LIBERAL MULTICULTURALISM IN KOSOVO; THE CRACKS AND LIMITS OF RECOGNITION

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Abstract:

In *Liberal Multiculturalism in Kosovo: The Cracks and Limits of Recognition*, I investigate how liberal multiculturalism in Kosovo masquerades as a form of national inclusion, facilitating the good feelings of the country while rendering racialized violence accidental– rather than generated by it. In conversation with activists and NGO workers for minority rights in Kosovo, I argue that discourses of tolerance and political racelessness converge to posit racialized violence as merely spectacular, a state of exception, and a matter of individual prejudice that depoliticize social inequality and divert energies from political solutions. I further highlight how liberal multiculturalism, in a context of promised but withheld whiteness, produces yearning and longing as affects of belonging, and actively perpetuates Western tutelage in Kosovo. Importantly, I borrow from Critical European Studies, Balkan Studies, and Transnational Feminist and Queer Theory to examine the fissures and cracks of multicultural governmentality to render visible certain kinds of racialized violence and join the call for cross-racial alliances as opposed to consolidation with axes of privilege– however tenuous these endeavors may be.

Introduction

”Is this man dressed as a woman kidnapping Albanian kids? Alarmed citizens…” “Men dressed as women have attempted to kidnap children in multiple municipalities of Kosovo,”[1] In May 2019, these were some of the headlines circulating on social media platforms, warning parents to look after their kids because allegedly, not one but multiple “men dressed as women” were kidnapping them in various cities of Kosovo. On May 23rd, the police identified her as a Roma Kosovar citizen who had been repatriated in 2011 from Belgium. Not many days later, the Roma woman was attacked in the city of Lipjan after which she was taken in by local authorities “for protection,” and was subsequently released. The Roma woman was assaulted again in the city of Ferizaj by an Albanian teenager which came across as particularly repugnant. Afterward, the police took in the Roma woman, who disappeared from the public eye, and no update has been issued ever since.

Various public figures were quick to denounce the act of violence. Vesel Makolli, the Social Work and Wellbeing deputy minister, pronounced the attack as a “barbaric act.” For him, the case must also be treated as exceptional, since it did not mirror the coexistence,

[1]Article headlines have been translated from Albanian by me.

tolerance, and generosity ostensibly present in Kosovo (KOHA 2019). He urged media outlets to stop sharing unverified news because it would negatively influence "the image of the country" (KOHA 2019). Another notable comment was from Blerta Deliu-Kodra, a parliament member, for whom the assault was a "vandal and racist act." She continued: "The fact that she is part of the Roma community makes the process even harder because institutions have tried repeatedly to prove that Kosovo is a country that respects its communities" (Anabel Magazine 2019).

Undeniably, the image of a "gender-bending" racialized foreigner, circulated by the media, engendered moral panic. The most salient moral panic here concerns the country's image: How could such an intolerant response to difference (Brown 2008) pass the scrutinizing gaze of Europe? How would this abhorrent act of racism make "us" look? After all, white Albanians are in the indefinite business of *proving* that Kosovo is a country that *respects* its communities, to use Deliu-Kodra's terms. Within public discourse, the assault against the Roma woman was condemned as a racist act within an otherwise tolerant and multicultural society. What is at stake here, in other words, is Kosovo's moral standing as tolerant/civilized (Brown 2008). Such moral standing, on the one hand, requires condemning intolerance as a discursive way of distancing oneself from it and on the other, demands depoliticizing racism by individualizing it. After all, a European country is simply "incapable" of racism (El Tayeb 2011). A dissonance occurs, I argue, when Kosovo strives for Europe through the pretense of liberal multiculturalism while Europeanness is relentlessly attached to the white/Christian body (El-Tayeb 2011). Indeed, the Roma woman's criminalization and subsequent assault urges us to think about how liberal multiculturalism makes certain kinds of violence seem accidental and not generated by it (Povinelli 2007). I therefore must ask: What work does liberal multiculturalism seek to carry out in Kosovo? For whom does it deliver its promise and at whose expense?

In this thesis, I investigate how liberal multiculturalism in Kosovo masquerades as a form of national inclusion (Puar 2007), facilitating the "good feelings" of the country while rendering certain forms of racialized violence merely accidental. Following Piro Rexhepi's (2023) work on the Euro-Atlantic enclosure and how it seeks to "redeem" Albanian whiteness, I situate liberal multiculturalism within larger histories of Albanian racial realignments with Europe. This racial realignment, I argue, is premised on racialized hierarchies that drive Albanian "ascendancy to whiteness" (Puar 2007)– insofar as they fully rid themselves of everything "oriental" and demonstrate a capacity for multicultural tolerance; virtues they ostensibly fail to uphold.

In conversation with activists, NGO workers, lawyers, institutional representatives, and artists concerned with minority rights, I contend that multicultural governmentality solicits "professing selves" (Najmabadi 2013), a burden placed exclusively on racialized minorities by way of discursive projection/deflection of racialized difference across majority/minority divides. The goal, I argue, is to demarcate racialized minorities as non-Albanian/non-white. In this essay, I hold that discourses of tolerance (Brown 2008) and political racelessness (El-Tayeb 2011) converge to posit racialized violence as merely spectacular, a state of exception, and a matter of individual prejudice that depoliticize social inequality and divert energies from political solutions. Therefore, I aim to highlight how liberal multiculturalism, in a context of promised but withheld whiteness, never "rewards its captives," produces yearning and longing as affects of belonging (Puar 2007), and actively perpetuates Western tutelage in Kosovo (Rexhepi 2023). Importantly, I examine the fissures and cracks of multicultural governmentality to render visible certain kinds of racialized violence and join the call for cross-racial alliances as opposed to consolidation with "axes of privilege" (Puar 2003); however tenuous these endeavors may be.

Historical Background

In this section, I highlight post-Ottoman and (post)socialist histories of racialization in Kosovo, to situate liberal multiculturalism as part of a larger context of racial realignment with whiteness and longer histories of Western tutelage in Kosovo. In October 1912, the irreversible demise of the Ottoman Empire was followed by the first Balkan War, in which Greeks, Serbs, Montenegrins, and Bulgarians united to dismantle the empire (Elsie viii) and re-Europeanize the Balkans (Rexhepi 14). During the post-Ottoman wars of independence, the region also emerged within the Western imaginary as Europe's internal other, incapable of transcending their own "essence:" "Ancient ethnic hatreds" that were to be "revived" during the breakdown of Yugoslavia (Gagnon 196). Between 1912 and 1913, the Great Powers[2] delineated the frontiers of the newly independent Albanian nation-state, which left out half of the Albanian-speaking territories (Elsie ix). Since the Serbian Army had occupied Kosovo in the post-Ottoman moment, the Conference of Ambassadors internationally recognized Kosovo as part of the Kingdom of Serbia (ix). On 28 June 1389, a coalition of Balkan forces led by the Serbian prince Lazar had lost the battle of Kosovo against the Ottoman Turks. Therefore, Kosovo's subsequent recuperation and colonization was narrated as a Serb post-Ottoman Reconquista; a realignment with Europe/whiteness (Rexhepi 14; Jovanović 95).

In *The Bridge Betrayed: Religion and Genocide in Bosnia* (1996), Michael Sells argues that within Serbian national mythology, the death of Prince Lazar in the battle of Kosovo marked the end of Serbian independence and the beginning of five centuries of Ottoman rule (98). 19th-century Serbian nationalist literature represented him as a Christ figure and his death as one of the Serb Orthodox nation (Sells 99). For the author,

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[2]In the Conference of Ambassadors in London, Austra-Hungary, Russia, Italy, Germany, France, and Britain decided on the future of the five Albanian *vilayets* (Ottoman regions/provinces) which largely undermined local agency and aspirations.

Christo-Slavism, the idea that Slavs are by essence Christian, was premised on the logic that conversion to Islam constituted race betrayal and those who converted to Islam race traitors and Christ-killers. It therefore set Slavic Muslims (Muslim Bosnians) outside the contours of nation, race, and people (Sells 51).

When Kosovo was "at last liberated" by the Serbian Army from the Ottomans, during the inter-war (1918-1945) and socialist periods, Serbia colonized Kosovo by pushing Muslim Albanians out and bringing Christian Serbs and Montenegrin settlers in.[3] In 1974, Josip Broz Tito abandoned the colonization of Kosovo and granted it the status of an autonomous province. While still a part of Serbia, Kosovo had an equal vote in the Yugoslav presidency as other federal members: Slovenia, Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, Croatia, and Montenegro (Sells 54). In 1986, Serb nationalists and clerics alleged that Albanians were perpetrating genocide against Kosovo Serbs with constant reference to a "dirty demographic war for an ethnically pure Kosovo" of high Albanian birthrates, targeted rape of Serb girls and women by Albanian men (Sells 55), and of vandalizing Serb heritage sites. In April 1987, Serb President Slobodan Milosevic was invited to hold a speech in Fushë Kosova (where the prince-Christ Lazar had died), to address the alleged brutality by the Albanian-dominated police against Kosovo Serbs (Sells 67). Ironically, while Kosovo Albanians consisted of eight percent of the Yugoslav population, they accounted for seventy-five percent of its political prisoners (Sells 57).[4]

June 18, 1989, marked the 600th death anniversary of Prince Lazar where one to two million Serbs had gathered to commemorate the battle of Kosovo and honor "the martyrs" i.e. those who had fallen protecting the nation against Islam in 1389. Milosevic returned to

[3]The colonization and "Serbification" of Kosovo, among other means, entailed the expulsion of Muslim Albanians to Turkey under the guise of "transferring Turkish populations" out of Yugoslav territories (Ukshini 240).

[4]Among them was also my paternal grandfather, Adem Demaçi, who served twenty-eight years in various Yugoslav prisons.

re-invoke nationalist mythologies and explicitly referenced the Kosovo battle as an endeavor "... to defend Europe from Islam, that Serbia was the bastion of European culture and religion, and that Serbia's future actions [genocide] would demonstrate that now as in the past, Serbia was always part of Europe" (Sells 122). Yugoslav Muslims, both Bosnian and Albanian, stood to symbolize the Ottoman Turks, the killers of the Christ-prince Lazar, and as such the archetypal threat to Christian Europe. The battle of Kosovo, the heart of this mythical wound, would be vengefully remembered in the genocidal offensives both in Bosnia and Kosovo and invoked as a civilizational cautionary tale in the name of Europe. The symbolism of Islam attached to Muslim Albanians is re-invoked today to posit Albanian racial re-alignment with whiteness as a pre-requisite to their European belonging and to characterize Europe's standing towards them as one of relentless caution.

1989, was also the year that Kosovo's autonomous province status was forcefully revoked. The decision was met with protests and demonstrations which only intensified with what followed. Some of the repercussions were: The suppression of the Albanian newspaper *Rilindja*, radio and TV stations, the closing of the University of Prishtina, the segregation of primary and high schools, and *de facto* segregation of the public space (Ukshini 262). In September 1990, Kosovo unilaterally declared independence which garnered no international recognition but planted the seeds for underground parallel structures[5] until the break-out of armed conflict between the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), a guerilla group, and the Yugoslav Army. After failing to garner generative peace talks, NATO[6] launched a "humanitarian intervention," bombing what was left of Yugoslavia (Serbia, Kosovo, Montenegro) from March to June 1999.[7]

[5]3,200 private homes, garages, and basements turned into improvised schools as parallel structures. My maternal grandfather, Ibrahim Gashi, was also part of this endeavor, whose home served as a music school for eight years.
[6]The North Atlantic Treaty Organization defines itself as a guardian of its member states through political and military means. Some known members are: France, Germany, the U.S, and the U.K

[7]The media representation of Muslim Albanians as white victims to be rescued from ethnic cleansing, served to legitimate the Euro-American military intervention, their interests in the region. It also elided the post-Cold War austerity measures, debt, and hyperinflation that actively destabilized the region (Kozol 2004).

Immediately after, the UN Security Council's Resolution 1244 placed Kosovo under international military structures (KFOR) and civilian administration (UN Mission in Kosovo). Protecting the human rights of all inhabitants of Kosovo, ensuring the safe return of refugees and displaced peoples, and overseeing the development of democratic institutions were among the main responsibilities of the international civilian mission in Kosovo (UN Security Council 1999, art. 10 -11). However, in "Between Competing Imaginaries of Statehood: Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian (RAE) Leadership in Newly Independent Kosovo" (2012), Nando Sigona argues that the international commitment to multi-ethnic co-existence in Kosovo had the contradictory effect of nearly complete segregation between Kosovo Albanians and Serbs, while non-Serb minorities (Bosniaks, Croats, Gorani, Roma, Ashkali, Egyptians, and Turks) were disproportionately excluded politically, socially, and economically (1215). In his article, "Roma of Kosovo: the Forgotten Victims," Kosovo Roma journalist Orhan Galjus claimed that between the Serbian state and the Albanian clandestine parallel structures " Roma lost the fight for time and space which would let them get politically organized in Kosovo." They were between two fires (The Patrin Web Journal 1999). Sigona therefore argues that the Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptians of the post-war moment, were also the "forgotten citizens" of the newly independent Kosovo.

On February 17, 2008, when Kosovo unilaterally declared independence under international supervision, the "Comprehensive Proposal for Kosovo Status Settlement" (UN Security Council 2007), prepared by Martii Ahtisaari, provided an authoritative blueprint for what was to become Kosovo's Constitution. According to the Ahtisaari Plan, Kosovo shall be a multi-ethnic society (Art. 1.1); "have its own, distinct, national symbols, including a flag, seal, and anthem, reflecting its multi-ethnic character" (Art. 1.7); and ". . . shall guarantee the protection of the national or ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity of all Communities and their members" (Art. 3.2). For Sigona (2017), the emphasis on the

importance of minority and human rights, and multiculturalism, posit Kosovo as a product of internationalized state-minority relations (1216).[8]

Ultimately, a transhistorical discourse about ancient ethnic hatreds, the Kosovo War (1998-1999), and post-war anti-minority violence informed a cunning rationale that a multicultural Kosovo, under Western tutelage, would be the only viable solution. This project aims to render strange this so-called solution and its ability to actually deliver a more inclusive Kosovo, especially given the historical white anxiety engendered by the "Ottoman intrusion" of Europe (Asad 162; Rexhepi 13), its after-lives, and the West's relentless need to redeem Albanian whiteness, or rather, to *contain* their "otherness" (Asad 171).

Literature Review & Theoretical Frameworks

In *European Others* (2011), race, ethnicity, and migration studies scholar, Fatima El-Tayeb argues that migrants and their contested ability to integrate, have been at the center of public policy and debate since their post-war arrival in the 1950s (xii). The terms of debate, however, have scarcely changed and focus on the moment of their arrival and on "what if" scenarios: What was to happen to Europe if they were to stay? (xii). For El-Tayeb, The discursive focus on the moment of arrival produces a divide between (white) Europeans and migrants (of color) and renders invisible native minorities of Europe (xxii). Europeans who possess visible markers of Otherness (xxii), therefore, remain as "eternal newcomers "(xxv); always external/unfamiliar to Europe (xxvii). This European form of racialization or "political racelessness," the author argues, is the coexistence of a continent-wide regime of recognized visual markers that construct "non-whiteness as non-Europeanness" with a discourse of colorblindness that "claims not to "see" racialized difference" (xxiv). "Political

[8]When international organizatons such as the UN develop conceptual and narrative frameworks about what the "problems" and "solutions" are, is what Will Kymlicka calls the internationalization of state-minority relations (2007).

racelessness" is not the absence of racial thinking, but rather, the negation of it (xxviii). It is constitutive of what "Europe" means today: "[T]hough rarely mentioned, race is present whenever Europe is thought" (xxv).

In "Muslims as a "Religious Minority" in Europe" (2003), anthropologist of Europe, religion, and secularism, Talal Asad further argues that the Turkish "assault" against Europe holds particular salience in the construction of Europe: "Historically, it was not Europe that Turks threatened, but Christendom" (162). Christian history, enshrined as the foundation of an ancient European identity, is thus re-invoked in narrative form to posit Muslims as external to the essence of Europe (165). Muslims already in Europe may assimilate into European civilization once they rid themselves of what they ". . . regard (mistakenly) as essential to themselves" (169). Indeed: "The discourse of European identity is a *symptom of anxieties about non-Europeans*" (161, emphasis mine). As he further points out: ". . . Europe cannot contain non-Europe. . . And yet, Europe must try to contain, subdue, or *incorporate* what lies beyond it, and what consequently comes to be within it" (171, emphasis mine). The expectation that some people should rid themselves of their relative "non-European essence" compelled Europe to transgress its borders into the Eastern bloc post-Cold War. Undeniably, this incorporation has been far more contentious for Balkan Muslims.

Piro Rexhepi (2023), a Balkan studies scholar of politics, religion, and sexuality succinctly theorizes the post-Cold War, Euro-Atlantic *incorporation* of post-socialist spaces and subjects as a "strategic spatial sedimentation of racial difference[,] between the redeemable and integrable whiteness of the postsocialist br/other and the irredeemable impasse of the postcolonial others" (9). On the one hand, the spatial integration of post-socialist worlds into what he terms the white Euro-Atlantic enclosure secures its borders from the postcolonial migrants along the Balkan route (9). On the other hand, it recruits Eastern European workers for cheap labor, bolstering the white demographics of the core and

its edges through the internal policing of Balkan racialized minorities (9); Bosnian, Albanian, and Roma Muslims. Balkan territories, therefore, take on the duty of filtering refugees on the enclosure's behalf, protecting its borders, its rhetoric of rights, politics of racelessness, and the "fantasy of whiteness" (Rexhepi 9; Mbembe 45).

Importantly, both post-Ottoman and post-Cold War narratives of "unification" with Europe (12), posit Ottoman and socialist pasts as ". . . temporary misalignments from the European path. . ." (13); an otherwise pre-Ottoman Christian and white history. In "Decolonizing Praxis in Eastern Europe" (2015), philosopher of decoloniality Nikolay Karkov, rightfully suggests that "Eastern Europeans…, have for far too long been too close to the West, both geographically and phenotypically, to be able to resist the lure and trap of [white] passing" (196-197). Just like discourses of political racelessness in Western Europe therefore, the religious and racial marking of the Balkans as European (white and Christian), has necessitated the epistemic erasure, physical removal (Rexhepi 13), secularization, and sanitization (11) of internal Muslim and Roma populations across post-Ottoman racial realignment missions, Yugoslav secularizing ventures (10), and (post)genocide incorporations to the "raceless" Euro-Atlantic enclosure (12).

Muslim Albanians in particular, are deliberately kept under unfinished states of sovereignty and structures of Western supervision (92) because although ". . . seemingly white, secularized, and attached to Euro-American ideals. . . " (100), they may one day ". . . wake up to Islam and reactivate their links to the Arab world" (100). Therefore, it is precisely Albanian proximity to Europe and whiteness that renders them a threat to Euro-Atlantic security structures. Once inside the enclosure, Rexhepi contends, Albanians may ". . . move seamlessly and pass the policing gaze. . .because people are not *primed to read a white body as suspect*" (100, emphasis mine). Therefore, it follows that "Islam prevents Albanians from

being acknowledged as fully and unquestionably white, a predicament that requires relentless affirmation of racial purity to secure sovereignty" (105).

In Kosovo, affirmations of racial purity often manifest in projections of post-independence Kosovo as intrinsically European, or at least aspirationally so. Kosovan political scientist Vjosa Musliu, in "Kosovo: A European State is Born" (2021), holds stock of the international state-building ventures in Kosovo that have sought to engineer a "European state" amenable to EU integration, free markets, democracy, the rule of law, and multiculturalism. The invocation of "European standards," the "European path" (28), and the "newness" of the state, reinforce the necessity for Western tutelage (38). As Musliu suggests, continued Western presence reminds Kosovars that they have yet to become European, and in doing so, ought to undo their Balkanness; ". . . [to] cease being backward, irreparable and prone to *system failure*" (38, emphasis mine). In Asad's words, they ought to rid themselves of their essence: The narratives, histories, and memories that constitute them and that they stubbornly hold on to– mistakenly of course.

The dense nexus of peacekeeping/state-building structures (the US, NATO, governmental agencies, the World Bank, the UN, and IMF) also coalesced around conceptions of peace and multiculturalism (Dević 263) of curbing majoritarianism (Musliu 23) and embracing institutionalized, distinct ethnocultural majorities and minorities (Dević 271). In a context saturated by putative "archaic enmities" (Brown 183), the majority's commitment to tolerance is continuously rendered suspicious and in need of constant display. Kosovo's European incorporation, therefore, involved an act of "[l]earning tolerance; . . divesting oneself of relentless partiality, absolutist identity, and parochial attachments. . . " (184). On the other hand, the West always has more rationality/peaceability, which is understood to derive from and generate tolerance (184). In the post-war moment, the white enclosure placed Albanian Kosovars under multiple and contradictory binds: To racially

realign with whiteness, and "learn tolerance" through liberal multiculturalism. Similarly to the anthropologist Elizabeth Povinelli (2007) in the context of Australian multiculturalism, I posit liberal multiculturalism in Kosovo as a structure of governance that manifests in everyday affective associations, identifications, and discursive incitements that facilitate the "good feelings" of the country (5-6).

In a grid of clearly demarcated ethnocultural identities, I trace how racialized difference (race and/or religion) traverses across and within majority/minority divides by way of its discursive projection/deflection. The telos of liberal multiculturalism being *racial purity/Europeannes* and *tolerant/civilized standing*. That being said, this process is fraught with power asymmetries and unfolds at the level of subjectivity, for white Albanians and racialized minorities alike. I take for granted here that subjectivities are both conscripted[9] into and resistant to the imperatives of multiculturalism. My focus is not so much on the entrenchment of ethnocentric identities, but rather, on the discursive circulation of racialized differences within and among them, as well as how the emphasis on "ethnocentrism" seeks to obscure racialized hierarchizations at play.

Tolerance discourse (Brown 2008) and political racelessness (El-Tayeb 2011; Rexhepi 2023) help me articulate how liberal multiculturalism makes certain forms of violence seem accidental, rather than generated by it (Povinelli 7). This convergence becomes most jarring in public debates about spectacular violence. Here, I shall return to the case of the Roma woman referenced in my Introduction to do it justice and adequately illustrate. Political racelessness operates through a "racial archive of images" (El Tayeb xxv) where non-whiteness signifies non-Europeanness. Simultaneously, political racelessness claims not to "see" racialized difference through an active erasure of racialized minorities (xxiv). Without reference, history, or place in European collective memory, "every acknowledgment

[9]In my uses, "conscription" is not intentional nor voluntary, but an effect of power that operates at the level of subjectivity (Asad 1992; Scott 2004; Guessous 2020).

of a non-white presence always seems to happen for the first time, giving each incident a *spectacular character, signifying a threatening state of exception, but at the same time voiding it of any lasting consequences*. . ." (El Tayeb xxiv, emphasis mine). Similarly, second-world narratives of colorblindness, erase both Balkan Muslims and Roma (Rexhepi 13); "outsiders" who supposedly arrived together with the Ottomans (14). Erased from Albanian collective memory therefore, public "acknowledgment" of the Roma woman, gained a spectacular character (the elusive "man dressed as a woman") and signified a threatening state of exception (the kidnapping of Albanian children warranting assault). The subsequent violence against her served as a discursive incitement about Albanian intolerance nestled in the denunciation of the racist Albanian local; though merely as an isolated "incident."

For Wendy Brown (2008), tolerance operates as a depoliticizing discourse "construing inequality, subordination, marginalization, and social conflict, . . , as personal and individual, on the one hand, or as natural, religious, or cultural on the other" (15). It follows that Albanian political elites ought to condemn individual acts of racism as a redeeming rhetoric of their tolerant/civilized standing, but not to contend with racism as a structural problem. Indeed, while racialized visual markers signify the Roma woman's *foreignness*, political racelessness insists that it does not "see" race. So when she shows up with no warning, her otherness is perceived as a threat to the *white enclosure.* Since suspiciously white though, Albanians should do more than protect the enclosure. They ought to condemn their own intolerance, but not in a way that attests to the protracted and intrinsically European history of racism. Here, I do not suggest that political racelessness and tolerance discourse do vastly distinct types of labor, nor that political racelessness has been "imported" from Western Europe– (pre/post)socialist anti-Roma racism powerfully attests against that (Rexhepi 2023).

Rather, I suggest that tolerance discourse and political racelessness converge in rendering racialized violence merely accidental and inconsequential to liberal multiculturalism and larger questions of what it means to be European today. Importantly, the reinforced intolerance of the Albanian local is not merely a redeeming gesture but also a legitimating argument of Western tutelage and superiority in Kosovo. The Albanian local, the story goes, is not ready for Europe; they need to cease being backward and "learn tolerance." Throughout my analysis, I dwell on this productive convergence between tolerance discourse and political racelessness.

Research Methods & Methodology

Methods

This capstone is based on both library and fieldwork research and spanned from January 5th to February 10th, 2024 in Kosovo, in addition to preliminary research conducted over the summer of 2023. My research involved interviews, informal conversations, and non-participatory observations in various cultural and artistic activities including plays that dealt with the minority question. I conducted 15 interviews in total, in-person or over Zoom, with interlocutors who were based in Prishtina, Fushë Kosova, Gjilan, Prizren, and Obiliq. My interlocutors were racialized minority activists, Albanian social justice activists, institutional representatives, NGO representatives/volunteers, playwrights, a human rights lawyer, and a non-profit employee. My Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian, and Albanian interlocutors often held many of the subject positions enumerated above. In terms of outreach, I reached out to some of my interlocutors through social media or email whereas for others, I was referred to by other interlocutors.

Many of my interlocutors of different positionalities were involved in the "Justice for Kujtim Veseli" campaign.[10] They were in close community when organizing the 2019 anti-racist protest, the subsequent events, or through their engagement with various NGOs for minority rights such as The Ideas Partnership, Balkan Sunflowers, The Voice of Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptians (VORAE), and United Toward Art (UTA). Other NGO representatives, both of Albanian and racialized minority backgrounds, worked for Roma Press, The Network for Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian Women's Organizations of Kosovo (RROGRAEK), Roma Versitas, and Gruaja Hyjnore. Lastly, I had known two of my interlocutors before researching through friendship or shared networks and was aware of their critical engagement with racial and social justice in broad terms. They had backgrounds in organizing and NGO/non-profit work. I also interviewed Rina Kika,[11] a human rights lawyer who represented Kujtim Veseli's mother in court, participated in the "Justice for Kujtim Veseli" campaign, and shared with me various press releases, reports, and email exchanges between the activist group and legal justice institutions.

In addition, I interviewed/informally spoke to two institutional representatives: Anita, an Ashkali key organizer of the anti-racism protest, assembly member at the Fushë Kosova municipality, and NGO volunteer/worker; and Driton, an Ashkali official at the municipality of Obiliq. In terms of my non-participatory observations, I attended two plays: "Gadjo" by Albanian playwright Jeton Neziraj, followed by an interview with him, and "Racism Kills" by Ismail, a young Egyptian playwright, activist, and leader of United Towards Art (UTA), an arts-based NGO for Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian youth.

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[10] The campaign called for justice for Kujtim Veseli, an 11 year old Ashkali boy who was raped and murdered in 2019. The 2019 anti-racist protest in 2019 kickstarted the campaign. Activists held institutional neglect and racism responsible for his loss.

[11]Except for Rina Kika and Jeton Neziraj all names have been changed to keep anonymity. As Albanian public figures with established careers and various kinds of social capital, I decided to keep their real names.

In carrying out my research, I sought to explore the multiple sites where conceptualizations of multiculturalism were being produced, reified, negotiated, and challenged. These sites of inquiry included racial justice activism, NGO advocacy, political representation, court cases, and cultural productions. Given my interlocutors' multiple and simultaneous subject positions, my questions catered to their specific backgrounds, expertise, and individual preoccupations. Because most of them are public figures to a certain degree, I got a sense of their various engagements that they shared on social media profiles, NGO websites, or other articles. Through my research, I aimed to better understand their genealogies as activists, organizers, political representatives, NGO volunteers/workers, and perspectives on the current iteration of multiculturalism within the constitution. In the case of Rina Kika, my questions concerned Kujtim Veseli's court case and the arguments made by legal officials during the proceedings. Finally, my interview with playwright Jeton Neziraj addressed some of the themes/artistic choices of the play, and his critical reflexivity as an Albanian playwright tackling the issue of racial violence. All of my interviews were conducted in Albanian except one, where we would switch between English and Albanian throughout the interview. All translations from Albanian to English are therefore mine.

Methodology

My research is conceptually, analytically, and epistemologically indebted to transnational feminist methodologies. Throughout, I have attempted to remain reflexive of my racial, ethnic, class, and imperial privileges vis-a-vis my interlocutors and sought to center political solidarities. In "Transnational Feminism as a Paradigm for Decolonizing the Practice of Research" (2016) Sylvanna M. Falcón, a Peruvian-American feminist scholar of human rights, urges for a critical transnational feminist methodology that accounts for the imperial origins of Western research and for creating new research models and practices that decenter the global North, English, privatized knowledge, academic institutions, and

white-dominated research models (Smith 1999; Falcòn 2016). Throughout my research, I attempted to implement the following methodological considerations and epistemological practices suggested by Falcòn: Positionality/Reflexivity (176), Imperial Privilege (182), and Politics of Vision, Hope, and Love (187); political solidarities .

Since many of my interlocutors are variously positioned Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian activists, NGO workers/volunteers, artists, and political representatives, I was committed to being thoughtful about my positionality and conducting my research in a self-reflexive manner (Falcòn 177). I am a Kosovar Albanian legible to normative conceptions of Europeannes[12] and embody my Muslim identity invisibly and culturally.[13] As a normative white woman and secularized Muslim with access to U.S. academia, I am a privileged researcher in the local context in terms of middle-class respectability and greater access to various types of social capital. In “Gadjo Supremacy and Gadjo Privileges” (2022), Roma Serbian scholar, Jelena Savić, expands on Mill’s concept of global white supremacy (2003) by proposing European Gadjo[14] supremacy: A socio-cultural-economic-political transgenerational model of Gadjo domination and unearned privileges that simultaneously treat the “. . . Roma as less European, less Christian, [and] non-white. . .” (2-3). Indeed, across West/East and EU/non-EU divides, the historical dehumanization, racialization, and enslavement of European Romani people, formed a *“. . . unifying racial contract”* despite the color-blind narrative Europe tells about itself (2-3, emphasis mine). Here, Savić theorizes the temporal and spatial ubiquity of anti-Roma racism through which European Gadjo dominance is enabled, imagined, and taken for granted.

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[12]I am phenotypically white.

[13]While Kosovo is a Muslim majority country, secular European modernity necessitates self-regulatory distancing from everything “oriental.” Muslim Kosovars (Albanian, Bosniak, Roma, Egyptian, Gorani, and Ashkali) who embody Islam visibly, are relegated as backward, oppressed/oppressive, manipulated by those who preach “foreign” Islam, and in the case of Albanians, more likely to identify as Muslim first and Albanian second. In other words, as having dual loyalties.

[14] Romani term for non-Roma people.

It is through this “unifying racial contract” that I, a non-Roma in Kosovo, benefit from a surplus of rights, dignity, humanity, social, economic, and cultural capital in the form of housing, employment and education opportunities, social, legal, and public services (6). This surplus of resources and capital at the expense of racialized minorities, put me in a privileged position during research. In Kosovo, the Ashkali and Egyptian communities are also discursively, structurally, and materially racialized. Therefore, when I refer to my Gadjo privileges, I also mean vis-a-vis the Ashkali and Egyptians. Given these racialized hierarchies, I did my best to remain analytically focused on liberal multiculturalism and Albanian whiteness. At the same time, I attempted to take racialized minority voices, critiques, and theorizations seriously as we collectively cast doubts on the promise of liberal multiculturalism in Kosovo.

I want to further complicate my “insider/outsider” positioning by drawing on transnational feminist Elora Halim Chowdhury (2011), as she reminds us that ”insiders” and “outsiders“ are constructed positions that are given meaning in the practice of research (11). As Falcón suggests, “insidernes/outsiderness” depends on fluid social locations (177). Feminist sociologist Nancy A. Naples (1996), also argues that community “outsiders” and “insiders” are deeply informed by race-ethnicity, gender, and class (83). My privileged racial/ethnic and class positions mark my “outsiderness” vis-a-vis my Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian interlocutors and “insiderness” in Kosovo. This privileged social location granted me *unearned* gratitude, rather than an overt lack of trust. Indeed, throughout my research, I was sometimes thanked for being “interested in the topic” and implicitly reminded that I am not like “other” Albanians.

Simultaneously, my interlocutors solicited different information from me. They asked me about the U.S., if it’s truly as good as they say, if I studied on a scholarship, and if I would invite them for coffee the next time I’m back. Furthermore, after Ismail’s play, I volunteered

to take a picture of the crew as one of his friends pointed at the ostensibly "*American way*" I was taking the picture. In a way, these interactions sought to hold me accountable for my racial, ethnic, and class privileges and my proximity to U.S. academia. For Falcón, U.S. citizenship and placeness within U.S. academia constitute *imperial privilege*, which grants the researcher unearned privileges, geopolitical mobility, and access to resources (177). To negotiate one's imperial privileges, Falcón suggests interactive interviews to challenge the "academic/non-academic" binary (182). Similarly, I tried to share preliminary questions with my interlocutors while leaving them susceptible to change or even discarding them when unhelpful. Through interactive interviews, I attempted to do justice to my interlocutors' epistemic agency and transform the researcher/researched binary into an exchange. Lastly, Falcón suggests resource-sharing which ". . . involves practicing acts of reciprocity to shift from mere awareness of imperial privilege into concrete acts of redistribution (182). With this in mind, I picked up the bill when needed and offered some of my skills when potentially useful. This meant offering to read their thesis, proofreading project proposals, or sharing events they would be interested in.

Ultimately, to incorporate both my interlocutors' epistemic agency and the racialized power asymmetries between Roma-Gadjo and researcher-researched dyads, I remained invested in situated knowledges. Feminist science studies scholar Donna Haraway (1988), challenges dominant notions of objectivity by showing that the "objectivity" of the unmarked male/white gaze claims the power to see but not be seen, to represent but never be represented (581). Alternatively, she argues for feminist objectivity: A politics and epistemology of limited location, situated knowledge (583), and partial perspective (584). Feminist scholars, like Sylvanna Falcón, caution us that situated knowledges necessitate more than recognizing privilege in some confessional way (177). Situated knowledge necessitates generating a world less organized by "axes of domination" (Haraway 585) and dismantling

systems that privilege unmarked positions and "objective" visions from above. Therefore, I attempted to highlight political solidarities, social justice, and liberatory models (Falcòn 187) articulated by my interlocutors– regardless of how entrenched in multicultural governmentalities they may be.

The Racial Politics of Deferred Sovereignties; The Corrupt, The (Anti)Racists, and The Innocents

Roma Versitas and The Ideas Partnership, the two NGOs that I center tangentially through my interlocutors, are part of a complex history of Kosovar civil society with particular implications on the minority question. While civil society has historically denoted pluralist politics within the state (Pula 3), the Kosovar parallel structures throughout the 1990s were informed by radical boycotting of the Yugoslav state and the struggle for independence (Pula 6; Stazzari and Selenica 118; Dević 259). The post-war period saw the differentiation of civil society into competitive political parties and NGOs (Stazzari and Selenica 118) that were *primarily responsible* for peace-building and multi-ethnic justice (Dević 263). In this process, local political constituencies were rendered peripheral because they were deemed untrustworthy (263).

By early 2010, there were about 5,954 registered NGOs, of which 481 were international (Stazzari and Selenica 123). In addition, local NGOs increasingly articulated themselves in line with human rights paradigms, and liberal democracy (118), and held the market, not the state, as the mechanism for social cohesion and economic wellbeing (Pula 15). Crucially, post-war Kosovo was rife with anti-minority violence, massive unemployment, and tumultuous institution-building efforts. In March 2004 in particular, a violent campaign erupted after the reported deaths of three Albanian children and one Serb teenager (Baldwin 16). UNMIK's administrator at the time, Bernard Kouchner chose a

politics of moral pontification, paternalistic scolding, and public stigmatization of the entire Albanian population for the post-war violence (Pula 25). Despite UNMIK's extensive authority at the time, the Albanian majority was blamed for the violence, who "to no one's surprise," had yet to "learn tolerance." These events marked a decisive shift in foreign donor policies that now centered around the protection of minority rights, loosely organized around democratization, reconciliation, and human rights (Pula 14).

Today, local NGOs along with other institutional practices, remain at the forefront of multicultural fashionings of Kosovar "minority" and "majority" subjectivities that are far more contingent, relational, performative, and fraught by racialized hierarchies, deferred sovereignties (Rexhepi 2023),[15] and affective economies (Ahmed 2004)[16] that underlie Albanian whiteness and European belonging. What I term the affective imperatives of withheld whiteness/Europeanness/sovereignty is a series of affects that provoke paradoxical incitements to discourse (Foucault 1978). Indeed, moral panic/concern/benevolence about the racialized "other," gratitude/indebtedness for the West, and white anxiety about the self interact in tenuous ways to compel iterations of Albanian (non)whiteness, (in)tolerance, (un)readiness for Europe, and deflections/projections of racialized difference throughout minority/majority divisions. Such a series of affects is crucially provoked by the imperative of *ascending to whiteness* (Chow; 2002; Puar 2007).[17]

In what follows, I turn to Roma Versitas and my interlocutor Bekim, an Albanian NGO worker who traverses the affective imperatives of conditional whiteness/Europeanness

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[15]Rexhepi argues that Bosnians and Albanians alike, are kept in perpetual states of deferred sovereignties, necessitating constant Euro-American civilian/military presence and affective displays for the conditional guardianship of the West (92). I further engage with this concept later.

[16]In Ahmed's affective economies, "emotions do things, and they align individuals with communities—or bodily space with social space– through the very intensity of their attachments" (119). We can think of the binding of the imagined white subject with the nation through *fear* about imagined "others" (117).

[17]The "ascedency of whiteness," is about the careful management of difference; the folding of racialized minorities into the nation; a promise that is never fully fulfilled and always shores up white hegemony (Puar 26).

at the level of subjectivity. In this section, I show how Albanian workers embedded within minority rights NGOs are conscripted into doing the labor of engineering whiteness and the tolerant/civilized European standing of the Albanian self. This is done through the reinforced inferiority (Rexhepi 106) of "other" Albanians and the "need to help" (Malkki 2015)[18] racialized minorities. Secondly, I show how Albanian NGO workers, are conscripted into policing the boundaries of who can claim racialized difference through a politics of benevolent concern.

I first met Bekim, an NGO Albanian representative of Roma Versitas in the summer of 2023 over Zoom and we spoke about the lack of international and state funding for community-based NGOs, the Settlement Program in Plemetin,[19] and the self-declaration policy in higher education.[20] On January 5th, 2024, we met in his office to further discuss these topics. Roma Versitas is a minority rights, service-based NGO that aims to ensure better academic performance and higher retention/graduation rates amongst racialized minorities (Roma, Ashkali,[21] Egyptian[22]) in Kosovo. Some of their projects over the years have included Youth Advocacy for Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptians; Diversity and Promotion of Culture and Tolerance; Transition to the Labor Market, and so on.

[18]In her study of Finnish Red Cross workers and other unprofessional helpers based in Finland, Malkki suggests that the benefactor's own need to help those in need, assumed to always be "out there," generate actions that help the benefactor in "surprising and vital ways" (8).

[19]Plemetin is a small village near the city of Obiliq that is mostly populated by Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian internally displaced persons. After the war, UNHCR and UNMIK built two apartment complexes for them. Plemetin is underfunded in terms of education, economy, and infrastructure. Obiliq too, is a city between two thermal power plants, making it one of the most polluted city in Kosovo.

[20]In higher education and beyond, the self-declaration policy mandates that Kosovars self-declare their ethnic identities upon enrollment. This policy is narrated as particularly useful for racialized minorities, who can benefit from enrollment quotas.

[21]The Ashkali are a racialized minority who are native Albanian speakers. Dominant discourse around them claims that they are Roma who have assimilated.

[22]The Egyptians are a racialized minority who are native Albanian speakers believed to have roots in Egypt. The history of the Ashkali/Egyptian identities remain contentious– a sentiment shared by some of my interlocutors.

Bekim shared with me that Roma Versitas in collaboration with Voice of Roma, Ashkali, Egyptians (VORAE), another NGO, was denied funding by the Austrian Development Agency (ADA) Kosova, on the premise that Roma-led organizations were likely to engage in the mishandling of funds. While Bekim had not attended the meeting, the ADA representative told his Roma colleagues: "We do not cooperate with thieves." Apparently, ADA had co-operated with another Roma-led organization that allegedly had mishandled funds. For Bekim, it was deeply racist to be "accused of something that someone else did." In the end, ADA granted the funds for the same kind of project to *S*ave The Children Kosova, a significant INGO. While VORAE and Roma Versitas are two of the larger and established NGOs for minority rights, ADA assumed that an INGO would be more trustworthy. Bekim called it absurd, how Roma Versitas had previously received funding from USAID in Washington, the European Council, and ADA Austria but not the ADA or USAID local chapters.

Bekim continued to express disappointment with the President's Office and the Office for Good Governance, two state entities that annually offer funding for local NGOs. For Bekim, allocating funding by state institutions is a highly corrupt process with grants going to organizations with the right connections and leveraging power. "Here, even within institutions, there's a lot of *dallavere.*[23] Those organizations who work and deserve it, don't get the funding. [...] This happens because they want to misuse the funds, . . . They don't implement the project. No one monitors them." Here, Bekim expresses the well-established perception of post-war civil society in that it had become a corrupt, entrepreneurial world ruled by private interests (Stazzari and Selenica 123), in tandem with institutional untrustworthiness (Dević 163).

[23]A term used locally to denote "cheating the system," corruption or deceit for personal/group gains and power.

In a specific instance in 2023, many minority rights NGOs didn't receive funding from the Office of Community Affairs (OCA) because of corrupt processes, or to use Musliu's (2021) term, "system failure" (38). Elizabeth Gowing,[24] also serving as the PM's Adviser for Community Affairs, stepped down from her role within the OCA. In a public statement on her social media, she announced:

> I'm proud to be continuing as the Prime Minister's Adviser for Community Affairs: co-ordinating vital work for Kosovo's communities, upholding Kosovo's constitution as a functioning modern democracy, and ensuring public money goes where it is supposed to. I'm sad that in the current circumstances, *I didn't feel I could keep my integrity* and continue to work with the Office for Community Affairs. (emphasis mine)

Indeed, such "system failure" and local intolerance would "sadly" put Gowing's "integrity" at risk. Not differently from Kouchner who resorted to moral pontification in 2004, the more peaceable/civil/farseeing/tolerant (Brown 185) Gowing, stepped down as she struggled to tolerate that which she could not imagine herself to be (Brown 175): Corrupt and intolerant. She is the incorruptible foreigner who despite the "system failure," is *still* committed to advising local political elites, upholding democracy, and co-ordinating the inclusion of racialized minorities. In other words, Gowing posits herself as indispensable to the project of multicultural justice because tolerance is purported to derive and be generated from the Westerner (Brown 184). The local's "incapability" for tolerance, in turn, legitimates Western supervision and sustains deferred sovereignties. As Brown (2008) reminds us, the West's capacity for tolerance is in itself an expression of power (187) which affirms its superior civilizational standing (185).

Bekim too, blamed profound *institutional incompetency* for various problems: The segregation of Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian students in primary education, the funneling of

[24]Elizabeth Gowing, a British woman, moved to Kosovo in 2006 and co-founded of The Ideas Partnership. In a conversation with her in summer 2023, she told me that she was well positioned to currently advise the PM for Community Affairs by virtue of her "neutrality."

Roma children into the Serb parallel education structures,[25] and the marginalization of racialized minorities in Plemetin.[26] Bekim suggested: "There are people who work within institutions who are racist.[...] A lot of things happen because of irresponsibility, ignorance, and arrogance.[...] In our society, there is an *illness* that needs to be treated." At another point, Bekim explains how the "unprofessional" and "uneducated" institutional staff harms racialized minorities in particular. "When they [state institutions] receive a complaint from the communities, they say, 'Whatever, they're just *m-* .[27] When I went to file a complaint with someone, they told me, 'Why are you here for a *m-* ?' Why should it matter who is here?" For Bekim, institutional incompetence is an illness, and state racism, irresponsibility, and corruptibility are its symptoms. The cleric who asks him "Why are you here for an *m-* ?" interpellates Bekim as a race traitor of sorts but ultimately sets him apart as the well-meaning/benevolent white Albanian who is not racist.

Piro Rexhepi (2023) refers to Ann Stoler's (2013) "states of deferral,"[28] to argue that for Bosnians and Albanians alike, sovereignties are kept in perpetual states of deferral necessitating constant Euro-American civilian/military presence and affective displays of gratitude/indebtedness for the conditional guardianship of the West (92). Albanian adulation for whiteness and the West, the author suggests, is ". . . the price of enduring genocidal trauma where appreciation is attached to the desperation that comes from the experience of violence but also fear of what might happen should the United States change course and abandon Albanians" (91). Indeed, since the NATO bombing and the subsequent UNMIK

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[25]Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian children were illegally segregated in separate classrooms both in the Albanian and the parallel Serb education systems in many cases, Bekim explained.

[26]Institutions have been largely irresponsive to local demands for resources/infrastructure (asphalted roads, street lights, electricity, and sewerage system), turning Plemetin into a racialized enclave.

[27]A local racial slur used against the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians. I will be referring to this term as "*m-*" only when quoting my interlocutors.

[28]". . . imperial guardianship, trusteeship, delayed autonomy, temporary intervention, [and] conditional tutelage" as the rule not the exception of colonial formations (Stoler 9; Rexhepi 92).

years, transnational circuits of power have sought to produce Muslim Albanian subjectivities that are secular, (anxiously) grateful, self-consciously white, and forever fugitive to their own racialized difference. By transnational circuits of power, I mean ideological, military/humanitarian, and developmentalist structures that sustain states of deferral and produce grateful Albanian subjects who must *ascend to whiteness* at the expense of racialized minorities. These structures include NATO military/humanitarian ventures, UNMIK, (I)NGOs (developmentalist and human rights centered), and liberal multiculturalism.

Further referencing Achille Mbembe (2017), who argues that race is a combination of internalizing the Other's gaze and a series of secret, unfulfilled beliefs and desires (31), Rexhepi claims that in states of deferred sovereignty, the local is put under a

> . . .constant state of anxiety due to their failed aspirations to become, once and for all, white. . ., such processes are underwritten with shame, overcompensation, self-hate, fear, and trauma– all of which function to sustain the state of deferral and, by extension, maintain colonial relations of power while *engineering whiteness through the reinforcement of inferiority*. (105-106, emphasis mine)

Here, Rexhepi theorizes the affective imperatives (shame/overcompensation/fear/self-hate) of withheld sovereignty where Albanian whiteness is predicated on self-reinforced inferiority and perpetual Western tutelage. Similarly, Bekim's deep disappointment with the corrupt local donor chapters (ADA and USAID), state funders, and the ostensibly inept/racist administrative officers congeal to produce an all-encompassing *illness*; the profound incompetence of the local. Here, I read incompetency as inferiority and its pathologization as its reinforcement, to use Rexhepi's terms. In Bekim's account, the local is decidedly corrupt, racist, and unprofessional. In contrast, he is the anti-racist NGO worker for whom it is a moral imperative to speak on behalf of racialized minorities and to over-compensate when his racial loyalties are questioned. In states of deferred sovereignty, the local is perpetually intolerant/incapable of governance, the INGOs are always already generous/trustworthy, and the white Albanian NGO worker is certainly grateful. In other words, the Albanian local has

to be conferred tolerance (Brown 178), they are almost always intolerant (187) and must condemn intolerance to secure their tolerant standing. When talking about institutional racism and incompetence, Bekim explained:

> . . . these things are still part of *our* mentality… the… 'whatever…they [racialized minorities] have no clue, leave them like that.' If *we* leave *them* like that, *we* will have problems with *them*. We have to push them forward, to…uplift them… so we don't have problems. All of those [racialized minority members] who are educated have a completely different mentality from those who are uneducated. You can sit with them and talk about many things.

Here, he condemns "our*" mentality*,[29] the neglect of Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian citizens, and simultaneously invokes a deep "need to help." In a quest for Albanian tolerant standing, Bekim urges "other Albanians" to *help* racialized minorities transcend "their" *mentality* through education.[30] By positing racialized minorities as "in need" of the majority's "goodwill" to uplift them, an undeniable neediness and relation of "self to self" (Malkki 4)[31] generate actions that ultimately bolster Bekim's tolerant/civilized standing. While it was unclear what kind of "problems" he meant, the educated/uneducated binary is deeply civilizational; the uneducated is always also backward, uncivilized, and said to possess a *mentality*. Therefore, the imagined "we" ought to be anti-racist and *need* to push "them" forward, so that "their" purported incivility does not compromise "our" aspirations for whiteness and European belonging.

Furthermore, within humanitarian discourse, those "in need" are associated with a certain innocence and simplicity (Malkki 7). Anthropologist Miriam Ticktin (2017) suggests that innocence regulates a space of purity free of knowledge, action, guilt, desire, or intention

[29]Bekim uses the patholgizing term *mentality* to refer both to Albanian racism and racialized minorities' level of education. Throughout my research and beyond, those who are said to possess a "mentality," are always more likely to be "backward."

[30]As Brown (2008) suggests, knowledge and thinking are themselves deemed to dispel "ignorance" and "tribal enthusiasms" (183). In this case, to dispel the *mentality* of "helpless" racialized minorities.

[31]For Malkki, helping is often associated with selflessness and self-sacrifice, but less with other self to self relations: Self-escape, self-loss, dehumanization, self-humanization, self-transformation, the relation of self to others, and the relation of self to the world (10).

(578). Innocence carries the desire to protect and take responsibility for the innocent because they cannot take care of themselves (583). Crucially, innocence produces a deservingness of humanity/care insofar as it is a space free of desire/will/agency (579); a space outside of history/politics that allows saviors to ignore their complicity in creating a category of people who need saving (583). In Bekim's account, the racialized "other" is either a cunning NGO worker or a victim subjected to prejudiced Albanians who are racist, intolerant, and incompetent. Given this, it is important to note that it is only the innocent racialized subject whom white Albanians ought to "push forward." In helping the innocent, Bekim thus also makes claims of moral innocence (Ticktin 582). Positing racism only as a matter of prejudice, however, undermines the workings of political racelessness,[32] depoliticizes social inequality and steers away from political solutions (Brown 15). As Ticktin puts it, insofar worthiness is organized by an axis of purity, politics is displaced at the limits of innocence (584) where the figure of the *undeserving* racialized "other" looms large; the cunning racialized NGO worker and the "gender-bending" Roma woman.

Crucially, Albanian whiteness, the *unfulfilled secret desire* to use Mbembe's terms, is engineered through reiterations of Albanian inferiority (incompetence, corruption, and racism), rationalizing Western guardianship, as the innocence of racialized "others" is reinforced to secure Bekim's claims to innocence, tolerance, and proper European civility. Indeed, within multicultural governance, Albanian tolerant/white standing *needs* a *deserving* racialized "other" to tolerate, help, and care for, while the assault of the *undeserving* Roma woman, for instance, is rendered inconsequential. Put differently, Bekim's self-exceptionalization as the innocent, anti-racist Albanian, obtains the force of what Michel

[32]Wiithin political racelessness, the "acknowledgement" of racialized others always seems to happen for the first time, where "prejudice" can be understood as a "natural" response to that which is external/unfamiliar. Political racelessness also negates the protracted "racial archive of images" (El-Tayeb xxv) that mark this encounter.

Foucault, in *The History of Sexuality* (1978), terms "the speaker's benefit"(6).[33] Surely, those white Albanians who denounce the corrupt/incompetent/racists are themselves tolerant, civilized, and ultimately European "against all odds." Paradoxically, Bekim must articulate at great length, the local's failed aspirations of becoming white while *unwaveringly aching* for whiteness. As Rexhepi puts it, the goal is not a full self-governing entity, but a Kosovo at the margins of the Euro-Atlantic enclosure whose people ought to remain permanently suspect (106). Under states of deferred sovereignty, the goal is the relentless *yearning* for whiteness at the expense of racialized minorities. If deserving only when innocent, multicultural governance seeks to reduce racialized minorities into modes of being, outside of history/politics, that evoke simplicity, lack of agency, basic humanity, or "bare life" (Agamben 1998; Malkki 2015).

Indeed, the Euro-Atlantic enclosure conscripts Albanian NGO workers to secure conditional whiteness by reinforcing the inferiority of "other" Albanians, the innocence of racialized "others," and by projecting racialized difference onto the internally racialized. This projection, operating through the "need to help" and affect of concern, also shows up in Bekim's discussion of the self-declaration policy. Indeed, deferred Albanian whiteness and policies of liberal multiculturalism attempt to produce majority/minority subjectivities, "professing selves" (Najmabadi 2013) as I shall call them, whose identitarian boundaries must be performed and discursively policed– a duty Bekim is also conscripted into taking up. Below, he refers to the enrollment quotas for minority members and their "misuse" by Albanians due to the self-declaration policy:

> It is something [the self-declaration policy] we have challenged with the university and the prosecutor's office. They told us: 'There's nothing we can do, we have no choice but the self-declaration [policy].' We made an offer to the University of Prishtina, we said: 'You get the applications, we'll verify them.'[...] We know

[33]For Foucault, the "speaker's benefit" stems from the act of speaking about sex in a context that is presumed to reppress any discussion about it– what he calls the repressive hypothesis. For him, a lack of discourse about sex is hardly the case. However, such purported repression provokes an incitement to discourse; deliberate acts of speech that posit the speaker as free of that repression. Thus, the speakers posture themselves as transgressive.

> everyone. Where they come from, from which region– we can tell from their last names more or less. I can self-declare as Roma right now, after six months as Ashkali, after a year as Egyptian, and then as Albanian. *I can self-declare however I want*. They said it would be anti-constitutional. They [minorities] are constitutional categories[...], and they are given the right to have quotas, but not for *us* to abuse.

Here, Bekim's benevolent concern about quota misuse by "other" Albanians compels him and other Roma Versitas workers to a series of authenticating labor: Make offers, devise lists of Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian students, track last names and locations, create networks, and mobilize community volunteers to expose the "imposters." In other words, Bekim is preoccupied with making racialized minorities at all times knowable/verifiable "for their own sake." Indeed, he purports that racialized minorities are always already knowable ("We know everyone").

In *Terrorist Assemblages* (2007), queer feminist scholar Jasbir Puar draws from Rey Chow's "ascendency of whiteness" (2002) and Susan Koshy's "class fractioning" (2001) to argue that in the proliferation of multicultural (and homonormative) identities, white hegemony institutes itself not through their exclusion, but inclusion (Puar 31). The ascendancy of whiteness, therefore, operates as a form of biopolitics (Foucault 1978) where the folding of ethnic bodies into the mandates of multiculturalism sanctions violence upon the very subjects it purports to include (3).[34] In this incorporation, the fractioning of identities is the prime activity of societies of control (28) and the production of "[a]ffective be/longing that never fully rewards its captives yet nonetheless fosters longing and yearning as affects of nationalism" (32). The ascendancy of whiteness as biopower for Chow, in particular, entails producing data, detail, and description about populations, seeking to manage and render objects knowable. At the same time, this management is coupled with an increased mystification of its primary beneficiaries: European subjectivities (Chow 2-3).

[34]For Puar, the inclusion of multicultural and homonormative subjects within the national imaginary fractions them away from cross-class sexual-racial alliances "in favor of consolidation with axes of privilege" (28). This national recognition, is contingent upon the exclusion of racial-sexual others (2), domestically and abroad. The ethnic other is usually straight whereas the homonormative is usually white. Both tend to have access to material/cultural capital (27-28).

The incorporation of racialized minorities as “constitutional categories” in Kosovo, therefore, is predicated on the fractioning of identities (sustained by self-declaration policies) seeking to render racialized minorities knowable and conscript them in the Albanian ascendancy to whiteness. At the same time, enrollment/employment quotas, multicultural festivals, national holidays, and (I)NGOs for minority rights masquerade as forms of national belonging/inclusion (27), to use Puar’s (2007) terms, as systemic forms of racialized violence are rendered immaterial to multiculturalism and Albanian whiteness is (tentatively) secured. Therefore, Bekim’s need to render racialized minorities knowable, under the benevolent clout of multicultural inclusion, seeks to obscure the primary beneficiaries of this epistemological project: white Albanian subjectivities. In other words, a concern about quota misuse *by* Albanians, supposedly ought to be mediated through the production of data *about* racialized minorities. This abstraction of the true beneficiaries of Roma Versitas’s authenticating labor is precisely what the ascendancy of whiteness as biopower seeks to do: Produce distinctions between subjects (Albanians) and objects (populations for control); between those who theorize and those who are theorized about (Puar 25; Chow 3). Indeed, it’s always racialized minorities who are called upon to “self-declare;” to “profess” themselves, and mark themselves for control.

Furthermore, Bekim’s concern is underwritten by Albanian white anxiety, warranting the denunciation of “other” Albanians who, opportunistically and mistakenly, profess racialized difference. Perhaps, his moral outrage is also plagued by *deep exasperation* from the Albanian inability “to grasp the geopolitical moment and to identify as white“ (101), to use Rexhepi's (2023) phrasing on unfinished post-Ottoman racial realignments. In other words, the self-declaration policy secures “professing selves,” fractioning identities in line with constitutional categories and liberal multiculturalism. And when fissures occur, when “other” Albanians fail to identify as white, the NGO worker is solicited to regulate which

bodies ought to mark themselves *through* the rendering of racialized minorities "knowable." Out of a purported "sense of duty," Bekim must make sure that it is racialized bodies who claim themselves to be Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian, not white Albanians.

Therefore, his "sense of duty" must be understood within a racial imaginary that seeks to reserve whiteness for the Albanian majority, projecting racialized difference onto the internally racialized body and deflecting it from the Albanian self that aspires to whiteness. This racial imaginary insists on an Albanian subjectivity that is "unmarked" and places the burden of visibility, naming, or "professing" exclusively on racialized minorities. As Susan Koshy (2001) argues, the resurgence of a "white ethnicity" works in insidious ways to obscure the operations of race and class in transnational contexts (156). In line with discourses of political racelessness, the production of Albanian "white ethnicity," insofar as they fully rid themselves of everything "oriental," does not imply the absence but denial of racial thinking. Ultimately, liberal multiculturalism, where racial thinking is abstracted precisely through this ethnicization of race (El-Tayeb 2011; Rexhepi 2023), never "rewards its captives" and yet produces a yearning for national belonging through inclusion (Puar 32).

Thus far, I have foregrounded how multicultural governmentality invites Albanian NGO workers to ascend to whiteness by reinforcing the inferiority of "other" Albanians, the innocence of racialized minorities, and by reserving racialized difference exclusively for the latter. However, my iterations and interview with Bekim do not capture the fullness of his subjectivity. Importantly, I do not wish to posit liberal multiculturalism as a rigid governmentality that is totalistic in its sways of power. I take inspiration from sociologist and transnational feminist Srila Roy (2023) for whom *entanglement* constitutes both co-optation and resistance due to governmentality's adaptability to local and transnational ideologies and idioms (35-36). Indeed, she thinks of governmentality in a Foucauldian sense that I find most useful. In her uses, governmentality is "never describing a state of sheer domination,

oppression, or constraint– as we tend to think and feel about power– but as a highly generative, mobile, and reversible set of relations through which a self is both governed and governs itself" (8). In this project, therefore, I do not claim "analytical closure" (Chowdhury 2011, 10) but rather suggest an analytical opening on the paradoxical demands of multicultural inclusion that both conscript and are negotiated. Therefore, I draw from my interviews with Anita, an Ashkali anti-racist feminist activist, and Dren, an Albanian social justice activist, to highlight the challenges that they pose, however tenuously, to multiculturalism through anti-racist solidarities.

Challenges to Liberal Multiculturalism; Anti-Racist Political Solidarities

I first met Anita, an Ashkali young woman, on January 8th at a local cafe in Fushë Kosova, a 20-minute car ride from Prishtina. She had just finished work at her municipal assembly[35] and we met for coffee to get acquainted, and for me to tell her more about my project. I had reached out to Anita through Rina Kika[36] who was the lawyer of Kujtim Veseli's mother, whose son was tragically raped and murdered in 2019. Anita was one of the major organizers of the "Justice for Kujtim Veseli" campaign and of the first anti-racist protest that erupted after Kujtim's loss. For the organizers, the institutional neglect and racism of Kujtim's case were major factors that led to this instance of violence. In Anita's words: "We know that it was Sefedin who took his life. But for us, *the state killed him*. The police itself killed him." Anita shared her engagements as an assembly member and beyond on her social media. Therefore, I went into our first meeting with some potential topics in

[35]Every municipality in Kosovo has an assembly of representatives that exercise some level of local governance..

[36]I first met Rina Kika, an Albanian human rights lawyer, in the summer of 2023 over coffee and more formally interviewed her over Zoom on February 1st 2024.

mind such as her volunteer experiences with The Ideas Partnership (TIP),[37] her work as an assembly member, and her organizing. The meeting was very informal, discussion-based, and mostly unstructured. Anita told me a bit about her background in activism and the chronology of her trajectory. I at times interjected with broader topics and follow-up questions but mostly stayed with what Anita wanted to share with me.

For our second meeting on January 23rd, I picked her up from a bus stop near the main square in Prishtina and we walked together to Rezidenca 17.[38] Before the interview, I sent her some guiding questions to practice transparency. Nonetheless, I wanted the questions to open discussion rather than prescribe a map for our interview. From our first meeting, how racialized minority activists are called upon *to represent* their communities was a present theme throughout. Therefore, I asked Anita about some instances that politically informed her activism and its importance, the demands/pressures of representation, her perspectives with the TIP peer support group,[39] and the 2019 anti-racist protest.

In what follows, I draw on my discussion with Anita to highlight how, in post-war and post-socialist Kosovo, liberal multiculturalism and human rights paradigms overlap to invite racialized anti-racist activists to articulate their emancipation through a human rights paradigm of *raising voices* and *knowing rights*. As minority activists multi-directionally traverse NGO, state institutions, and activist spaces, they bear both the "burden" and "honor" of representation, yielding often contradictory, simultaneous, and ambiguous results: (De)politicization and conscription/resistance. In other words, racialized minority activism is deeply *entangled* (both conscripted and resistant) with multicultural governmentalities.

[37]TIP is a community-based NGO for Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian children, young adults, girls, and women. Some of their activities include Saturday activity classes for children, catch-up classes, micro-financing projects, and support for early marriages in the community.

[38]A residency program open to artists, curators, and researchers. The space was a cozy and quiet environment, so I scheduled meetings and discussions with some of my interlocutors there whenever possible.

[39]The support group was led by my interlocutor Dren, an Albanian activist and psychology student at the time. The group was where a lot of the strategizing for the anti-racist protest in 2019 took place.

Anita started going to TIP as a 6th or 7th grader and was part of various reading, consciousness-raising, and peer support groups. As Anita described it, other activists who would visit TIP would "teach us how *to be activists*, how *to ask for your rights,* how to *be more independent* maybe, and many other things." Dren, whom I mentioned earlier, was one of the Albanian volunteers who started a support group at TIP, which was instrumental to the first anti-racist protest in response to the institutional violence against Kujtim Veseli. More specifically, in May 2019, Kujtim Veseli, an 11-year-old Ashkali boy was raped and murdered by an Ashkali 19- year old, Sefedin. Kujtim was sexually harassed in January 2019 when Sefedin's father filed a report upon Kujtim's mother's request. Sefedin was taken into questioning, had admitted to the charges, and was subsequently released. For Rina Kika, the institutional neglect that enabled Kujtim's murder was informed by state normalization of violence within racialized communities, therefore rationalizing their lack of care or intervention. For Anita, "It was such a tragedy, you know, for us, and that's when we realized that racism even kills." Many of my interlocutors knew Kujtim and lived in the same neighborhoods. Referencing a conversation within the support group, Anita shared:

> We would say…how can we do something… and we were so angry, we wanted to do something, be out there. It was our dream to *be out there and raise our voices*, enough with the racism, you know? We wanted to confront the institutions. When he [Dren] saw our willingness– that we had the will, he said that 'we can help, do you guys want to do it,' you know? And that's where the idea for the big protest came.

The group had thought about organizing even before Kujtim but there was a fear about their demand not being taken seriously. However, Kujtim's loss had struck the group with particular urgency. For Anita, Dren and his group had given them courage and support to organize the protest. They had gathered other activists and had brainstormed together various slogans and banners. "Racism Kills" was one of the main ones. Anita described it as "our first experience as proper activists, you know?[...] That's where I got my first steps. The strength,

the energy, this…way of *raising my voice*. Because I knew I had to speak up, but I did not have the chance…they gave me the chance and the courage in a way."

Similarly to Roma Versitas, TIP followed an NGO emancipatory model that sought to conscript white Albanian activists to "bestow" multicultural tolerance and "teach" rights while racialized minority activists were invited to "receive" them. A hierarchy characterizes this transfer of knowledge; racialized minorities were presumed not to have the prerequisite skills of *raising voices* and *knowing rights*, thus posited as "in need" of Albanian expertise. Simultaneously, my Albanian, Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian activist interlocutors also negotiated, however ambiguously, the giver/receiver binary through anti-racist political solidarities. On January 17th, 2024, I met with Dren, the Albanian support group leader, at a local cafe in Prishtina, where he lived and worked. Dren's interest in social justice started at the Center for Equality and Liberty (CEL), an NGO for LGBTQIA+ rights established in 2013. He was also one of the co-founders of The Feminist Collective in Prishtina. During our interview, we discussed Dren's experiences, perspectives, and how he navigated his privileged positionality within the support group. For him, questioning his race, class, and leadership role privileges was the starting point. As he put it: "That space was necessary so they could talk to one another. It wasn't about me.[...] I took a step back and they decided how to do activism.[...] I saw myself as an ally, as a supporter, not as the one who decided what the strategy was going to be.[...] *We became activists together*."

Put differently, Dren articulated the support group as a space of knowledge sharing, political solidarities, and one where asymmetrical relations of power were negotiated. Here, I do not argue that the *intent* for solidarities and togetherness across racial lines absolves the giver/receiver binary nor the multiculturalist imperative of engineering Albanian whiteness. Indeed, activism and organizing are deeply entrenched within structures of governmentality. Rather, I contend with the ambiguous, not totalizing, effects of power. By foregrounding

these intentional and tenuous solidarities, I think of cross-racial alliances as potentially *otherwise* political openings as opposed to stable fractioned identities that are "in favor of consolidation with axes of privilege" (Puar 28).

Furthermore, Anita's activism is also entangled with human rights paradigms that invite her to *raise her voice* and *know her rights* to reify multicultural categories and the state as the bestower of rights. However, Anita's account also casts profound doubts on the project of multiculturalism and the ways it depoliticizes racialized violence. Importantly, Anita and other activists denounced racism as a structural issue by holding the state responsible for Kujtim's loss. As Anita put it: "It didn't matter to me who Kujtim was, what community he was from.[...] It didn't matter whether he was Roma or Ashkali…it mattered that he was killed because of racism." Here, Anita discursively resists the ethnicization of race– the abstraction of racialized logic. Indeed, when racialized violence is incessantly compartmentalized as merely spectacular, a systemic and public anti-racist protest profoundly disrupts the reinforced silences of political racelessness.

Throughout our conversations, Anita also articulated the burdens/honors of political representation; a process through which racialized difference is simultaneously projected and deflected across majority/minority divisions. Anita shared with me some instances that had been formative to her activism of which her role as a feminist political representative was especially memorable:

> A decisive moment…that made me feel that I represent the communities– or maybe it could even be described as *racist*– was when I was elected an assembly member. There was never, as I've told you before, a woman representative from the communities.[...] And they thought that women were very oppressed, uneducated,[...] that they don't know anything, you know?

She continued to describe her first interaction with the mayor, an Albanian man, who gave her a disbelieving look for being Ashkali: "I could tell that he had those same thoughts, you know? He was surprised… *I can't say that he discriminated against me or anything*." The

mayor had proceeded to ask her probing questions: If she was educated, if she had graduated high school, and was particularly interested in her professors at the University of Prishtina. Anita felt that in doing so, he had tried to "verify" if she actually went there. Furthermore, she identified her protest, organizing, and advocacy as other significant moments in her trajectory: "When I saw that we were very neglected to put it simply." She continued to share: "They [the state] try to give us rights, and we have them realistically– and they do try to implement them.[...] But *I don't always like them*." Here, Anita expresses dissatisfaction with the stories of inclusion that multiculturalism tells about itself– a strategy of negotiation within an imperfect system that purports to include her. I think of Anita's reluctant disposition as a form of disidentification, what queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz (1999) defines as the "survival strategies that the minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship" (4).

Crucially, while Anita is embedded within multicultural governmentalities, by articulating her discontent with multicultural citizenship, she casts critical suspicion at the state's *intent* to truly "reward its captives" (Puar 32). With critical suspicion on the promise of multiculturalism, Anita provided two salient examples: the *self-declaration policy* and *politics of representation*. In terms of the self-declaration policy, she shared: "You always have to self-declare as a member of the communities to be enrolled. They never simply see you as a student– but always as a community member, you know?" Indeed, the university cleric had asked her to provide written "evidence" that attested to her "identity:"

> When they saw me that I was of color, [...] I had to come up with a declaration that says 'I, Anita, am a member of the Ashkali community' and have it *stamped* by the municipality. Now, when you look at it, it is a positive thing because it does advantage you in some way, [...] On the other hand, it is a way of creating divisions– how they don't see you as a student but always as a community member first.

While Anita also mentioned the quota misuse by Albanian students, she particularly highlighted the engineering of identitarian boundaries through the self-declaration policy and labor of ordinary clerics. Here, the university worker acts as an agent of power by urging Anita to profess racialized difference and "mark" herself. Similarly to Bekim, the cleric does the policing labor of multiculturalism by reserving racialized difference only for those perceived to be, in Anita's words, "of color." Decidedly, it is racialized minorities who are exclusively called upon to claim difference while the white Albanian body remains unmarked. She continued to share her experiences as a political representative within the assembly:

> They never see you as a citizen but always as a– you always have to mention these communities: Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian, you know? [...] When an Albanian member raises an issue, they speak on behalf of all citizens, you know? But, when we raise an issue, we have to by *all means* mention the communities. [...] You know, not as a citizen, but the community I belong– and then as a citizen. [...] I can't say that I represent you [the author], for instance. I can only say that I represent the Ashkali community.

For Anita, Albanian representatives were relieved of the multicultural imperative of professing themselves. Albanians represented the "non-marked," abstract, liberal citizen– insofar as they demonstrated a capacity for tolerance. Importantly, it is precisely through the anxious projection of racialized difference onto the "marked" body that Albanian whiteness can (tentatively) institute itself. Anita continued to share: "That's what made me feel that I am a community representative even though I am proud to be one. But, you know, these divisions– because you always have to *declare yourself* Roma, Ashkali, or Egyptian. [...] This way of creating divisions hurts me, you know? [...] Even though Kosovo is a multi-ethnic country." Crucially, Anita also rendered strange the paradoxical homogenization of racialized minorities. As she put it, Albanians use the acronym "RAE" to refer to them. Anita argued that for the Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptians the acronym is discriminatory in its assumption of sameness. She suggested:

> Now, it's not that we are racist. For instance, as an Ashkali, I am not racist towards the Roma or Egyptians. But since they divided us, then they should not consider us all the same. The Roma have their own culture and language, you know? [...] The Ashkali and Egyptians– I grew up speaking Albanian, you know? I don't have another language or origin. And our traditions, are the same as Albanians'[...] The Ashkali were always talented in *tallava*, but Albanians also have it.[40] This is also a thing we share, you know? [...] Now, if we're going to divide just because of *skin color,* there are also Albanians of color.

In no ambiguous terms, Anita theorizes the various racialized and gendered demands premising her roles as a political representative and activist. She negotiates imaginaries about the oppressed/uneducated racialized woman and theorizes systemic neglect and the impasse of being allowed to speak exclusively for racialized minorities. Indeed, multicultural governmentalities solicit racialized minorities to profess racialized difference and uphold identitarian boundaries simultaneously; the very terms of recognition for their multicultural inclusion. Surely, she identifies a salient conundrum within liberal multiculturalism in Kosovo: The demand to relentlessly articulate oneself through fractioned categories even as the purported differences between them are constantly obscured (the RAE acronym). Constitutional categories, it seems, are there to merely secure Albanian whiteness, their multicultural credentials, and therefore proper Europeanness. In other words, multicultural governmentalities ambiguously and simultaneously reinforce *and* obscure the specificities between the Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptians so that it is them who bear the burden of managing identitarian boundaries– while collectively, they are demarcated as non-Albanian/non-white.

The management of boundaries may also be underwritten by desires of proximity to Albanianness and distance from Romaniness in terms of language, origins, culture, and traditions. This process is entrenched in asymmetrical power dynamics between Albanians and racialized minorities *and* between the Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptians. Earlier, I argued

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[40]Tallava is a music genre originating from Albanian-speaking Roma communities in Kosovo, Albania, and North Macedonia. Tallava, its appropriation and disavowal, is saturated with Albanian white anxiety due to its Roma origins and "oriental" nature. Piro Rexhepi (2023) writes about this in his book.

how Bekim, an Albanian NGO worker seeks to secure his whiteness by projecting racialized difference onto racialized minorities. Here, Anita's deflection of that projection cannot be missed: As racialized minorities are invited to be the only "rightful owners" of *tallava* and "skin color," she resists this imperative by establishing them as shared with Albanians. Simultaneously, while Anita deflects/resists the projection of racialized difference onto herself, she implicitly projects it onto the Roma, who in her view, *really* do have a different culture, language, origin, and tradition.

To reiterate, racialized minorities are invited to simultaneously represent *specific* fractioned identities and racialized minorities *collectively*. It is precisely these inconsistencies, contradictions, and ambiguities that make multicultural governmentality powerfully diffuse, though not totalistic, in shoring up Albanian whiteness. Importantly, racialized minorities discursively resist the imperative of professing themselves by theorizing the uneven burden of representation; the invitation to speak exclusively from the position of that professed self. Paradoxically, they are also invited to aspire for whiteness (through proximity to Albanianness) and distance themselves from Romaniness– deflecting racialized difference from the self and projecting it onto the Roma. I contend, therefore, that liberal multiculturalism diverts energies from cross-racial alliances in favor of proximity to whiteness, although its effects are paradoxical rather than absolute.

Conclusion

In this project, I have argued that liberal multiculturalism masquerades as a form of national belonging and inclusion (Puar 27) which seeks to produce Albanian tolerant, civilized, European, and white standing at the expense of those it purports to include. Surely, for suspicious Muslim Albanians, the pursuit of whiteness remains a powerful site of *cruel optimism* (Berlant 2011). As cultural theorist Lauren Berlant puts it:

> A relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing. It might involve food, a kind of love; it might be a fantasy of the good life, or a political project. It might rest on something simpler, too, like a new habit that promises to induce in you an improved way of being. The kinds of optimistic relations are not inherently cruel. They become cruel only when the object that draws your attachment actively impedes the aim that brought you to it initially. (1-2)

Indeed, the Euro-Atlantic white enclosure purports to be what we desire, the fantasy of the good life, and the post-genocide pathway to safety (Rexhepi 9) as it actively impedes and defers Kosovar sovereignty in favor of Western tutelage (Rexhepi 92). Importantly, the promised but withheld Albanian incorporation into the white enclosure produces yearning and longing that never rewards its captives (Puar 32) and feelings of self-hate, fear, and internalized islamophobia " due to… failed [Albanian] aspirations to become,. . . , white" (Rexhepi 105). Crucially, the white enclosure conscripts Muslim Albanians to anxiously reiterate their racial purity by way of forgetting, secularizing, and flattening our own histories as well as by way of epistemic erasure, physical removal, and externalization of racialized minorities. In doing so, Muslim Albanians keep the enclosure white while their own whiteness remains permanently suspect (Rexhepi 106)– merely a *cruel optimism*.

Furthermore, I have argued that multicultural governmentality operates as a form of biopolitics where the inclusion and fractioning of racialized minorities sanction violence upon those very same subjects. Therefore, liberal multiculturalism is also saturated with *cruel optimisms*; a promise of belonging, the good life, a kind of attachment that only confers inclusion to racialized minorities who are amenable to human rights paradigms, ascendancy to whiteness, and who can be rendered knowable, deservingly innocent, and markable; those who bear the burden of *professing* racialized difference. Indeed, within multicultural governance, political racelessness and tolerance discourse converge to elide and depoliticize racialized violence as merely spectacular, exceptional, a matter of individual prejudice, and inconsequential to liberal multiculturalism.

Simultaneously, I have taken inspiration from Srila Roy (2023) to think about multicultural governmentality not as a totalizing, panoptic extension of power, but rather as an entanglement– especially in the context of Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian, and Albanian anti-racist activism and solidarities. Surely, such anti-racist solidarities, particularly on the part of Albanian activists, have been productive terrains of power asymmetries in the form of giver/receiver and benefactor/beneficiary binaries. At the same time, multicultural governmentality is also prone to disruption, destabilization, and even failure precisely because it requires energetic affect and technologies of boundary policing, proficient professing, and prolific performance. My aim here has not been to resolve the concomitant conscriptions and interruptions of governance, but rather, to propose an intentional *harnessing* of these ambiguous effects: A substantial reckoning with the intrinsic asymmetries that solicit Albanian activists to "bestow" knowledge and invite racialized minorities to "accept" Albanian tolerance and expertise.

In addition, my Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian activist interlocutors powerfully critiqued the reinforced silences of political racelessness (in terms of spectacular violence and political representation) through protest and discourse. Importantly, they articulated racialized violence as generated by not accidental to multiculturalism. Simultaneously, multicultural governmentality also invites racialized minorities to manage the boundaries between them, paradoxically compelling desires of proximity to Albanianness and projections of racialized difference onto the Roma– the putative "rightful owners" of difference. Indeed, I hold that liberal multiculturalism seeks to elide these racialized hierarchies in favor of consolidation with axes of privilege rather than cross-racial alliances (Puar 28). Importantly, aspirational whiteness seems to be the prime site of longing and yearning that never rewards its captives, especially those classified most at a "distance" from it. Albanians, of course, are those whose whiteness is posited as the most "redeemable."

Lastly, I suggest that the fissures and cracks of multiculturalism offer sites of potentiality. Surely, my Albanian anti-racist activist interlocutors were both consonant with the imperatives of whiteness and *unnerved* at the cruel optimisms of multiculturalism; the suggestion that they ought to shore up their own whiteness at the expense of racialized minorities. Therefore, my hope is that anti-racist solidarities can also be about a critical remembering of our own pasts and struggles; about leaning into modes of belonging that are less tethered to "Europe," anxiety, fear, shame, and optimisms that cruelly impede on our own fullness and multiplicity. I join Rexhepi (2023) in his call for modes of being that relinquish affective attachments towards the West, whiteness, and the unrelenting impulse to police ourselves, each other (89), and internally racialized "others." Indeed, I call for ways of being "through which *care* is cultivated for the abundance of life" (Connolly 70).

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