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# The Securitization of the Roma in Europe

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# The Securitization of Roma Mobilities and the Re-bordering of Europe

*Nicholas De Genova*

Minoritized ‘Roma’ communities within and across Europe have long been the target of processes of racialization and criminalization.<sup>1</sup> Contemporary processes of securitization with regard to Roma mobilities, and the concomitant state and extra-state coercive practices dedicated to their encampment and ghettoization, as well as their eviction and displacement, are inextricable from these well-established processes of Roma subordination. Inasmuch as many Roma people have been juridically re-inscribed over recent years as ostensible citizens of the EU, however, the securitization of their mobility within and across the area of the EU exemplifies a premier instance of their precisely *abject* relation to EU citizenship (Hepworth 2012, 2014, 2015). Simultaneously but uneasily inhabiting the socio-political conditions of ‘citizens’, ‘migrants’, and also ‘refugees’ (Bigo et al. 2013), Roma people repeatedly emerge as a kind of limit

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figure, and their mobility therefore provides a particularly revealing site for the interrogation of the re-bordering of ‘Europe’ as such.

### ABJECT MOBILITY AND NEO-NOMADIZATION

Roma people have perennially (and inordinately) been burdened by the pernicious ascription of racializing and criminalizing stigma to their mobility. The notorious construction of ‘Gypsies’ as nomads and the well-worn apparatus of suspicion and derision that has conventionally shadowed this allegedly unsettled condition have thus been purported to ensue from the unsettling, but supposedly intrinsic, mobility of the Roma themselves (Drakakis-Smith 2007; Hepworth 2012, 2015; van Baar 2011b). However, contemporary EU (statist) constructions of Roma ‘nomadism’ not only signal the most entrenched expressions of methodological and political sedentarism (Malkki 1995) but have also routinely served as desultory alibis for campaigns of eviction and deportation and hence as a protracted strategy of state-enforced mobility for the Roma (Fekete 2014; Hepworth 2012; Kóczé 2017; Clough Marinaro and Daniele 2011; Nacu 2012; van Baar 2011b, 2015, 2017b). Here, of course, it is likewise imperative to note the productivity of both sporadic pogroms and systematic violence, perpetrated by racist mobs or neo-fascist gangs, that have complemented and exacerbated the handiwork of the police (Clark and Rice 2012; Fekete 2016; Mirga 2009). Roma communities have hence been widely subjected to statist as well as extra-state strategies of both coercive *immobilization* (through segregated ghettoization and encampment) (see Sardelić 2017) and forced *mobilization* (through various forms of expulsion and displacement) (see Solimene 2017; van Baar 2017a). In short, it is crucial to underscore the extent to which *new forms of nomadization* are being coercively perpetrated by various formations of state power, serving to reinforce and reinvigorate the customary abjection of Roma mobility, and also cynically mobilizing the specter of Roma mobility to the ends of broadening the purview of their abjection and subjugation (van Baar 2011b, 2015). Indeed, as Roma migrants have arrived in places where they did not already occupy well-established positions within existing racial hierarchies as an automatically recognizable racialized category (see, e.g., Fox 2012; Fox et al. 2012; Grill 2012, 2017), these spectral (and increasingly spectacularized) projections of putative Roma ‘nomadism’—which I designate as their *neo-nomadization*—serve to refortify the processes of ‘Gypsy’ re-racialization and criminalization.

The hegemonic EU political ideal of ‘free movement’ thus becomes riddled with ‘a free movement across countries that is defined by social and security excesses and an imperative to contain them...[reconfiguring] free movement from an opportunity into a series of dangers’ (Aradau et al. 2013: 138). The mobility of Europe’s working poor, and particularly of the Roma, thus transmutes the free movement of presumably self-governing and responsible *individuals* (properly neo-liberal subjects) into a ‘problem’, perceived always as being a matter of unruly *collectivities*—(racial) formations of ‘group’ mobility—and as a result, is presented as ‘a question of categorising those who can be legitimately mobile and those whose mobility needs to be restricted on grounds of security’ (Aradau et al. 2013: 138; cf. van Baar 2017a). For Roma people and other poor migrants within and across the space of the EU, free movement—as an ostensible entitlement and distinguishing feature of EU citizenship—reveals itself to be a distinctly ‘un/free mobility’ (Yıldız and De Genova 2017).

### VEXATIONS OF CITIZENSHIP

The abjection of the ‘undesirable’ mobility of Roma (EU) ‘citizens’ reveals a constitutive contradiction within the larger EU-ropean project (Riedner et al. 2016). Repeatedly and persistently, ‘the Roma’ paradoxically emerge as a (racialized) ‘problem’ precisely *because* of their EU citizenship and the consequent requirement for EU Member States to circumvent or subvert EU law in order to render Roma migrants ‘irregular’ and deportable (Çağlar and Mehling 2013: 173). This is a remarkable instance of the contradictions that can arise for mobile, ostensible citizens who, despite their EU passports, come to be effectively irregularized and thus ‘migrantized’ (Garelli and Tazzioli 2016; Tazzioli 2014; see also Riedner et al. 2016). This is particularly the case among Roma migrants, who tend to find little opportunity for employment other than in the informalized economy (often as day labor) and whose impoverished (and not uncommonly homeless) condition as the sometimes over-employed working poor must nonetheless be supplemented by begging, resulting in their being rendered deportable and subject to racially targeted policing (Yıldız and Humphris *n.d.*; cf. Hepworth 2014, 2015).

The contemporary condition of the Roma in Europe becomes more complex still, however, if we consider Roma mobility within the EU area not merely as ‘migration’ but also (not implausibly) as veritable refugee

movements, in the sense that migration is often a form of escape from or desertion of one or another socio-political regime of subordination and persecution repudiated by the ‘migrants’ as intolerable and from which they flee (Mezzadra 2001, 2004). Given the abundant evidence to support the proposition that Roma people are indeed routinely subjected to systematic racist persecution and discrimination in their countries of origin, their ostensible (EU) citizenship consequently becomes riddled with the vexations of an officially impermissible and unspeakable putative oxymoron—that in Europe, ‘citizens’ become ‘refugees’ by virtue of the fact that certain EU Member States are culpable of abuses of the supposed civil or human rights of their own citizens and that, as citizens of the EU, members of these persecuted and minoritized communities might consequently be compelled to seek asylum within other EU countries. Furthermore, not unlike many other ‘asylum-seekers’ who are compelled to migrate to Europe as illegalized migrants (the great majority of whom are ultimately refused refugee status), we may discern in the condition of most of the Roma who cross borders within Europe a still more extreme perversion of the pretensions to human rights of the EU asylum regime: theirs is precisely the predicament of refugees who are systematically disqualified from any consideration for recognition as such and are preemptively rendered ineligible for any asylum process—presumptively disqualified from eligibility for the status of refugees by the mere fact of their EU citizenship—and reduced, in practice, to the status of virtually irregular and deportable ‘migrants’ whose putative right to mobility as citizens is negated by virtue of their marginalization and poverty (van Baar 2015, 2017a, b).

Once this uncanny fact becomes cognizable, however, we must go further and consider the perfectly reasonable proposition that ‘the Roma’ are not (and never were) truly ‘citizens’ in the first place. The juridical anomaly of their ostensible EU citizenship and the un/free mobility that it occasions, facilitating their efforts to travel as migrants to EU Member States other than the countries of their national citizenship, must then be subjected to extraordinary policing and exceptional measures to render them ‘irregular’, evictable, and deportable—in short, to harmonize their socio-political and juridical status within the larger constellation of the EU with their real (debased) status in their countries of origin. Furthermore, when they return ‘home’, to those (predominantly Eastern European) countries of origin where their citizenship was always already disavowed, they are further derided as ‘undesirable’ migrants for allegedly having

blemished the reputations of these ‘sending’ countries and simultaneously stigmatized anew as ‘failed’ migrants, if not as ‘criminal’ deportees. They thus become double losers. In short, Roma migrants everywhere in the EU seem, sooner or later, to become *re*-racialized as ‘Roma’—that is to say, they are produced anew as ‘Roma’, or, to put it more bluntly, they are re-Gypsified (Riedner et al. 2016). Their citizenship is consequently bedeviled, as it always is, by countless vagaries and vexations and seldom—if ever—suffices to counteract their actual lived experience of de facto statelessness.

### STATELESS CITIZENS

It is instructive here to return to the locus classicus of the theorization of statelessness: Hannah Arendt’s much-celebrated chapter, ‘The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man’ in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1968: 267–302). Arendt’s meditation on ‘the Rights of Man’ (or what, in a less classical idiom, might be termed ‘human rights’) is, perhaps counter-intuitively, particularly resonant and pertinent here, because it is deeply preoccupied by precisely this question of *mobility*. Arendt confronts a crisis for ‘human rights’ instigated by the mass displacements of whole populations expelled from their natal lands and coercively set in motion, whereby ‘rightlessness’ presents itself as an inexorable effect of statelessness. The refugees whose predicaments she contemplates were mobilized by their expulsion into a kind of no-man’s land between states.<sup>2</sup> Of course, the mobility of Roma migrants within the larger spatial arena of the EU may appear to present a striking contrast, inasmuch as their ‘migrant’ mobilities are predominantly self-activated and autonomous. In this regard, even with their historically specific and socio-politically particular characteristics as virtual refugees, Roma migrants, like many other ‘irregular’ labor migrants, forfeit their natal countries (the states where they are most often juridically inscribed as citizens) and traverse the borders of nation states in order to more or less deliberately inhabit the no-man’s land of protracted rightlessness that prevails under the bleak horizon of prospective expulsion (deportation). Notably, the mobile EU citizenship of Roma migrants confirms that such predicaments are not exclusively reserved for illegalized migrant non-citizens originating from non-EU ‘third countries’. What, for Arendt, was a paradox of refugees whose mobility had been inflicted upon them like a curse, stripping them of the presumptive protections of any state, now appears as the

banal and matter-of-fact racialized condition of Roma people, ostensible EU citizenship notwithstanding, pervasively exposed to the punitive and discriminatory recriminations that ensue not from the absence of a state's oversight but rather from an *excess* of state superintendence and whose migrant mobility across the space of the EU merely multiplies such exposure to state power and exacerbates their persecution.

The tumultuous succession of cataclysmic events that generated the defining features of the first half of the twentieth century is, in Arendt's (1968: 267) account, chiefly distinguished for having provoked the 'migrations of groups... who were welcomed nowhere and could be assimilated nowhere, [who] once they had left their homeland... remained homeless... [and] became stateless'. The resemblance here with the predicament of many Roma people is remarkable. Arendt is most directly concerned with the dilemma of the deprivation of civil rights suffered by dispossessed people and, following their forced displacement, the consequent transmutation of these initial travesties into the prolonged and irremediable condition of their veritable rightlessness. This conundrum, which surrounds the question of 'human rights', provides an instructive backdrop for my own questions with respect to the condition of the Roma. It is especially revealing, as Arendt incisively remarks, that this is the process which allowed totalitarian regimes (that of Nazi Germany in particular) to convert their victims into precisely what they had always already alleged them to be: namely, 'the scum of the earth' (1968: 267). That is to say, by means of an utterly and devastatingly effective 'factual propaganda', they were delivered across nation-state frontiers as 'unidentifiable beggars, without nationality, without money, and without passports' (1968: 269). We may therefore detect, at the heart of Arendt's prescient enquiry into the perplexities of human rights, a question about human mobility in an extreme form, which, despite its extremity, nonetheless bears a striking resemblance in the twenty-first century to the rather mundane plight of an ever-growing and increasingly prominent mass of restless denizens: irregularized migrants, presumptively susceptible to administrative detention and all manner of police measures, and with little or no recourse to any semblance of legal process—all existentially homeless, inassimilable, and prospectively deportable. And remarkably, perhaps even more than many other categories of (non-citizen, non-European) migrants, the Roma resurface as Europe's premier racialized internal alterity, now re-nomadized as 'migrants' (EU passports notwithstanding).

Deportation has long been a technique crucial to state power for the disposal of diverse populations of ‘undesirables’ (cf. Kanstroom 2007; Walters 2002), who are sometimes subjected to serial expulsions and displacements, as we are reminded by Arendt’s discussion of statelessness. Furthermore, in Arendt’s account, these serial expulsions never guarantee that those subjected to mass deportation could not otherwise be targeted for outright extermination. The problem in Arendt’s era, of course, was what she astutely calls ‘the undeportability of the stateless person’ (1968: 283) and the perennial dilemma of *how to make refugees deportable* yet again (1968: 284). As Arendt (1968: 279) notes in her exposition of how the very concept of statelessness degenerated into one of mere ‘displacement’, the refusal to acknowledge the veritable statelessness of the so-called displaced persons ‘always means repatriation, i.e., deportation to a country of origin, which either refuses to recognize the prospective repatriate as a citizen, or, on the contrary, urgently wants him back for punishment’.<sup>3</sup> These same vexations inevitably generated a more general crisis for the immigration and naturalization regimes in the receiving states and undermined the status of migrants who had been previously naturalized, such that ‘living conditions for all aliens markedly deteriorated’ (1968: 285). Confronted with those who had been stripped of their citizenship (de-nationalized) and ultimately deported by another state, these receiving states came increasingly to render an ever-wider cross section of their own lawfully resident aliens and citizens susceptible to de-naturalization or de-nationalization. Thus, these states became embroiled in the sorts of ‘lawlessness organized by the police’ which threatened them with a subtle but seemingly ever more inexorable ‘danger of a gradual transformation into a police state’ (1968: 288). In Arendt’s (1968: 290) account, therefore, an incapacity ‘to treat stateless people as legal persons and... the extension of arbitrary rule by police decree’ fostered a ‘temptation to deprive all citizens of legal status and rule them with an omnipotent police’.<sup>4</sup> It ought to be obvious here that whatever securitized abuses may be deployed against Roma people, these will inevitably tend to serve to render routine such excesses of state power, which are first authorized as ‘exceptional’ or ‘emergency’ measures but are increasingly extended to an ever-wider circle of other denizens and abject citizens, and thus become normalized.

## RE-BORDERING ‘EUROPEAN’ CITIZENSHIP: RE-BORDERING ‘EUROPE’

In the face of the newly reanimated ‘pan-European racism’ against the Roma, palpably enacted through the pervasive securitization of their mobilities and through exceptional measures against a phantasmatic (spectacularized) ‘invasion’ of destitute beggars and alleged welfare benefits ‘tourists’ and ‘scroungers’, re-racialized, re-nomadized Roma migrant citizens can only encounter Europe as something approximating to ‘a huge open prison’, as Liz Fekete has incisively argued (2014: 68). Once again, Arendt is strikingly relevant here. In her account, the perplexities of ‘human rights’ derive, in no small measure, from a peculiar consequence: the fact that ‘whether we like it or not we really have started to live in One World’ (Arendt 1968: 297). In other words, Arendt’s paradox derived from the consolidation of what she deemed to be ‘the new global political situation’: ‘a completely organized humanity’ in which there is ‘no longer any “uncivilized” spot on the earth’. Paradoxically, as this newly comprehensive degree of global integration became self-evident (largely as a consequence of European colonialism), there arose the conditions of possibility for millions of people to have been shorn not only of particular rights but of even the ‘right to belong to some kind of organized community’ such that ‘the loss of home and political status became identical with expulsion from humanity altogether’ (Arendt 1968: 297). By a curious and striking postcolonial inversion, with the unprecedented degree of comprehensive institutionalized juridical and socio-political harmonization that has been created with the EU—albeit with its inevitable unevenness and irreconcilable constitutive contradictions—and the consequent completely new political situation, corresponding to a ‘completely organized’ EU-rope, it is now European integration which has meant that the Roma now re-emerge as ‘*Europe’s* largest ethnic minority’ (see, e.g., European Commission 2010, 2011, 2013; cf. Guglielmo and Waters 2005; McGarry 2011; van Baar 2011a; Yıldız and De Genova 2017), a racialized ‘minority’ on a European scale, whose deprivation of the presumed rights of the citizen derives in no small measure from the fact that they now find themselves in ‘One Europe’. Of course, this singular and fully unified ‘Europe’ remains, in very significant ways, both an incomplete project and a rather fragile and beleaguered ideological projection (De Genova 2016a, b). If ‘Europe’ remains, however, deeply contradictory and fundamentally incoherent—indeed, if ‘Europe’ remains in many ways an abstraction—it is

nevertheless crucial to recognize it as a real abstraction (Sohn-Rethel 1978: 20), produced and continuously sustained by socio-political relations. We may even posit that, in the era of the EU, this real abstraction of ‘Europe’ is perhaps more real than ever before. And for the Roma—for Roma migrants in particular—who encounter analogous and partially coordinated efforts to securitize their abject mobility as ostensible EU citizens, the apt analogy of an open prison reminds us that the amorphous but cruel borders and boundaries of ‘Europe’ (De Genova 2017) not only trace an external perimeter or an externalized border zone extending outward but also assume the fractalized form of a centripetal proliferation of internalized, involuted, and increasingly securitized barriers which traverse the EU-ropean space (Riedner et al. 2016; van Baar 2014) and thus increasingly permeate the space of everyday life for those who find themselves racialized as ‘Roma’ (or ‘Gypsies’).

The consequences for the stateless in Arendt’s account of ‘a problem not of space but of political organization’ (1968: 294), that is, their mass dislocation from the jurisdictions of particular (‘national’) states, were that they came to be represented in the abject figure of the stateless, rightless subjects of ‘human rights’ and nothing more. In other words, shorn of what Arendt deemed to be the more proper and substantial ‘rights’ of citizens, the stateless were abandoned to ‘the abstract nakedness of being human and nothing but human’ (1968: 297). For the Roma, confronted with an analogous problem not of space but of political organization, it is not so much their dislocation or forced expulsion from the precincts of one or another punitive nation state so much as their larger-scale, supranational subsumption within a juridical and socio-political framework which both facilitates their un/free mobility across the space of the EU and seems to partially subvert the national borders of its Member States, while at the same time abandoning them everywhere to the substantial condition of being despised as Gypsies and nothing but Gypsies, against whom the borders of national (welfare) state are repeatedly re-activated through exceptional security measures.

Even when they are fleeing violent persecution and desperate circumstances, the Roma are widely figured as ‘bogus’ refugees or ‘illegitimate’ asylum-seekers, and when they are thereby categorized as ‘mere’ migrants, they are pervasively denigrated as ‘poverty migrants’ and perniciously affiliated with the specter of ‘benefit tourism’ and ‘abuse’ of social welfare systems (Castañeda 2014). Alternately, the Roma are criminalized as a specifically ‘itinerant’ group whose alleged menace to the security of

EU-ropean society as a whole is amplified by its devious recourse to an essentialized and de-historicized ‘nomadism’, and thus exquisitely affiliated with a defining and intrinsically unsettling mobility (van Baar 2014: 91). The abjection of the mobility of the Roma thus contributes to a wider-ranging process of neo-nomadization. Moreover, to the extent that they are singled out for special policy consideration as a ‘European minority’ and presumed to be in need of developmental assistance, their separation tends to re-inscribe their re-racialization, segregation, and securitization (van Baar 2017a). In this respect, the very same juridical regime of ‘human rights’ norms and priorities which has been institutionalized at the EU level, and according to which the Roma in particular, as ostensible EU citizens, are repeatedly made to reappear as a ‘problem’ which the EU must solve, serves nonetheless to re-entrench their racialized minoritization and marginalization and hence tends to further mobilize them in a seemingly unrelenting quest to seek their fortunes as migrants across the space of the EU. In short, the EU-ropeanization of the Roma has not reduced them to the abstract nakedness of merely ‘human’ life, nor has it supplied them with the substantive entitlements or rights of ‘citizenship’, however much these may ultimately remain similarly abstract (and merely juridical). Instead, their encompassment within ‘Europe’, particularly as migrants, has reconfigured their de facto statelessness, now on a quasi-supranational yet multi-national (re-bordered) scale. Thus, with newly excessive and rather concrete forms of racial stigmatization, criminalization, securitization, and neo-nomadization, the EU-ropeanization of the Roma has reconstructed their subordination.

Finally, a crucial difference can be found here between the plight of the stateless refugees in Arendt’s account and the predicament of most Roma refugees/migrants within the EU today, and that is the inherent ambiguity and instability which pertain to Roma mobilities—the veritable undecidability between a mobility that has been compelled (a refugee condition) and one which, because it has been self-activated as an act of flight and desertion, is a manifestation of the autonomy of migration. In this respect, we are reminded that, no matter how abject their citizenship, and no matter how effectively un/free their mobility, as EU citizens, many Roma migrants nonetheless appropriate their putative right to ‘free movement’ and migrate in order to realize their various aspirations and ambitions for a way of life free from the asphyxiating constraints of their racial subjugation ‘at home’. Their securitized neo-nomadization, criminalization, and re-racialization as ‘undesirable’ Gypsies across the whole of the EU

notwithstanding, Roma migrants nevertheless autonomously enact their mobility. They frequently confound the juridical regime of EU citizenship precisely because their freedom of movement is exercised first. Confronted, in other words, with the primacy and autonomy of Roma migration, the apparatuses of policing, eviction, and deportation are mobilized only in response, as reaction formations dedicated to rendering these presumptive citizens effectively ‘stateless’ yet again. In an objective sense then—even though their challenges do not always manifest themselves as overt defiance and often take only the modest and mundane form of a simple disregard for the mandates and machinations of a EU-ropean socio-political order which disparages them as loathsome vagabonds, unwanted beggars, and suspected criminals—Roma migrants incessantly confront the EU regime of un/free mobility as autonomous subjects with their own priorities and prerogatives and thereby expose the contradictions of their abject citizenship.

## NOTES

1. A note on terminology: I have opted here to use the term ‘Roma’ as both a noun (as is customary) and as an adjective, and I am thus deliberately choosing not to resort to the term ‘Romani’ as an adjective. This usage admittedly reflects the increasingly established normativity and ubiquity of the label ‘Roma’—as a generic name for the heterogeneous (multi-lingual, plurinational, and culturally diverse) minoritized communities which variously call themselves Rom, Roma, Vlach Roma, Romany, Sinti, Ashkali, Bayash, Kalé, ‘Egyptian’, Gypsies, and so on—which has itself arguably been an effect of the larger processes of EU institutionalization (cf. Guild and Carrera 2013; Sigona and Trehan 2009; Simhandl 2006; van Baar 2011a). Consequently, my use of the phrase ‘Roma people’ entails what may seem to some readers to be an awkward redundancy. Nonetheless, inasmuch as the term ‘Roma’ has already acquired a thoroughly racialized salience, my usage intends to simultaneously acknowledge the saturation of the term with racial significance—without euphemizing it or retreating from it—while also seeking to emphatically re-humanize the people so described.
2. Elaborating the concept of ‘frontier zones’, Leanne Weber and Sharon Pickering (2011) have discerned analogous processes underway in the contemporary global regime dedicated to the ‘management’ of refugee and migrant mobilities, whereby states (such as Australia in their research) willfully produce a gap between international law and national sovereignty, as a result of which human mobility may be subjected to repressive violence and

- coercion but is deprived of any legal protection (see also Heller and Pezzani 2017 and, more generally, Agier 2011).
3. Furthermore, the more vexed the predicament of such ‘undesirables’ and the states which did not desire them became, the more the internment camp emerged as ‘the routine solution for the problem of domicile of the “displaced persons”’ (Arendt 1968: 279); ‘the only practical substitute for a non-existent homeland... the only “country” the world had to offer’ them (284).
  4. It seems indisputable that this transformation of deportation from the exception to a presumptive norm, across the intervening decades with which Arendt was concerned, owes a great deal to the general degradation of the global status of ‘aliens’ in light of the mass deportations and forced population movements of the era she describes (see De Genova 2013; De Genova and Peutz 2010; Fekete 2005; Hing 2006; Kanstroom 2007, 2012).

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