



ULTRA-RED  
**BLOK 70**  
Soundscapes of precariousness.

[ SIXTH IN PUBLIC RECORD'S TRANSISTORS SERIES.]

**PROLOGUE.** ON LEAVING THE CENTRE OF BELGRADE, DRIVING IN THE DIRECTION OF THE FOOTBALL STADIUM RED STAR AND THEN FOLLOWING THE STREET TO KRAGUJEVAC, ONE SEES THE SIGN '1000 ROSES'. ONCE A MOTEL, 1000 ROSES IS A CAMP RUN BY THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSION ON REFUGEES. SURROUNDED BY FARMLANDS, THE CAMP HOUSES REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS AWAITING UNHCR'S DECISION ON THEIR ASYLUM APPLICATIONS. IF APPROVED, THESE MEN AND WOMEN WILL BE RESETTLED IN THE EU OR THE US. IN SERBIA, 1000 ROSES IS ONLY ONE OF THE PLACES WHERE UNDOCUMENTED MIGRANTS ARE TO BE FOUND.

ORIGINALLY FROM JORDAN, HAVING LIVED AND WORKED IN CYPRUS—WHERE HE MET AND MARRIED A WOMAN FROM BOSNIA—SAID DOES NOT WANT TO LEAVE 1000 ROSES AND HEAD 'WEST' AS MANY OTHER MIGRANTS FROM THE CAMP DO. 'THERE IS NO LIFE WITHOUT DOCUMENTS' HE SAYS AND SPEAKS OF BEING SEPARATED FROM HIS WIFE WHO RETURNED TO BOSNIA WHILE SAID AND HIS SON STAYED IN THE CAMP. FOR THE LAST YEAR, DAY AFTER DAY, SAID HAS SAT ON THE SAME CHAIR. THIS CHAIR, HE PROMISES TO BREAK INTO PIECES THE DAY HE LEAVES.

**1'** Blok 70 in Novi Beograd. The market is a large, two floor structure, that hosts more than 300 shops. The bargain goods range from clothing to kitchenware. On any day of the week, one will find the corridors bursting with shoppers, clerks and merchants. The market at Blok 70, is a busy place inhabited by various groups of people.

**2'** Local Serbian people, mostly women, work as sales employees in the shops. They also work in the Chinese restaurants, chopping the vegetables, and delivering food to the shops next door. They work from 9 to 6 or from 6 to 4 every day of the week for 300 dinar a day. Some of the workers have been laid off from previous jobs. Some, especially young women and Serbian war refugees from Bosnia, could not find work elsewhere and opted for Blok 70. Others come and go from Blok 70, working here and there.

**3'** Blok 70 hosts a large number of Roma people. A portion of this population have arrived in Serbia only recently after being deported from Germany. In Germany they had a temporary residency that had to be renewed every three months. But all that changed when police forcibly removed the Roma refugees from

Germany. Picked up at six in the morning, with no time to pack, entire families were put in vans to be detained at the airport and flown out of the country hours later with no possibility of returning to Germany for four years. The alternative, called voluntary return, happened after social benefits have been cut or the work permits suspended. It meant having two weeks to pack. With the voluntary return, deportees have the possibility to return to Germany, but only for a holiday or a short visit.

**4'** Forced to abandon their lives in Germany, Roma found themselves deported by border police to Serbia, Monte Negro and Kosovo -- often after a seven month-long struggle. In April 2002, Roma organized a protest caravan through Germany. Demonstrators set up a protest camp occupying a public square in Dusseldorf from July to December 2002. During these months, protestors mobilized several demonstrations and hunger strikes. In response to police raids, the Roma occupied offices of the PDS and the SPD. While the German government conducted deportation flights to Pristina three times a week, the Roma demanded their immediate stop and the right to stay in Germany.

**5'** Finding a low paid job in Blok 70 offers little consolation for those who have spent the last 12 years of their lives in Germany, for those who planned to live here, fall in love here. In Serbia they are foreigners. In Serbia, many don't even speak the language. In Serbia, they can not continue their education or trainings.

6' Chinese nationals run the shops in Blok 70. They have to negotiate with Serbian owners to rent a shop. The law prohibits them to own property. The small shops cost between 200 and 3000 Euros a month.

7' Chinese nationals are granted between three and six months residency permits with the possibility to prolong the permit another three to six months. In the '90s, Chinese migrants were given permits to stay sometimes up to two years. Today, renewal of a temporary residency depends upon the amount of taxes paid. Permits, however, are rarely extended for more than six months. Visas are currently given to close family members, such as a wife, or husband, or children, but to no one else.

8' Due of their temporary residency status, Chinese parents often send their children born in Serbia to schools back in China. In fact, Serbian law does not provide permanent status for any foreigners even though some Chinese nationals have lived in Serbia for as long as ten years. After ten years their immigration status is the same as the moment they first arrived.

9' It is not accidental that at this specific moment, in this specific place, the mediators between the different groups at Blok 70 are translators. Young Serbian women studying Chinese make a living translating customs declarations, residency permits, wedding certificates and other official documents for their Chinese employers. They work in a travel

agency and book flights for Chinese businessmen and women to China or holidays to Monte Negro. Always on stand-by with their mobile phones, these young women are the curators of communication at Blok 70. The Serbian redundant worker, compelled to accept a low wage job as a sales clerk; the Roma youth recently deported to Serbia from Germany; and the Chinese shopkeeper are all only able to speak with one other through a translator.

10' Does the Roma youth with German deportation papers know that the Chinese woman for whom he works is experiencing a similar process of precariousness? Does the Serbian woman who has fled war and is working in the kitchen of a restaurant know that the Roma man recently deported from Germany has memories of a movement of resistance? How can they speak to each other?

**EPILOGUE.** IN BLOK 70, THE NAME MIGRANT IS ALMOST PREMATURE. A CHINESE MERCHANT, SPEAKING THROUGH A TRANSLATOR, POINTS OUT THAT IT IS NOT EVEN POSSIBLE FOR HIM TO CONSIDER HIMSELF A MIGRANT. A MIGRANT, HE SAYS, IS SOMEONE WHO HAS RIGHTS. TO NAME ONESELF A MIGRANT IS ITSELF A POLITICAL ACT. A FORM OF RESISTANCE, A DEMAND, A TRANSFORMATION OF EVERYDAY LIFE.

(Written by Andrejisevic and Bojadzijevo.)

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