap between the minimum wage and the minimum market basket cost in Serbia, we will see that those who regularly earn a minimum wage salary cannot cover even one third of their living costs¹³. And while the workers in Serbia should fight for a *living wage* and not the minimum wage, let's not forget how the poorest strata of society live, including most of the Roma – who can only dream about a minimum wage. Unemployment, the jobs remunerated far below the amount that could guarantee a decent life, as well as the lack of investment in the public sector, shape the everyday life of most of the citizens of Serbia¹⁴. For the Roma who mostly

13 See: Bojana Tamindžija, *How Much is the Minimum Wage worth in Serbia?*, Centre for the Politics of Emancipation, August 8, 2020. Available at: <https://cpe.org.rs/osvrti/bojana-tamindzija-koliko-vredi-minimalna-zarada-u-srbiji/>

14 See: Jasmina Drmaku, *Employment*. In: *Between Form and Reality*, Roma Forum Serbia, Belgrade, 2018. Available at: <http://www.frs.org.rs/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/lzmedju-forme-i-realnosti.pdf>

live in the substandard settlements, these are important factors that shape their social position and in the pandemic the outlook for their chances to improve employability and employment are worse than ever.

Education of Roma children in the time of pandemic

Roma girls and boys also have the right to regular education, also during the coronavirus pandemic. Nevertheless, during the state of emergency when the education switched to educational television programs and online classes, the access to this kind of education was not granted to Roma pupils from the informal settlements. More than 90% of pupils from the Roma settlement Veliki Rit in Novi Sad did not have adequate conditions for online classes and homework during the state of emergency. Usually in most of the substandard Roma settlements the access to electricity is not taken for granted, and this has additionally complicated the obstacles that Roma children face in the process of education. The winter is ahead of us and, traditionally, electricity restrictions are usual in this settlement. Furthermore, in numerous Roma families that have only one television set, it is problematic even to regularly follow the school television program, especially where there are many children in one household, and the lack of professional help makes the whole situation much worse because parents, who are often illiterate, do not know how to do it.

According to the official data, after the state of emergency ended, during the summer, Roma pupils have received 600

tablets all over the country¹⁵. Yet, did these tablets really reach the children who live in substandard Roma settlements? The question remains, because the children from the settlements in Novi Sad have not received any. However, even if they had, the question is: how will Roma children focus on working on a tablet – knowing that they do not have a regular access to nutritious food, electricity or running clean water, neither heating in winter or air-conditioning in summer, nor separate rooms for studying and education.

For many years, the living conditions of the poorest in Serbia remain covered by a veil of a lack of interest and care of the politicians, who remember the Roma community only when they need political support. The fact that life is cruel for most of the Roma is buttressed by statistics which partially depict this situation. And that reality is even worse during the epidemic. While in Roma settlements people struggle with poverty, lack of access to water or electricity and providing food, the donors and Roma non-governmental organizations are proudly distributing humanitarian packages and tablets with the internet.

And while the ‘solution’ for epidemic is to leave the people to themselves, hoping that the coronavirus will ‘leave us alone’ and that the pandemic will stop and the life will go back to normal, it is clear that the ‘normal’ situation for the poor Roma is not what should be normal to anyone. Because that is the ‘normal’ situation in which they continue to collect the secondary raw materials illegally and underpaid, sell on the market or play music in the street or in celebrations for a meagre salary

15 Available at: <https://objektiv.rs/vest/275644/kako-ce-romska-deca-pratiti-onlajn-nastavu-tablet-racunari-i-internet-za-600-ucenika-sirom-srbije/>

regardless of whether the temperature is +40 or -40 degrees celsius, live in completely non-functional and substandard housing, without an access to education and health care, and so on and so forth. The struggle against such 'normality' is what we all should be doing, during Covid-19 as well as after it, and it cannot be reduced to a struggle for humanitarian packages but should be the struggle for serious and structural changes.

– Psychological Tests and Other Discriminative Evaluation Procedures: Issues of Education of Roma children

To recognise and understand the problems of education of Roma children and other marginalized groups means to observe a broader frame of functioning of the educational system in Serbia and in the world. The current socio-economic tendencies are largely influencing the dynamic of knowledge and the way it is used in public education.

The supremacy of neoliberal orientation manifests itself in the market logic that enters the spheres which previously were regulated by non-market values and norms, such as health and education. Thus, it occurs that the knowledge that does not have a direct application and cannot generate profit becomes redundant. This suppresses the important emancipatory and humanist role of public education as such, while the access to any type of knowledge is possible only if one pays for it. In

that sense, the knowledge became a privilege and ceased to be a public good. Neoliberalism is not exclusionary only in the sphere of the economic phenomena, nor it should be reduced to one. Its consequences can be observed in a broader social frame as a method for constructing a society. “Economics are the method, the object is to change the soul” – these words of Margaret Thatcher, founder of neoliberal policies, precisely point out the essence. Since the education is considered to be an instrument for changing the “soul”, we can say that the neoliberalism achieves its goals by the means of transformation of the public education, among other tools¹⁶.

Today, the economy requests a labour power that is extremely adaptable, accepts overtime work as well as unstable salary, and takes part in the constant race for resources and competition. Nevertheless, better qualifications, higher level of expertise and higher level of education give at least slightly better options and access to better paid jobs. Possession of knowledge and access to it can represent a key advantage in the technological world of information and skills, while the individual skills are a highly valued commodity on the market¹⁷. Knowledge becomes a commodity.

What is the position of the Roma in a system with such orientation? Do the marginalized groups have chances? Are we talking about equality in the world in which the possession of

16 Alpar Lošonc, Andrea Ivanišević, Jelena Novaković, *Neoliberalism in Education and Knowledge Dynamics*, 2015. Available at: http://www.trend.uns.ac.rs/stskup/trend_2015/radovi/T2.2/T2.2-3.pdf

17 Bačević, J., *From Public Place to Market Place: Anthropology, Critiques of Contemporary Education and Its Meaning in Serbia*. In: *Issues in Ethnology and Anthropology*, 1(2), 2006, p. 209-230.

capital and class position define the extent of development and the access to a good quality public education?

Education is no exception when it comes to the state's unfavourable attitude towards the Roma. The segregation of Roma children, once complete and today visible in various forms and manifestations, was one of the first points of the public education reform defined by *The Decade of Roma Inclusion*. Separate classes for Roma, separate buildings or parts of the buildings, separate schools, etc. are some of the examples of discrimination. In such conditions, the quality of education is very low, due to a poor institutional support, insufficient salaries of those who work in these schools, substandard infrastructure, low expectations when it comes to Roma children's school achievement and, finally, the feeling of inferiority that prevails among Roma children¹⁸.

The psychological intelligence tests are one of the important segregation mechanisms. The idea that certain races are on average smarter than others has a long history in white, western world. The American history is in particular marked by it, because this idea served as a justification of slavery and racist immigration policies of the past century. Thus the first intelligence test, the famous Binet-Simon scale, got a completely new use when it was brought to the USA from Europe. It had been created to determine the development level of preschool children, but it served as a perfect tool for segregation of the majority of American population because the black children and

18 Rostas, I., & Kostka, J., *Structural Dimensions of Roma School Desegregation Policies in Central and Eastern Europe*. In: *European Educational Research Journal*, 13(3), 2014, p. 268-281.

immigrants scored much lower results. The purpose of the tests was to select children and adults and to limit them only to the activities and jobs that corresponded to their results. American white intellectual elite greatly supported the nativist approach to studying intelligence, which considers that certain capacities are congenital and unchangeable in the course of life. This position goes with liberal orientation and premise that everyone has equal opportunities to succeed, and if that does not happen, it means that they do not have skills and capacities. In other words, if someone is poor, that is not a consequence of economic and political conditions, social injustice and racist ideologies but of his or her innately low capacities. A change in these attitudes shook the United States of America after the financial crisis in 1929, when many lost their jobs and became poor. For a moment, it became unacceptable to explain the poverty by innately low intellectual capacities.

On a smaller scale but using the same mechanism, similar examples existed in Europe as well as in our country where the data about intelligence were a subject to manipulation. Concretely, the tests in the public education system served as a basis to determine whether a child will enrol a regular or a special educational needs school, such as a school for mentally challenged children. Frequent enrollment of Roma children in special schools was a form of segregation. In Czech Republic, the Roma organizations initiated a legal process against the *Psychological Association* claiming that the use of psychological tests contributes to racial discrimination of the Roma. They have proved their case in the court and consequently the pre-school tests ceased to be a part of the standard procedure.

The data from the school year 2007/8 showed that in the special schools in Serbia there were about 30% of the Roma students and the following year, 2008/9 even 32%. According to some older surveys, that number had gone up to 80% while in regular schools there were only 2-3%¹⁹. The situation was not better in the countries of the region: similar statistics existed in Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania and Hungary. Statistically it is impossible that such a large number of one social group, in this case the Roma, has lower capacities, yet the tests showed the opposite.

How do these tests function and why are they prone to abuse? The Intelligence quotient that results from the tests is a statistical and psychometric construct. The tests are an artificial creation. They are constructed on the basis of certain theoretical hypotheses about the examinee, in the form of questions or tasks that “aim” the object of testing. The examinees are categorized or profiled on the basis of their responses. The result of the test does not have a meaning in itself, because it does not represent an absolute measure. The basis for all the psychological tests is standardization. The result is compared with average values, previously established for that measure, that have an average deviation. Therefore, every test, including the intelligence tests, is previously standardized – which means that a certain number of examinees took the test and the average values were obtained from their results. The result of every new examinee is compared with the average obtained from the

19 *Roma Children in 'Special' Education in Serbia – Overrepresentation, Underachievement and Impact on Life – Research on Schools and Classes for Children with Developmental Difficulties*, Open Society Institute, 2010.

representative sample, which shows where the examinee is on the scale for that measure: below, above or equal to the average. It is clear that if the intelligence test is standardized on a sample that comprises white, upper class people, with better education opportunities and living conditions and certain cultural values – everyone who does not belong to that category will have a result that is outside the average. The racism is evident when the interpretation of the results of such tests does not take in consideration the context of the social groups to which the examinees belong and the test results are used as an excuse for discrimination.

Social and cultural factors shape the concept of intelligence and it depends on many factors which the tests do not comprehend. One test can hardly be applied within the same population in two different points in time, let alone in cultures and groups different from the one in which it was originally created. If we reverse the situation and imagine that an average white person has to pass the test in foreign language, with expressions and shapes they have never seen before, the results would be the same as the ones that Roma and other minorities and marginalized groups have.

A good result of an intelligence test depends as well on the capacity for acquiring abstract, theoretical knowledges and analytical thinking. Conversely, during the longest part of their history, a human being depended on their capacity to acquire practical knowledges and skills. Furthermore, abstract thinking, in all of its forms, is a cultural adaptation to the modern, technologically developed society and the distribution of knowledge and technologies is not equal in the world. The

skills of abstract and analytical thinking are more used in developed economies than in the rest of the world²⁰.

Statistics about poverty and school results support the thesis that the outside factors, not the inherited ones, influence achievements. When we compare results of the 20% of the poorest pupils in Serbia with the results of the whole population, we can see that about 30% of children which are among the poorest were not able to acquire even the basic knowledge of mathematics and Serbian language after three years of elementary school while the percentage for the overall population is 10²¹. When we analyze the results of Roma pupils, the observations are even more devastating. About 50% of Roma pupils could not acquire basic knowledges and skills after three years of elementary school. After the third grade, Roma children had the same level of knowledge of mathematics and Serbian language as non-Roma children in the middle and at the end of the first grade.

Besides the social and cultural insensitivity, there are other factors that influence the results of the test and come from the testing situation. One of them is the expectation effect. The children are well aware of the prejudices against the Roma and they internalize them thus creating a bad image about themselves. Hence, the testing process becomes yet another confirmation of what is expected from them and that is to have

20 Sonja Pavlović, *Intelligence and Race – Pseudoscience and Racism*, 2013. Available at: <https://mindreadingsblog.wordpress.com/2013/07/02/inteligencija-i-rasa-pseudonauka-i-rasizam/>

21 Snežana Tovilović, Aleksandar Bauca, *Maturity Evaluation for School Enrollment: How to Approach the Issues of Maturity Evaluation and Adaptation of the Marginalised Children to School?*, Center for Applied Psychology, Belgarde, 2007.

worse achievement than the others. Some researches show to which extent the expectation effect is real: they controlled the expectation impact which resulted with marginalized groups having the same score as other groups²². The same happens with the stereotype that women are worse than men when it comes to mathematical and spatial skills (intelligence tests used to record this regularly). When the instruction did not specify which skill it aimed to measure, it turned out that there were no differences between examinees of different races, ethnicities or sex. The differences disappeared when none of the exams had pre-formed expectations about success during the completion of tasks. Likewise, the research showed that the expectations from Roma children in schools in Serbia are lower than the expectations from other children. Besides lower expectations, the teachers give Roma children considerably less homework or feedback about their work including suggestions about what they should improve and work on²³. In our schools, the teaching staff less frequently supports and incites Roma pupils which further impedes their educational progress.

We should not forget that, besides the primary school enrollment, the psychological tests are also a diagnostic tool in hospitals and medical institutions, as well as a selection tool for job interviews and human resource management. It is, therefore, important to talk about this subject, work on demystification of psychological tests and develop a certain level of criticism.

22 Aronson, J., Quinn, D. M., & Spencer, S. J., *Stereotype Threat and the Academic Underperformance of Minorities and Women*. In: *Prejudice*, 1998, p. 83-103.

23 Baucal, A., *Development of mathematical and language literacy among Roma students*. In: *Psychology*, 39(2), 2006, p. 207-227.

This is particularly important when we take in consideration the attention and credibility that society gives to certain experts in this field who form their expert opinions solely on the basis of test results which are often main factors in defining an individual.

By introducing inclusion in the public education and adopting the new *Law on the Fundamentals of Education System* in Serbia in 2009, the perspective has shifted in observation of intellectual capacities, hence the context, as well as environment and conditions in which a child is growing, became more important when analysing the results of the preschool test of children from minority groups. The procedures for school enrollment of Roma children now include affirmative measures. According to the Law, children from the vulnerable groups can enrol without necessary documentation or after the legal age limit, due to illness or other reasons. Those children can take tests after they enrol and it is possible for them to do it in their mother tongue. If it is necessary, the school can initiate an individual education plan or insist on providing additional educational support²⁴. Nevertheless, these measures are not without issues. For example, it is possible to enrol a Roma child without personal documents only at the beginning of the school year, because the parents have to provide it before the end of the school year. Without the documents (child's birth certificate and parents' proof of residence), a child cannot obtain a schooling certificate at the end of the school year. Parents

24 The Team for Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction and the government of the Republic of Serbia, *Analysis of the implementation of Affirmative Measures in Education of the Roma and Recommendations for Advancing the Measures, 2016*

can get support in collecting documentation, but only from the non-governmental organization²⁵ and not from the state institutions. Moreover, creating a personal education plan for children who need adapted school requirements, is not followed by financial and professional support for the implementation. Besides, the number of expert assistants in schools is constantly decreasing, while the number of children who need a personal education plan is increasing. Thus, the education becomes entirely a responsibility of teachers who work in parallel with the child who needs support and all the other pupils in the class. Such conditions result with considerably lower quality of education. The affirmative measures often seem to stop at words which provide extra points to the state for implementation of inclusion in education. Inclusion does not mean a mere affirmative enrollment. Implementing affirmative measures without structural changes of the inequality does not contribute to a change.

A conversation with one pedagogical assistant from an elementary school in Novi Sad²⁶ gives us a clearer image of additional difficulties caused by the current epidemiological situation and the organization of school classes that go to the detriment of the Roma. She underlines that the after school care is very important for Roma children because they can get help with homework and studying. However, during the epidemic, the official decision is that only the children whose both

25 As an example, the Ecumenic Humanitarian Organisation translates the documents of the Roma children from abroad; the Organisation Praxis helps obtain birth certificates of persons born in Kosovo, etc.

26 Zorica Kalanjoš, pedagogical assistant in the elementary school *Dušan Radović* in Klisa (Novi Sad).

parents work can attend after school activities. It is obvious that this is an opportunity lost in advance for Roma children, because their family structure most often includes a stay-at-home mother and a father who is working. In any case, how can Roma parents provide an employment certificate when most of them work without being legally employed and, in the conditions of epidemic, such work becomes uncertain and/or implies a high risk of infection. If a formally employed worker gets sick, their employer will have a legal obligation to pay 65% of the salary while for those who work informally such an issue means an automatic loss of income. In such conditions, parents who are struggling to provide for their families do not have the means to study with their children and follow their school requirements. As for the distance education and online lessons, which are out of reach for many Roma, an additional problem is organization of communication with teachers. Concretely, in the part of the city in which the assistant works, it has been decided that the parents should send their child's homework to a Viber application group, which requires owning a smartphone. If they do not have such a mobile phone and cannot find another solution, she personally goes to the settlement and visits the children. Basically, everything depends on the good will and financial situation of the individuals who choose to work on fostering inclusion of the Roma children in the educational system during the epidemic.

Negative opinions about the capacities of the Roma are in the core of many prejudices. The ideology that makes it impossible to understand the Other and exit an egocentric position, as well as the system that celebrates individuality and compe-

tition, perceive the Roma as those who have weaker skills, not merely different. Additionally, the problem does not lie in the lack of motivation of the Roma to get an education even though they are frequently accused of it. The Roma want to get an education but, besides poverty and external obstacles, they experience restraint because of discrimination, hidden or less hidden prejudices and bad treatment that comes from their teachers and peers. In the past, most of the Roma children who enrolled in school said that they prefer going to special schools “because their friends were there” which tells us a lot about how strongly the environment makes them feel unwanted. There is a whole series of psychological issues that results from this sense of not belonging: feeling inadequate, incompetent, low self-esteem, fears, helplessness, and sense of low or no control over one’s success, to name just a few²⁷.

The myths about the Roma culture: their “constant poverty”, “lack of interest in education”, “laziness”, etc., diminish or completely eliminate responsibility of the state in creating and maintaining socio-economic inequalities. Thus the things remain essentially the same despite the inclusion and affirmative measures.

The complex dynamics of society and power can explain the segregation in schools. The most important role of the racialized, ethnicized and gendered segregation in public education is the institutionalization of the division between white middle class majority and marginalized, socially vulnerable Roma, which further strengthens hierarchical relations and inferior

27 Jelena Savić, *A Roma Women’s View on Ivory Tower*, 2017. Available at: <http://proletter.me/portfolio/pogled-romkinje-na-kulu-od-slonovace/>

position of the biggest part of the Roma population. The segregation in the area of public education reconstructs and perpetuates the structures of social inequality whose roots can be explained by the special relation of racism and capitalism. Namely, capitalism implies exploitation which has to reside on someone's "lesser value" and consequently the lesser value of their labour²⁸. Racialized, ethnicized, gendered and other criteria further reinforce the notion of "lesser value". It is, thus, more profitable for the capital if other cultures or skin colours exist, and if it is easier to oppress them and exploit their work on that basis. Racism is inherent to capitalism and enables the survival of that system by the means of diverse discriminatory policies which influence public education as well.

28 Ana Simona Zelenović, *The Roma and Racism*, 2020. Available at: <https://re-marker.media/drustvo/romi-i-rasizam/>

– **Gender-Based (Im)Balance in Roma Families: a Matter of Conviction or Something Else?**

Feminist struggles toward a more egalitarian system have resulted with, at least some, victories and values which helped the current generation of parents to have different expectations regarding new ways of family life and parenthood, including shared responsibilities for raising children and household work as well as questioning the traditional ideas about bringing up boys and girls differently. The shift towards a more egalitarian set of values is an important framework which makes it possible to envisage and create a context for equal opportunities for boys and girls, as well as for development of a behaviour based on respect and equality for future generations of men and women.

The gender-balanced family environment is the one that is based on development of roles and family dynamics on interests, agreements, skills and respect, as opposed to predeter-

mined division based on stereotypical expectations. Besides sharing the responsibilities for children and the household, such a definition of a gender-balanced environment encompasses the opportunities that boys and girls have for participation in family life.

Nevertheless, the research results show that, in the general population in Serbia, the share of household work between men and women dominantly corresponds to the stereotypical gender roles, and that such dynamic shows a stability regardless of the development phase of the family or the age of parents. (Mihić, Mihić, Kamenov, Jelić, Huić, 2013). An interesting result of this research is that, even when both partners express egalitarian opinions, the household work share remains as described above. (Mihić, Filipović, 2012). Irrespective of whether we describe the gender balance through communication between father and mother, their involvement in taking care of children, educational behaviour, self-evaluation of competencies for raising children or inclusion in raising children, the father is perceived as cold, distanced, traditionally engaged in providing financial means for the family and, generally, less involved and skilled in the parent role in comparison to the mother. (Petrović, 2007; Mihić, 2010)

As the research results show for the general population (Petrović, 2007; Mihić, 2010; Mihić, Filipović, 2012; Mihić, Mihić, Kamenov, Jelić, Huić, 2013), in Roma families as well, women dominantly still have an inferior position in comparison to men, which is visible from several aspects including paid and unpaid work, experiences with violence and abuse, health issues, etc. Gendered or gender-based division of household

work remains asymmetric and results with the woman taking care of the children and the household while the man is in charge of providing for the family. Such work division results with gender-imbalanced positions and unequal involvement of the parents in taking care of their children. On the basis of the above described imbalanced position, there are convictions about “mothers being better prepared” and stereotypes about gender roles. On the other hand, there are often the prejudices (seemingly harmless) which result with a perception of the other gender (in this case – women) as weaker and, consequently, less able to participate in some aspects of the family and social life. In most of the families, including Roma families, there are still significant differences in the upbringing of girls and boys.

Besides, this inequality manifests itself in the aspect of unequal approach to education as well as in employment opportunities. The consequences of the above described inequalities limit children’s development and perpetuate gender-based inequality throughout their adulthood and whole life.

Still, is it only about a subjective sphere of convictions, attitudes, opinions, prejudices, stereotypes and wrong images or is there another reason for this asymmetry? And what happens with the women in the formal sphere of labour?

We can also explain women’s economic position by the effects of discrimination and the fact that the employers hesitate to hire women because they suppose women will someday become mothers (and that implies paid maternity leave and other benefits which are not profitable *from the perspective of capital*) and they expect that women will have much more family

obligations than men²⁹. Yet, this is not only about prejudices, stereotypes, preconceived images and personal convictions of the employers. This is about economic coercions, which are the motor of the capitals system of production.

Therefore, besides the effects of different prejudices and traditional convictions about gender roles, it is clear that the inferior position of women is essentially embedded in the capitalist system, which actually prevents society from developing towards egalitarianism. The capitalist world in which we live, besides class, racial and other inequalities, also functions through gender-based inequality, with the aim of making profit. From the beginning of capitalism to modern times, although with slight variations, the system maintains itself through a divide to a sphere of production and a sphere of reproduction, with the latter being reserved for women. A strict separation of these spheres and different constraints (not only ideological but also institutional, legal, financial) “push” women where they allegedly belong: in the house, in the role of mother, in the sphere of unpaid work – which is supposed to be “naturally” female work – in the sphere of care which is presumedly inherently “female” sphere, etc. So, the consequence of such a system

29 „A common explanation for higher rates of unemployment and economic inactivity among women is discrimination, the reluctance of potential employers to hire women because of their family obligations, which is only partially the case. This explanation reduces the problem to employers’ personal level of humanist enlightenment, which often results in platitudes such as ‘promoting gender equality in the workplace’. It is difficult to believe in the success of actions that are inspired by this approach because they overlook the key obstacles to women’s equal access to labour market: the lack of affordable childcare and elderly care institutions, which will be discussed below. They cannot be reduced to employer prejudice alone.” (Cačić and Levačić, 2018: 12)

is that men are more frequently hired for jobs that are more profitable, more stable, with full-time working hours, and so on. Moreover, there are less chances that a man would use a leave to take care of children (even though he has a right to it, according to the *Law on Labour*), paternity leave, etc., because that would be impediment to profit as well as the workers' wages. From this perspective, the employer does not even have to have the convictions about inferior position of women, yet the needs of the market and competition force him to follow the logic of profit. Because otherwise he could go bankrupt. Some of the employers even offer contracts that make women commit to not having a child or a family in the near future. If the female employees act against the contract, the employer has an opportunity to fire them and thus avoid paying the worker's maternity leave.

The above interpretation of the position of women is particularly impotent when it comes to the Roma population. Often, the conclusions about the position of women are interpreted *ad hoc*: they are perceived as disaffected, uneducated, not involved, and so on. On the account of this, we can see efforts to raise the level of their motivation, education and, consequently, employability by deploying different activities, strategies, methods, and in different spheres, including the non-governmental organizations. Nonetheless, as we can see from the analysis above, in the labour market, women face predefined lines of gendered work divisions and roles which are established according to the system of production. All of this can be related to the expectations and personal prejudices about gender roles but is not primarily so.

Moreover, we can conclude the following: when it comes to interpretation and analysis of the (im)balanced position of women in Roma families, on the macro level we can observe economic relations that are the aorta of the capitalist system of production and then on the micro level we can see the consequence of gender-based prejudices and discrimination. Therefore, the subordinate position of Roma women is not just a matter of customs, traditions, wrong opinions, images, convictions, Roma culture, and so on, but is also deeply rooted in the economic organization of our societies. If we advocate and act for changes, it means that they have to be *systemic*, well planned and adapted to human needs – and not to the needs of profit.

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– The Left and the Roma

For the last few years, we have been able to see new forces on the regional political scene that are leaning towards the left, however weak they still might be. Considering the fact that the levels of corruption and crime in the whole region are still rising, while the media is facing pressure from the governing political parties, the need of creating left movements and political parties is even urgent. For many decades, the lack of left-wing political options is one of the main reasons why all of the democratic structures have been collapsing.

In the next few years, we can expect that these left-wing movements will take certain positions on the Serbian political scene, and thus the social field will slowly regain balance. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze the ways in which these movements could address the Roma minority question and the problems that characterize it.

The official census data show that around 147,000 members of the Roma ethnic minority live in Serbia, nevertheless, unofficially, that number is considered to be at least half a million. This fact is important because it shows that Roma minority is the most numerous one in the country. Although members of the Roma community are dispersed all over the country, they share the same problems which all sum up in extreme poverty.

The Roma in Serbia mostly live in 583 so-called substandard Roma settlements, segregated from the rest of the population, which is the first indicator of the level of discrimination that they are experiencing. Up to 43% of these settlements are informal settlements and slums, which do not have any infrastructure indispensable for a dignified life. About 44% of the settlements does not have any street infrastructure, 10% has no electricity and 30% does not have access to water³⁰.

The official data show that up to 59% of Roma who are able to work are unemployed, and as many as one third of all the registered Roma are social welfare recipients. The mortality rate for newborns in the Roma settlement is 13 in 1000 children, which is double of the rate in the rest of the population. 10% of Roma children are malnourished, 19% have growth issues and only 13% of them have received all the mandatory vaccines. Only 22% of Roma children enrol high school and 43% of Roma girls between the age of 15 and 19 drop out from school while in the rest of the population this percentage is only 4³¹.

30 Djordjević Aleksandar, *Substandard Roma Settlements in Serbia, Data Overview for 2016, Geographic Information System, OSCE Mission in Serbia, Belgrade, 2017.*

31 *The Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma in the Republic of Serbia for 2016-2025 Period.*

The statistics show the cruel living conditions of the Roma population as well as the complexity of the issues related to this minority. Every new political movement leaning towards the left-wing politics, whose priorities are social equality and security, would have to seriously address the Roma minority issues as well.

The first and absolutely indispensable condition for solving the Roma minority issues is including the Roma themselves in the movement. There is a significant number of Roma who for years have been working on these issues, mostly in the framework of the civil sector, and who want to be politically engaged. The new left-wing political movements should reach out to these activists and give them the opportunity to participate in the new movements from their beginnings as well as address the issues of the Roma ethnic minority as a part of essential questions. Moreover, a certain responsibility is on the behalf of the Roma movements who up to now had to gain the awareness that they cannot expect solutions for Roma ethnic minority issues from the right-wing and neoliberal political options. The former are led by hate for different cultures and people while the latter, contrary to their advocating for equality and different identity rights, propagate a political system whose existence is based upon exploitation of the poorest strata of society – hence both sides will be satisfied only if the Roma remain poor.

Considering how complex the issues of Roma community in Serbia are, it is necessary to define those that we should urgently address: undoubtedly the ones related to living conditions, the question of labour and employment; the question of housing and the question of education.

The question of labour and employment has to be the priority for the leftist movements because all the other issues are,

for the most part, a consequence of unemployment. When it comes to employment of the Roma, we need to address two things: solving the status of the secondary raw material collectors and hiring the Roma in the public sector.

The biggest percentage of Roma women and men, as well as children, collect secondary raw materials for living. This job is often the only source of income for many Roma families. Even though they provide up to 75% of the raw materials for the recycling industry of Serbia, which makes them the basis of it, the industry does not recognize the Roma collectors and their work is completely invisible and extremely underpaid. Given that recycling is considered to be the industry of the future, a possible solution to this issue that the left-wing movements can propose is the strengthening of public utility companies which would organize recycling under the state umbrella while secondary raw material collectors should be an integral part of this solution³².

We do not know the exact number of the Roma who work in the public sector, yet we do know that the percentage is very small in comparison with the percentage of the Roma citizens in the overall population (approximately 2%). It is important to underline that there are jobs in the public sector that do not require a high education level, such as maintenance and cleaning, therefore the level of education is not a valid excuse for exclusion of the Roma from the public sector.

As for the housing, first we need to analyze the above facts about the conditions of Roma settlements and then to take certain measures for solving these issues systemically. This should

32 Robert Kasumović, *How to Unionize the Invisible Workers?* Web portal *Mašina*, October 22nd 2019. Available at: <https://www.masina.rs/?p=11217>

comprise legalisation of houses, which would later open the space to a possible infrastructure improvement. It is necessary, above all, to work on solving the utility infrastructure problems and provide access to water and electricity.

Education is an indispensable precondition for the advancement of any social group, the Roma community included. Taking into account the situation of Roma minority education, it would be good to maintain or re-implement the measures that existed during the *Roma Decade* (such as affirmative action measures in university admissions, scholarships for pupils and students, etc.) Regarding education, as well as other areas that we mentioned, it is essential to pay special attention to Roma women and girls. They are exposed to double discrimination: being Roma and being women. Therefore, it is imperative to help them additionally, first and foremost with education and employment.

If Roma activists succeed in imposing these questions as an essential part of a political program of some new left-wing movement which would show a potential for a future participation in political struggle, this would be a significant political success – for the movement as for the Roma who have been without representatives in political circles for a very long time.

The issues of the Roma national minority are political problems and they can be solved only by political engagement and equal participation of the Roma in the new, left-wing political movements. Alongside solving the problems of the majority population, these movements should also insist on solving the specific issues of Roma citizens. Only in this way would these movements be truly emancipatory and strive for equality of all the citizens.

– **Would Classifying Roma Intangible Cultural Heritage on the UNESCO List Help to Overcome the “Identity Crisis”?**

How to deal with the fact that the Roma consider me a *gadzo* (Serb, German, foreigner etc.) while non-Roma consider me a *gypsy*? This contradiction is often the very essence of the “identity crisis” of young, educated Roma.

Who am I? What makes me different? These are the questions that I have encountered frequently in my life. I grew up in a musical family whose members have only elementary school education. We have always spoken in parallel both Romani and Serbian language, and in the Roma mahala (settlement) where we lived (with both Serbs and the Roma) the traditions and customs were respected.

When I started elementary school, I was ashamed of my mother tongue and would not speak it outside of home. Same goes for Roma music. Whenever my parents would call me on the phone or talk with me outside of our home in Romani, I would answer in Serbian because I was ashamed. I was afraid

of jokes about the Roma language. This went on until I turned 16 and understood that those who do not accept my mother tongue do not accept me. That Romani was my language and I have been losing myself by being ashamed of who I am. However, many of my friends, educated Roma, have not yet overcome the “identity crisis”. In this text, I will try to link this crisis with the aspect of intangible cultural heritage, to raise some questions along those lines and to seek to provide answers.

Do inclusion and socialization of the Roma mean that we should assimilate and forget everything that we have as our ethnic identity?

The General Convention of the United Nations Organization for Education, Science and Culture, UNESCO, on October 17th 2003, at its 32nd Session has recognized that the processes of globalization cause risks of losing values and the disappearance and destruction of intangible cultural heritage. Also, the convention adopted general resolutions: a) preservation and respect of intangible cultural heritage of communities, groups and individuals; b) raising awareness on local, national and international level of the importance of intangible cultural heritage and of the respect it should receive; c) fostering international collaboration and aid. There are five areas that form the field of intangible cultural heritage: a) oral traditions and expressions, including language; b) performing arts; c) knowledge and skills related to traditional arts and crafts; d) knowledge and practices related to nature and universe and e) social practices, customs and celebrations. (*Guidelines for Preserva-*

*tion of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Ethnically Mixed Regions 2020: 1)*³³

Every country that has ratified the Convention should undertake the necessary measures to protect intangible cultural heritage on its territory as well as identify, define and promote different elements of intangible cultural heritage in collaboration with communities, groups and relevant non-governmental organizations. Serbia currently has 49 intangible cultural heritages on its national list. Three of them are recognized by UNESCO (*slava* – saint’s patron day, *kolo* dance and singing to the accompaniment of the *gusle* instrument) while the fourth is in the process of recognition. As one of the elements of the National Registry, the 49th and final one, there is a Roma custom *Tetkica Bibija* – a celebration of *Aunty Bibia’s* day³⁴.

Is it that the Roma do not have other intangible cultural goods or that cultural institutions have not sufficiently researched and recognized other elements?

Marriage ceremonies, religion, language, music, customs, arts, etc. – these are all unexplored fields of the Roma culture. In the process of “socialization, inclusion and globalization” many elements of the Roma culture are being forgotten, and Roma people assimilate into other cultures. Young and educated Roma often lack information about their own culture and do not have enough written sources about the intangible cultural

33 *Guidelines for Preservation of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Ethnically Mixed Regions 2020*. Available at: <http://biblioteka-np.org.rs/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Smernice-za-zastitu-nematerijalnog-nasledja.pdf>

34 The Aunt Bibia is a religious holiday celebrated by the Roma who are Orthodox Christians.

heritage of the Roma. Yet, they often reject their intangible cultural heritage because of discrimination, which further deepens the “crisis” of the identity.

Music and dance are characteristic for the Roma, however, not because we are talented or because that would be an immanent Roma characteristic but because we try and invest our efforts to practice them.

In December 2017, the traditional folk dance *kolo* was included on the National list. Question then arises: could this cultural heritage be something that represents the Roma community on the UNESCO list as well? Maybe the Roma do not have specific arts, crafts and customs (marriage rituals, funerals, celebrations of childbirth, etc.) although this area is not sufficiently researched, nevertheless, in my opinion, we do have specific melodies and dances.

Namely, in practice, there are three specific Roma steps in the *kolo* dance (Hora), depending on the rhythm, in southern Serbia, and it is possible that there are at least two more in the other parts of Serbia, because of the specificity of rhythm and melodies. One of those *kolo* dances is Sasujak's horo (the *kolo* of the mother-in-law, generally recognizable as a dance from Vranje region). Most of the Roma marriage celebrations starts with this horo (step), the rhythm is $\frac{7}{8}$ and there are two melodies. The first melody is composed on the basis of Gypsy Scale and its author is unknown, while the second has the basis of regular minor and was recorded by the orchestra of Baki Bakić. This *kolo* dance is specific because all of the members of a household perform it, led by the mother-in-law to start the celebration.

The Roma ethnic minority has its institutions which are active in the field of culture, such as Roma Ethnic Council, the Museum of Roma culture in Belgrade and the Roma Cultural Centre in Niš. Of these institutions, only the Museum has succeeded in listing *Tetkica Bibija* – Aunty Bibia day celebration – in the list of intangible cultural heritage of Serbia but not on the UNESCO list. What are the Roma institutions doing to further develop Roma cultural identity? Knowing that there are grounds for including other intangible cultural heritage in the UNESCO list, I wonder if those are the institutions that should handle this task?

In conclusion, apart from the problems of social inclusion of the Roma, their discrimination and marginalization in the areas of labor and education as well as the burning housing issues, it seems to me that the problems in the field of culture also contribute to the “identity crisis” of the young Roma. Perhaps it would be easier for the young to overcome this crisis, if strengthening of the culture would become a more important matter. To date, we do not have any intangible cultural heritage on the UNESCO list, not even a standardized language even though 80% of it is understandable to all. It seems to me that preservation of the intangible Roma cultural heritage could be at least one step towards overcoming crisis.

Multiple Oppressions of Transgender Roma

We live in a society in which differences exist, seemingly in conflict. It is not the same whether you are a man, a woman or a gender non-conforming person; a Roma or a Serb; whether you have a homosexual or heterosexual orientation; and particularly whether you are rich or poor. Regarding the fact that we live in a capitalist world, these asymmetries in the differences are nothing new, because capital motivates and regenerates them, be it directly or indirectly. Yet, capital does not affirm the differences in the direction of freedom but uses identity and class differences as ways of subordination and exploitation for its own purposes, namely a constant increase of profit.

We know that the Roma community in Serbia is marginalized, however, there is generally no talk about the oppression of its members who are being discriminated against on the basis

of other identities, above all sex/gender and sexual orientation. In order to better understand how the diverse forms of oppression intertwine in the case of persons who identify as trans and Roma with regards to whether they live in substandard settlements or belong to the middle class, we will start with mapping the basic terms for thinking through these differences.

When we talk about gender identification, we should first-ly mention the difference between the sex and the gender. As is commonly considered, the sex refers to biological characteristics (internal and external sex organs, sex chromosomes, hormonal status, and, starting from the puberty, secondary sex characteristics). Babies are assigned a sex right after birth, primarily based on their external sex organs. It is generally taken as a binary category, or male and female sex, nevertheless, medical research shows that there are many intersex variations³⁵. Therefore, it is of key importance to point out here that sex is not something natural, given and strictly binary because, as we have mentioned, the sex is *assigned* to babies right after birth. So, it is not *just* a matter of biology, but of a complex relation of the biological sphere and the sphere that *assigns* something, the *norms* which proscribe what is acceptable and normal and what is not. The matter in question is the relation to the social sphere that forms the sex of the newborn and turns the baby into a boy or a girl. Or, if there is an intersex variation of chromosomes and/or hormones which does not fit in the typical definitions of male/female body, the baby is forcibly categorized as one of the two. Hence, reducing the sex to biology en-

35 *Transition Guide for Transgender People in Serbia*, Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, September 2020.

tails a risk of falling into the biological essentialism and erases all those social layers of science/biology, which show how the category of “biological sex” was formed historically and in close connection with heteronormative and racist ideas about white supremacy³⁶.

From the other side, gender is generally considered as a social construct. It designates socially determined roles, behaviours, activities and attributes which a given society considers appropriate for women and men. Yet, the gender identity also designates a personal, internal sensation of a gender that can, but does not have to, be in accordance with the “biological sex” assigned at birth. In that sense, it is a personal perception of one’s own body, clothes, way of talking, gesticulation, etc. Therefore, the gender expression should be a way in which a person expresses their gender identification which they choose for themselves: if they have a possibility of choice. Still, sex/gender norms in capitalist societies are not something that a person can choose freely but are imposed according to the acceptable sex/gender constructs and roles.

In the real experience of people, sex and gender identities are much more diversified than the binary concept of rigid male and female categories comprehends. Thus, the gender identifications can be in accordance with the socially proscribed definitions but are not necessarily. Moreover, it is not always the case of inversion – meaning that the one born in what is commonly recognized as a “male body” feels as a woman or vice-versa.

36 See the text: *J.K. Rowling and the White Supremacist History of “Biological Sex”*. Croatian translation published by Slobodni Filozofski, August 16th, 2020. Available at: <http://slobodnifilozofski.com/2020/08/j-k-rowling-i-bjelacka-supremacisticka-historija-biologskog-spola.html>

There are many identifications, as well as persons, who do not want to identify themselves in terms of gender. Those whose gender identity is different from the one assigned at birth are generally called trans persons. Nonetheless, since the variations and self-identifications are numerous, other terms are also used, such as “gender diverse”, “gender nonconforming” or “gender variant”.

Furthermore, sexual orientation refers to a sensation of emotional, affective and/or sexual attraction towards other people. Predominantly, four sexual orientations are mentioned: heterosexual (feeling attracted to members of the opposite sex/gender), homosexual (attracted to members of the same sex/gender), bisexual (attracted to the members of both opposite and same sex/gender) and asexual (not attracted to any sex/gender). Often, every sexual orientation different from the heterosexual one is designated with the term *queer*. Regarding the fact that sexuality is a complex phenomenon, there is a large number of sexual orientations with which persons identify themselves, such as, for instance, pansexuality, demisexuality, etc.

Since we live in an unfree, patriarchal and capitalist world in which the oppressions are also articulated on the basis of someone’s sex/gender identification as well as sexual orientation that differ from the ones proscribed, it is possible to talk about various forms of degradation, humiliation, marginalization, subordination, violence, etc. based on sex, gender and sexual orientation. In that sense, everyone who does not fit into the normative heterosexual binary division on male and female bodies – imposed as a naturally given as if humans were animals and not social beings – is being put in a subordinated po-

sition of the oppressed. As heterosexuality and the constructs of “masculinity” and “femininity” within it are imposed as the only acceptable options of the human affectivity and sexuality, this repressive mechanism of society is called *heteronormativity*. This means that heterosexuality is imposed as a norm and everything else is considered unacceptable, “unnatural”, “not-normal”, “deviant”.

Oppressions based on sex, gender and sexual orientation are manifold: oppressions of women, trans persons, *queer* persons, all those who are gender variant and do not fit into the classification of division and social roles imposed by capitalism. History shows that there is a strong connection between LGBTQ+ identities and capitalism³⁷ and that the struggles against these oppressions are tied to anticapitalist struggles.

Regarding sex/gender identifications, as well as sexual orientations, and sexism, misogyny and other oppressive mechanisms, it is useful to keep in mind another difference. Namely, trans theoretician Julia Serano used the notions *traditional* and *oppositional sexism* to explain how traditional sexism designates sexism against women while oppositional sexism designates sexism against all those who do not fit into the heterosexual and heteronormative binary scheme. According to oppositional sexism, there are two opposite sexes, male and female, which are taken as something natural, given and eternal, and everything that does not fall into those categories is perceived as not normal, an excess. Therefore, this sexism is

37 For more details about the American case, see the text: John D'Emilio, *Capitalism and Gay Identity*. Croatian translation published by Slobodni Filozofski, June 30th 2012. Available at: <http://slobodnifilozofski.com/2012/06/john-d-emilio-kapitalizam-i-gej.html>

not directed only against women but also against all those who do not fit into heteronormative classification: gay persons, lesbians, trans persons, gender variant / gender diverse persons, men who might not be gay but whose behaviour is “feminised”, *drag queens*, *drag kings*, etc. Marxist queer theoretician Holly Lewis³⁸ also uses this distinction which helps us further nuance some sexism, homophobe behaviours and in particular, transphobic behaviours and practices that might not always be very visible.

On the subject of *ethnic identifications*, they are not always clearly determinable, especially if we know that they can be entirely subjective. So, how can we define the Roma identity or how to define who are the Roma? “To say that I am Romani is a statement of my ethnic heritage; to say that I am a gypsy or a Gypsy may mean that I am a nomad, freespirted, a wandering musician or beggar. It may mean a lot of things, some offensive, some charming, some true and most false. Preferring a statement of ethnic identity to a set of stereotypes and myths, many Roma do not like to be called Gypsy. And now it gets confusing, because there are members of some other ethnic groups who are and indeed call themselves Gypsies. These people are nomadic, or at least their families once were, and they are called Gypsies. And they do not mind it³⁹.” The Roma ethnic identity is sometimes

38 See the interview with Holly Lewis, 49th episode of the series *Reframing*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cgw6tmeXF3U>

39 Jud Nirenberg (editor), *Gypsy Sexuality: Romani and Outsider Perspectives on Intimacy*, Serbian translation published by Rekonstrukcija Ženski Fond, Beograd, 2013, p. 13. Available at: <https://www.rwfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Seksualnost-cigana-O-intimnosti-romska-i-autsajderska-perspektiva.pdf>

constructed on the basis of the common origins, considered to be (at least partially) from ancient migrations from India, and mostly on the basis of the language, culture and traditions. Ethnic identity can be a subjective thing, a matter of choice – or, in any case, it should be. Nevertheless, this is not always a subjective definition, because the society stigmatizes certain persons as the Roma and treats them as second-class citizens. As the Roma are mostly poor, it is clear that they are marginalized on the basis of their ethnicity, which is not merely a matter of free choice.

This brings us to the notion of *class*. However, class is not determined on the basis of categories of the poor and the rich and even less the lifestyle and living standard, but as a position in the social system of production. Since the whole world lives in the capitalist production system (even when it is not named as one), this positioning refers to the relation between the capital and labour as well as to whether someone owns the means of production or is coerced to work for another to survive and through that work produces the surplus value for that other. In that sense, we most often talk about the working class and the capitalist class, but there are more nuanced classifications as well as the classes of the oppressed that cannot be easily classified as what is traditionally perceived as the working class. The poor Roma are often in a worse class position than workers because they are either unemployed or work in the informal sectors and survive on occasional jobs and activities, and most Roma frequently do not own any means of production or private property by which they could make their living. Nonetheless, it is important to underline that there are Roma who belong to the middle and higher class.

Being Roma, being trans and, on top of all, the lower class..

We have explained the above to point out the complexity of the oppression experienced by those who are oppressed on the basis of sex/gender, ethnic identification as well as class position. Certainly, the persons who experience multiple oppressions live them as their concrete experience, which is always more complicated than what an analysis can comprise and they do not perceive these distinctions as separate categories. They *live* their lives in those unjust relations.

For an analysis of the multiple oppressions of the Roma, we need data about this ethnic community which are usually very scarce (or can even be incorrect) and, moreover, when it comes to the gender and sex aspect the data is inexistent. Specifically, we still do not have any data about the Roma who identify as LGBTQ+ persons. The surveys have not been conducted on the territory of Serbia, therefore, we can only suppose how it is when you are simultaneously a member of the Roma and LGBTQ+ community and live in one of the five hundred sub-standard Roma settlements, relying on the experiences of the individuals from these backgrounds.

LGBTQ+ persons who live in the Roma settlements actually cannot freely express their identity (just as in all the other parts of the society) because the heteronormative constraints permeate this community as well. Someone who would “come out” as a trans person in such an environment runs the risk of judgement by their closest ones, denial, expulsion, and loss of financial and any other support. However, it is very important to understand that these intertwined identity-based margin-

alizations are very much conditioned by the class position. The members of the lower class simply have a more restricted choice. As we have seen, all of this is not a matter of choice in capitalist societies, not even gender.

If we define sex as something purely “biological”, it could seem that it is something that we cannot choose, which has the highest degree of coercion, which is given as it is and cannot be different. While if we determine the gender as something social, it could seem that it is entirely the matter of “choice”, because it simply is not tied to something so “solid” as a “biological body”: meaning that we might not be able to choose the body we will be born in, but we can choose the gender identification later on. Nevertheless, this is problematic. Is it possible, as an example, for a Roma woman – who lives in a substandard Roma settlement without water and basic amenities, in an extended family whose members are illiterate and have to do poorly paid jobs to survive – to choose her gender identity? So, saying that gender is socially determined does not mean that it is something that can be freely chosen, allegedly detached from anything “solid” and material – like biology, which is floating in air. It is there, in the sphere of social, that the *constraints* exist as well as the most material reality. The social is inextricably intertwined with material coercions! The material does not mean only “biological”, “physiological”, “genetic”, etc., *social relations* are material. This is what we really and concretely experience, including on our bodies and skins. Those are the constraints because of which we do not dare to come out or have any possibility to choose our gender identity because we risk not only being disregarded by our closest ones, or being beaten by the conservatives who cannot stand our chal-

lenging of the heteronormative roles, but we also risk not being able to get employment and make our living. So, the “social” in the definition of gender does not mean anything free and is not a matter of choice, because we do not live in a free society that would make this possible. Rather, the sphere of social in capitalism is a matter of both *constraint* and the sphere of material living conditions.

It is well known how transgender persons live in a heteronormative society. In Serbia, there is an anti-discrimination law (Article 13) that protects the rights of transgender persons as well as a legal provision about sex change, which came into effect on January 1, 2019 and enables transgender persons to change their sex identity on official documents after a hormonal therapy and/or after a sex reassignment surgery. However, the reality in which transgender persons live is completely different from the one ‘on the paper’ because, first of all, most of them cannot financially afford it. Furthermore, transgender persons experience discrimination when they try to get a job or rent an apartment precisely because they have not met the conditions for changing their sex on official documents (which is a long, exhausting, complicated and expensive process), and are forcefully ‘outed’ as trans because their documents do not match their identity. In addition, transgender persons who have successfully undergone a transition are also discriminated. According to the statistics: in Great Britain 43% of employers admits that they would not employ a transgender person⁴⁰,

40 “Half of those trans people who do manage to find employment have to hide the fact that they are trans – either they are closeted and unable to transition, or they transitioned some years ago and are able to hide their history (though unchangeable physical traits will permit only some trans people to do this). If

while in Ireland unemployment of transgender persons is 50%; in the USA, 14% of the transgender population is unemployed (which is double of the unemployment percentage in the rest of the population) and 44% are underemployed (doing manual work that is heavily underpaid⁴¹).

The discrimination against transgender persons is a constant in all capitalist societies, and when it goes together with discrimination on the basis of ethnicity as well as class position, it is obvious that, in Serbia, the discrimination of transgender Roma is very deeply rooted. It seems that, in this capitalist world, the only remaining option is a struggle in solidarity of those who are endangered and oppressed as well as their mutual support for survival in the system that mercilessly erases the differences: until we win the fight for a better world in which the differences will genuinely be a matter of choice!

you are in work and not hiding the fact that you're trans, you're at risk of workplace harassment, which can run from procedural injustice to verbal taunts or violence – one in eight British trans people have been physically attacked at work." Shon Faye, *The Fight for Trans Equality Must Be Recognised as a Class Struggle*, Croatian translation published by Slobodni Filozofski, December 31st 2018. Available at: <http://slobodnifilozofski.com/2018/12/borba-za-jednakost-trans-osoba-klasna-borba.html>

41 See: *Transgender workers at greater risk for unemployment and poverty*. Available at: <https://www.thetaskforce.org/transgender-workers-at-greater-risk-for-unemployment-and-poverty/>; as well as the video of the trans-activist Sonja Sajzor. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yiRmDf-BxAck&t=134s> During the Covid-19 pandemic these differences are even more pronounced, so in the USA: "319,800 transgender adults are immunocompromised and have one or more of the following conditions: asthma, diabetes, heart disease, or HIV; 217,000 transgender adults are 65 or older; 450,400 transgender adults could not go to the doctor last year because they could not afford it; 137,600 transgender adults do not have health insurance; and 667,100 transgender adults live below 200 percent of the poverty line." Kay Van Wey, *Trump's Anti-Trans Measures Protect Prejudice in Covid-19 Era*. Croatian translation published by Slobodni Filozofski, November 11th, 2020. Available at: <http://slobodnifilozofski.com/2020/10/trumpove-anti-trans-mjere-stite-predrasude-udoba-pandemije-covid-19.html>

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Bojana Krivokapić was born on March 15th, 1994. Bojana holds a doctoral degree from the Faculty of Technology in Novi Sad. She advocates for equal rights for all.

Jasmina Drmaku graduated from the Department for Finances, Banking and Insurance in Novi Sad, at the Faculty of Economics in Subotica. Her graduation thesis was an analysis of the direct foreign investments and their influence on the market in Serbia through privatization of the factories. She started

focusing on the Roma questions after studies of Romology at the Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad (Head of Department – Professor Svenka Savic). She has been active within *Roma Forum of Serbia* since the beginning of the political education workshops, at first as a participant, then as a panellist. Her writings mostly analyze the economic and political influence on the position of the whole community, the questions of employment, education, the position of the collectors of secondary raw materials and the economic impact on the culture and tradition of the Roma community. In the framework of collaboration with the *Roma Forum of Serbia*, she directly works with the Roma community on self-organizing and finding common solutions for advancing their overall position.

Jelena Savić holds a master's degree from the Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad. The main focus of her work is on social protection while other topics of interest are the question of the position, discrimination and economic and social rights of marginalized groups. She worked on the international project on migrations where she provided psychological support to unaccompanied minor migrants. As a volunteer of a non-governmental organisation, she worked on the program of support of early development of Roma children in informal settlements in Novi Sad. Working with primary and secondary school pupils, she gave workshops on the topic of destigmatization of people with mental health issues.

Miljana Marić Ognjenović holds a doctoral degree in social policy and social work from the Faculty of Political Sciences in

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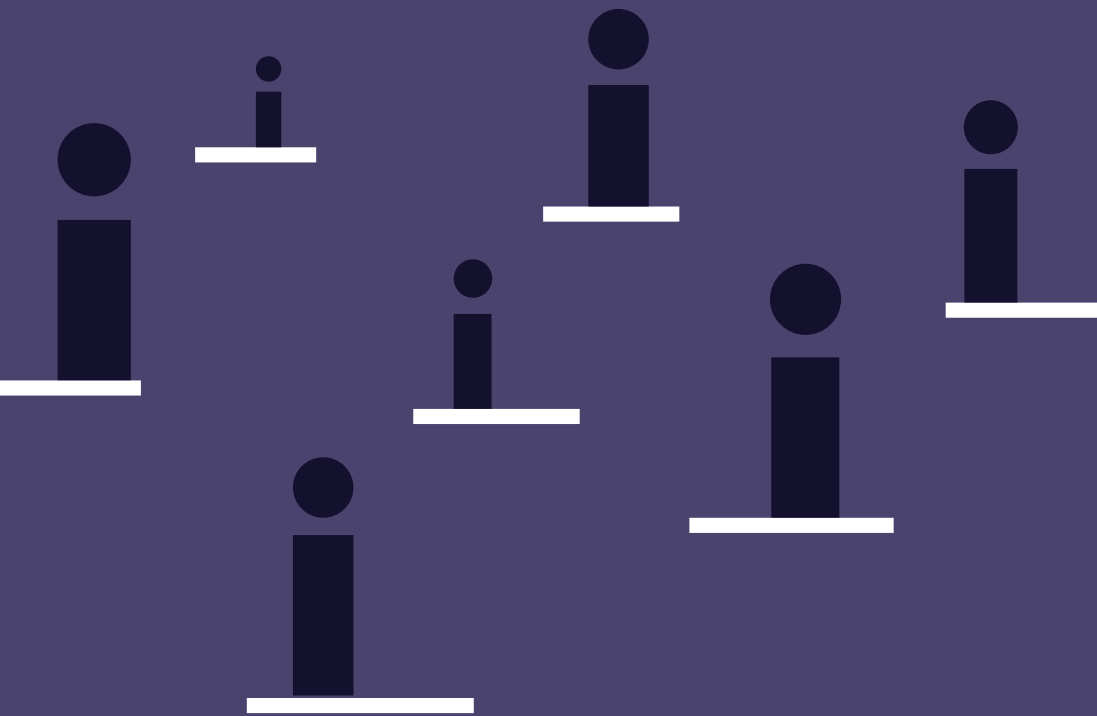
Robert Kasumović graduated from the Faculty of Medicine in Niš and holds a master's degree in pharmacy. He is an activist of the *Roma Forum of Serbia* and mostly works on political education projects. Robert also writes for the portal *Mašina*.

Iva Barčić was born on December 2nd, 1996 in Niš. He is a student of the final year at the Faculty of Arts in Niš, at the department for Wind Instruments – Clarinet. The city of Niš has awarded him many times for good results at national and international competitions for classic clarinetists. He lives in a Roma settlement, and is active in the Roma community where he fights on everyday basis against discrimination that its members experience. He also works on strengthening the Roma identity and culture of the Roma community, particularly through his work with youth in the *GRUBB Foundation* in Niš. Iva collects and records the intangible Roma cultural heritage, he is an author and music teacher. *Traditional and Old Roma Songs from Niš and Southern Serbia* is his first collection and he is currently collecting material for the second collection. He is the leader of *Very Naiss* orchestra that aims to preserve and promote Roma music with nuances of jazz, funk

and rock. He is interested in creating a new sub-genre in the electronic music *Gypsy House*. However, he does not forget the traditional sound and melodies, which will be dominant on the album that he is recording.

Paola Yo is a drag artist from Novi Sad. Since 2006, she has been an activist and volunteer in Roma non-governmental organization, currently a member of *Roma Forum of Serbia*. From the fall 2019, she has been a member of the organization *IZADJI* (Come Out) from Novi Sad and works on LGBTQ+ topics. Paola has participated in various projects, seminars and trainings to acquire knowledges and skills that help her support her community and fight for a better position in society for the oppressed.

Maja Solar holds a doctoral degree in Philosophy. Her research work focuses on political theory. She translates from English and French and writes poetry and prose. She is a member of the *Gerusia collective*, left-oriented theoretical and political organization, and one of the editors of the journal for theoretical practices *Stvar*. From 2015 to 2020, she worked as a translator for the Serbian edition of *Le Monde Diplomatique*. She published three books of poetry and with Jacques Lučić edits the poetry podcast *Puna usta poezije* (*Mouth Full of Poetry*). Maja is the author of more than thirty articles on social theory. Some of her fields of interest are Marxist-feminism, Marxist labour theory, history of socialism, property theories, luxury theories, social reproduction theory, gendered and racialised forms of violence, relation of the identity and class, etc. She fights for the Roma and other oppressed lives to matter.



Roma Forum of Serbia, 2020