The Perpetual Mobile Machine of Forced Mobility: Europe’s Roma and the Institutionalization of Rootlessness

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Migration and border scholars have convincingly argued that the Europeanization and securitization of migration and border policies in Europe have led to practices and techniques of population management that constitute a questionable divide between EU and non-EU groups (Huysmans 2006; Vaughan-Williams 2009), as well as between different non-EU populations (Bigo 2008; van Houtum 2010). I will build on this debate, and argue that these securitizing processes and transnational governmentalities have also impacted on the under-researched, ‘intra-EU’ divide regarding irregularized EU citizens, such as Europe’s Muslim and Roma minorities. Consequently, these minoritized, religionized and ethnicized groups have been faced with, for instance, having the adequate exercising of their citizenship – including their right to free movement in the EU – impeded.

This chapter focuses on the position of the Roma, and on how the post-1989 Europeanization of their minority status – including the institutionalized promises for European citizenship and ‘integration’ – ambiguously relate to the securitization of migration and borders in Europe. I will discuss several intra-EU mechanisms and practices of bordering and policing and show that these securitizing processes affect not only migrating Roma – including those who have fled and asked for asylum – but also many other Roma, particularly the poor and segregated, who are confronted with both forced mobility and forced immobility.1
European Citizenship, Free Movement and the Emergence of Domopolitics

Since the 1957 Treaty of Rome, ideas of European unity, cohesion and integration have been closely connected to defining the European Community in terms of its four central freedoms: the free movement of persons, capital, goods and services. To promote these freedoms, the development of infrastructures that accommodate and encourage mobility has increasingly become key to the promotion of European integration in and beyond the EU. The introduction of Schengen and its subsequent incorporation into the EU system, for instance, can be regarded in light of such infrastructures and, in this particular case, as instruments to reduce barriers put up by national borders.

Similarly, since the 1980s the EU has developed so-called ‘Trans-European Networks’. These are cross-European transport, energy and telecommunication networks meant to guarantee the flows represented by the idea of the four freedoms. Since the fall of the Iron Curtain, the emergence of such networks has particularly focused on re-establishing the ‘missing links’ between Europe’s East and West. Aiming at promoting European integration and reconnecting Eastern with Western Europe, the EU has designed several corridors of mobility. Corridor X, for instance, runs from Salzburg through Ljubljana and Belgrade to Skopje and Thessaloniki. The EU documents which describe these corridors have embellished the official narrative of the four freedoms with notions such as connectivity, accessibility, inter-linkage, harmonization and cross-border exchanges.

Yet, while the EU has been rhetorically re-conceptualized as an easily traversable space and European citizenship been based on the paradigm of free movement, the relationship between freedom and security has also been significantly redefined. Along with the establishment of the EU’s ‘Justice and Home Affairs’ policy in 1992, the re-articulation of the EU as an ‘Area of Freedom, Justice and Security’, and the Europeanization of security, migration and border policies, we have seen the emergence of what William Walters (2004) has called ‘domopolitics’. This is the ambiguous governing of political spaces such as the US, the EU or its Member States as a ‘home’. The etymological reference is to the Latin word *domus* that is both the noun ‘home’ and the verb ‘domesticate’. ‘Home’ is something we actively construct through everyday practices. We usually associate it with intimacy, the family, trust and togetherness. ‘Home’ represents a sanctuary and safe place to which we tend to want to return. Home is a place we protect and to which we invite guests. In the sphere of international law, a home is something that, we believe, everyone deserves to have as a fundamental right.

At the same time though, some of us believe that some people and their practices seriously threaten the safe haven of our homes: terrorists, traffickers, criminals and, more often and more controversially in present-day Europe, refugees, migrants, asylum seekers and minorities such as Muslims and Roma. This imagination relates to the second dimension of domopolitics, or to what Walters (2004, 242) describes as ‘a will to domesticate the forces which threaten the sanctity of home.’ Yet:

Domopolitics is not reducible to the Fortress impulse of building walls, strengthening the locks, updating the alarm system. It contains within itself this second tendency which takes it outwards, beyond the home, beyond even its own ‘backyard’ and quite often into its neighbors’ homes, ghettos, jungles, bases, slums. (2004, 242)

The domo-political protection of the home has coincided with more or less conventional border regimes, such as those organized at and around national borders, but has also and increasingly diverged from these regimes and the technologies of border control they have
historically generated. This shift has gone together with the gradual overshadowing of territorial and disciplinary forms and techniques of control by population-based mechanisms of control that monitor the flows of information, goods, services and peoples, and which create more surveillance for some, allegedly ‘risky’ groups than for those considered ‘at risk’ (Bigo 2006b).

One pre-enlargement example of Roma-related domopolitics was the Belgian government’s decision to collectively deport a group of Slovak Romani asylum seekers. In 1999, these Roma, who tried to ask for asylum on their arrival in Belgium, were not allowed to enter the official asylum procedure. Instead, using the false pretext that they would have to come to the police station to complete forms as part of this procedure, they were transported to a closed detention centre. After being kept under heavy police guard for a couple of days they were deported to Slovakia (Cahn and Vermeersch 2000).

At more or less the same time as this deportation took place in Europe’s ‘capital city’, the UK government made a domo-political move that fits the idea of Walters’ ‘beyond the own backyard’ even better. The UK government secretly agreed with the Czech authorities that they should be allowed to perform ‘preventive screenings’ at Prague airport to avoid the possibility of passengers with a Romani background entering the territory of the UK. Personnel from Czech Airlines, the third ‘partner in crime’, marked the names of those on passenger lists whom they suspected of being Roma with the letter G for ‘Gypsy’ (Fawn 2001).

This, and the similar actions of other ‘old’ EU Member States, took place when the Union had begun negotiations with countries in Central and Eastern Europe. The EU reports on progress toward accession repeatedly mentioned the persistent violation of the Roma’s rights in countries such as Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania and Bulgaria. Nevertheless, as the examples illustrate, these violations, and the attempts of some Roma to escape them through migration to the West, were frequently met with denial and the rejection of their asylum claims in Western Europe and Canada (Bigo et al. 2013; Sobotka 2003; Vidra 2013). Upon their return to Central and Eastern Europe, these Roma were blamed for impeding visa liberalization and for harming the nation’s image abroad (Castle-Kaňerová 2003; Vaščeka and Vaščeka 2003). The Roma were confronted with politicians who called for a limiting of their rights. In 2000, Róbert Fico, who would later become Slovakia’s Prime Minister (2006-2010, 2012-the present), claimed that the Roma’s ‘speculative requests for political asylum’ endangered the free movement of ‘decent’ Central and Eastern European citizens and that these Roma therefore had to be punished (Togneri 2000).

As the secret British-Czech agreement illuminates, the articulation of the enlarging EU and correlated forms of policing implies that borders – and their protection – can begin far away from traditional national boundaries, for instance, in Eastern Europe or even further away from the European ‘homeland’. Security professionals, ranging from the police, migration officials and privatized agencies to border police corps and various international migration authorities (e.g. IOM, Interpol, Europol, Frontex) have been involved in profiling individuals and groups on the basis of risk analyses, and in policing mobilities at a distance (Bigo 2006b; 2008).

Not only has domopolitics been operationalized outside conventional border regimes; it has also changed the notion of the border itself and transformed borders – understood as lines of national demarcation – into border zones. The incorporation of Schengen into the EU system, in particular, has led to the ongoing development of an ‘EU internal security field’ and to a blurring of the boundaries between internal and external security (Bigo 2006a). As various authors in border studies have argued (van Houtum 2010; Vaughan-Williams 2009), these developments have gone together with the exporting of the EU’s external border regime to, for instance, Northern and Sub-Saharan Africa. But the EU border has been distributed
within the European ‘homeland’ of freedom, justice and security just as much as it has been exported – having its control outsourced and producing ever new technologies of border control to deal with its failing ‘efficiency’. This is an effect that has hitherto been under-researched in border and migration studies. A third Roma-related example of a domo-political action will explain this latter dimension of these novel forms of bordering.

Free as a BIRD: ‘Excessive Mobility’ and Networks of Security Experts

In 2012, the EU requested its members to ‘make more systemic use of the Europol Information System’ in what the EU frames as ‘the fight against itinerant criminal groups’ (CEU 2012, 4). ‘Itinerant criminal groups’ have been on the EU’s agenda since the second half of 2010, when Belgium held the EU Presidency, predominantly through the calls of police-related networks of experts who have urged politicians to pay more attention to these groups at a European level.

Many of the national and EU policy documents that deal with the phenomenon of so-called ‘itinerant criminal groups’ (or ‘mobile bandity’) remain vague about how these groups are defined. In the Belgian report used to Europeanize this issue during the Belgian EU Presidency, these groups are euphemistically referred to as ‘BIRDs’ (CGBFP 2010, 32), short for the French-Dutch bilingual ‘Bandes Itinérantes Rondtrekkende Dadergroepen’ (itinerant bands of offenders). Though the report begins by stating that it ‘sets out an unambiguous definition of the concept of itinerant criminal groups’ (ibid. 2), its subsequent explanation does not contribute much to conceptual clarity. Nowhere does the report give a clear definition of the itinerant character of the BIRDs. The report mentions that these bands ‘mainly originate from the former Eastern Bloc countries or from a sedentary group of offenders in Belgium’ (ibid. 2). The introduction of this subcategory of so-called ‘sedentary criminals among itinerant criminal groups’ increases the ambiguity associated with how these categories of criminals are defined:

Sedentary criminals are understood to be nomads, originally from the former Yugoslavian Republic, Romania, France or Belgium. These nomads are actually people without a real homeland. In historic terms this population group came to Western Europe in large migration waves. They now have Belgian nationality, are seeking asylum or are illegal. Despite the fact that a large part is settling down, the break between being sedentary and being mobile is not radical and never final. Sometimes they strengthen their apparent sedentarisation… [but they] can also start moving around again suddenly… (CGBFP 2010, 10-11, my italics)

Though the Roma are not mentioned, several of the historically most persistent stereotypes related to them are flagrantly apparent here. The Roma have often been considered as ‘nomads’ and as a rootless people who do not belong to Europe or to any of its nation states, due to their supposed or imagined homeland in India and due to their alleged quality of being ‘a people without history’ (Trumpener 1992; van Baar 2011a; 2015). Moreover, the historical patterns of ‘Roma’ migrations – which are inadequately qualified as ‘large waves’ – do not substantially differ from those of other migrants in the same periods (Lucassen et al. 1998; Sobotka 2003). Nonetheless, this report’s qualification of migration fits into the general tendency to exoticize and isolate ‘Roma’ migration from broader patterns of socioeconomic developments, from processes of marginalization and exclusion, from labour or seasonal migrations and from the political circumstances and transitions under which the migration of Roma has occurred.
Though the connection between the Roma and those designated as ‘nomads’ is not made in this report, the link is nonetheless justifiable. In similar expert documents on ‘itinerant criminal groups’, the Roma do indeed show up. For instance, a communication from Europol on the EU’s internal security claims:

Bulgarian and Romanian (mostly of Roma ethnicity), Nigerian and Chinese groups are probably the most threatening to society as a whole. Roma organised crime groups are extremely mobile, making the most of their historically itinerant nature. (CEU 2011, 14, italics are original)

The inclusion of the Roma’s ethnic background in these types of documents is against all political and juridical conventions at EU level. What is perhaps even more alarming is that their background is fully de-historicized by dint of the phrase that these Roma would make ‘the most of their historically itinerant nature’. As we have often seen in the history of state, and particularly police-related, preoccupations with Roma (About 2007; Lucassen 1996; van Baar 2014), criminalization based on alleged racial and ethnic origin is entering the European policy narrative here.

Since the bipolarity of the Cold War came to an end, security professionals and networks have not only played a key role in blurring the boundaries between internal and external security in Europe, they have also contributed to the development of new security ‘realities’ (Bigo 2006a; 2008; Bigo et al. 2010). ‘Itinerant criminal groups’, and the ambiguous ways in which several definitions of them have been disseminated among security experts, are newcomers to these imagined security and migration worlds.

One of the groups of security experts with a longer history of combatting ‘itinerant crime’ is the Office Central de Lutte contre la Délinquance Itinérante (OCLDI) or the Central Office for the Fight Against Itinerant Delinquency, established by the French Gendarmerie. This office caused a scandal in 2010, the year in which Sarkozy publicly announced that France was going to expel Romanian and Bulgarian migrants (van Baar 2011b; 2014). It turned out that OCLDI had been specifically targeting Roma, and had developed a secret and illegal database, the so-called ‘MENS’ – Minorités Ethniques Non-Sédentarisées or Minorities Ethnicities Non-Sedentary – in which they had ethnically profiled Roma.

The way in which the combatting of ‘itinerant criminal groups’ has ambivalently begun to overlap with the profiling of Romani minorities and migrants (see also Siegel 2014 for this questionable trend) explains why the EU’s request to ‘make more systemic use of the Europol Information System [in] the fight against itinerant criminal groups’ (CEU 2012, 4) represents a domo-political action. This example illustrates that the relocated border can start wherever threat is perceived. This border or border zone can begin, for instance, where migrants or minorities end up in ‘suspicious’ zones, ghettos or settlements, and where, consequently, the fight against ‘itinerant criminal groups’ becomes questionable as it starts to intersect with ‘targeting Roma’ (Töpfer 2012; van Baar 2014).

Several scholars have argued that the regulation of populations at Europe’s de-nationalized and de-territorialized borders has been constituted along the lines of distinctions between EU and non-EU populations, and between different non-EU people (e.g. van Houtum 2010). However, the case of the Roma shows that these governmentality traverse Europe’s populations themselves or, argued conversely, that the Roma often end up in the symbolic or terminological cloud of ‘non-Europeans’ or ‘third country nationals’, despite the EU citizenship that most of them hold, and despite the policy rhetoric about their European integration and social inclusion. These contested categories of administrative action are currently ‘serving as organizing principles at the borders and boundaries of the new …
Europe [and] have come to shape core understandings of “Europe”’ (Stewart 2012, 19) which tend to exclude Romani minorities.

The domesticating dimension of domopolitics is at one with the idea that the rearticulation of freedom in Europe and the removal of the EU’s internal national borders have not led to the disappearance of intra-European borders. The borders are not fading away, but are instead taking new shape. While ‘old curtains’ have disappeared, ‘new screens’ and preemptive measures based on threat perception and construction – articulated in a wide variety of circles and discourses of political, media, cultural and security expertise – have entered the scene. While security checks at national borders have (partially) disappeared, de-territorialized security screenings increasingly target those who are suspected of undermining the free movement of allegedly ‘decent’ and ‘regular’ citizens. Mobility per se has not been discouraged in Europe. On the contrary, freedom of movement is arguably not some additional right of Europeans, but the foundation of EU citizenship itself, and thus key to a desired European identity (Verstraete 2010). Travelling within Europe, the EU doctrine teaches us, is the basis of cultural, social, economic and other kinds of exchanges. Consequently, the circulation of persons, capital, goods and services needs to be maximally encouraged. Yet those forms of circulation considered to threaten the effective exercise of our right to move freely need to be controlled and are framed in terms of security and insecurity. Since the 1990s, migration and asylum have increasingly been problematized in terms of dangers to the functioning and stability of the EU and its members (Huysmans 2006). To this pairing of migration and asylum, I want to add poverty. Migration and poverty, and their problematic development along the lines of ethnicity, have become inextricably connected with securitizing narratives, tools, expertise and practices.

**Forced Immobility and Displacement**

One of the many Romani ghettos in the Serbian capital is located under the Gazela Bridge that connects Old and New Belgrade through the E70 highway from Zagreb to Sofia. In the EU narrative of trans-European corridors of mobility, the bridge and road form part of Corridor X and what, in the former Yugoslavia, was known as Tito’s Highway of Brotherhood and Unity. But what has happened under this bridge is only ambiguously linked to brotherhood, unity, the EU’s rhetoric of free movement, and to the underlying idea behind corridors to improve mobility, accessibility and integration across Europe.

The Gazela ghetto was established in the early 1980s, during the dramatic socioeconomic crisis in Yugoslavia, when poor people from Southern Serbia and Kosovo hoped to find a better life in Belgrade. Gazela’s population grew rapidly throughout the wars of the 1990s, when Roma (from Kosovo in particular) fled in great numbers to cities such as Belgrade and Novi Sad, where they became Internally Displaced Persons (Aggermann et al. 2008, 22). The Romani IDPs from Kosovo, of whom tens of thousands still live in segregated areas in Serbia, are the neglected reminders of the most recent genocidal conflict to divide the European continent.

During a visit to Gazela in August 2005, bulldozers were implacably levelling the ground close to the many small shacks the Roma had built there. ‘To repair the bridge’ city officials told the Roma. ‘To prepare our eviction’ some Roma told me. ‘Some say that they want to put us in container houses, somewhere out of town’. For years, the Roma speculated about the announced ‘resettlement’ to a ‘container village’ and how they would deal with it if where they lived were to be ‘made ready’ to guarantee the kind of mobility of which the bridge and the highway were obvious expressions. They knew that they were living on valuable land, land which formed a margin that cut right through Belgrade’s newly emerging business centre. On the horizon of their ghetto, large hotels and expensive apartments had been built
for tourists, business people and Belgrade’s *nouveau riche*. New formal and informal economic networks had arisen between and amongst both contested strata of this urban world, and several Roma had established a kind of mobile recycling industry. During my visit, Roma using improvised or self-made bikes and small cars came and went with empty bottles, waste paper and other recyclable materials.

In August 2009, the Belgrade city authorities finally evicted the inhabitants of Gazela, who relocated to various other ‘illegal’ settlements outside and on the outskirts of the city. The eviction came in advance of repair work on the Gazela Bridge, partially paid for with a 70 million Euro loan from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and from the European Investment Bank (Amnesty International 2010). European funds were used to improve ‘mobility’, albeit at the cost of the Roma, who were forced to move to new illegal sites, often far away from everything, including schools. Some of the Roma have managed to continue their recycling business, though in more difficult circumstances: now they have to commute daily between their new ghetto and the city of Belgrade.

Reports and statistics from the EU (FRA 2009; 2011), the World Bank (2005) and the UNDP (2002; 2006; 2013) tell us that the Roma are the poorest people in Europe. Large parts of the Romanian and Bulgarian Romani populations are in a state of permanent starvation, and in Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and Serbia, more than three-quarters of Roma live below the nationally defined poverty threshold. Infant mortality amongst Roma is much higher than the European average, while their life expectancy is significantly lower. To address these issues, we have witnessed the rapid increase of international development programmes and interventions since the mid-1990s, which have contributed to what I have called the ‘Europeanization of Roma representation’ (van Baar 2011a). That is: the framing of the Roma in terms of a ‘European minority’ and the parallel devising of Europe-wide programmes intended to improve their situation.

**Face-to-Face and Facebooked Violence**

While Roma-related development programmes have repeatedly been devised, reshaped and subjected to discussion, some sections of European society have come up with macabre solutions to deal with the Roma. Since about 2004, we have seen the emergence of radical and often organized violence against Romani minorities and migrants throughout Europe. In several countries, Roma have been attacked with incendiary bombs and even grenades. They have also become the targets of mob violence, most prominently in Italy, where so-called *campi nomadi* have frequently been destroyed. Between January 2008 and July 2012, more than 120 registered violent attacks against Roma took place in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and Bulgaria (Amnesty International 2013b). About half of the attacks in this period took place in Hungary, during which nine Roma were killed, including two minors.

Violence against the Roma also originates from state authorities. In 2004, the Slovak government mobilized its army for the first time since the fall of communism to suppress protests against neoliberal welfare reforms that mostly affected the poor, among whom were many Roma, who would ultimately face eviction from their homes due to higher costs and, consequently, arrears in rent (van Baar 2011a; 2012). According to the official discourse, ‘Gypsy unrest’ had to be combated. In 2008, a newsletter of the trade union of Hungarian police officers, edited by a prominent politician of the far-right *Jobbik* party, described Hungary as a ‘crumbling country, torn apart by Hungarian-Gypsy civil war’ (cited in Rorke 2009, 11). In Italy and Lithuania, terrorism has become one of the state frames mobilized to ‘other’ the Roma and legitimize crisis interventions (ERRC et al. 2008; Kavaliauskaite 2008). In 2007, several major Italian cities signed so-called ‘security pacts’ to deal with what has been called the ‘nomad’ or Roma ‘public emergency’. According to these pacts, the mere
presence of domestic or migrant Roma in public spaces is considered to be a security risk, and is sufficient to allow the authorities to take special measures, including eviction, confiscation of property and ethnic profiling through fingerprinting.

Similarly, the French government considers the Roma to be a threat to public security. This became clear during controversies over the expulsions of Romanian and Bulgarian Romani migrants from France in 2010. For instance, a member of former French President Sarkozy’s ruling party, Union pour un Mouvement Populaire (UMP), stated that the key issue of what he called the ‘European Roma problem’ is the way in which Roma interpret and practice the right to travel freely in the EU. He said that their ‘excessive mobility’ and its ‘related medieval lifestyle’ cause serious security problems and, he suggested, should lead us to reconsider the EU’s free movement directive (van Baar 2011b).

Violence against the Roma is not new to post-1989 Europe. In the aftermath of the fall of communism, Roma were attacked throughout Central and Eastern Europe, and assaults in Western Europe were also recorded. In reflecting on the difference between now and then, Andrzej Mirga, a Polish Romani intellectual and former senior policy advisor of the OSCE, remarks that while ‘in the early 1990s, there was mainly impromptu community violence against Roma and Sinti in Europe… What we are witnessing today is the deliberate and organized use of hate speech and incitement of violence’ (Mirga 2009, 6). Social media have begun to play a key role in both the spreading of hate speech and the organization of physical confrontations. Facebook groups with names such as ‘Death to the Roma’, ‘Anti-Gypsy group’ and ‘Let’s chase away Roma’ and whose websites often include insulting images referring to expulsion, deportation, destruction and genocide, have mushroomed over the last decade, whether or not in close connection to openly Romaphobic political parties and extra-parliamentary far-right factions.

Since about 2007, parties on the extreme right and related ‘patrol’ or ‘security’ groups in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Bulgaria and Hungary, have organized provocative marches through Romani neighbourhoods. According to Jobbik’s 2010 electoral platform, the party ‘will establish a Gendarmerie: along the lines of both our own appropriate historical traditions, and the functional example of comparable organizations operating in other countries, it shall work alongside the existing police force’ (Jobbik 2010, 18). Actually, just such a ‘gendarmerie’ had already been established in 2007 under the name Magyar Gárda (Hungarian Guard), dedicating itself to what Jobbik’s manifesto calls ‘the fight against our ever-swelling crime wave’ (ibid. 18). Elsewhere, the party pamphlet clarifies that one of the pressing social issues to be addressed ‘is undeniably the halting of gypsy crime [sic], for which the strengthening of the established police and the foundation of a dedicated rural police service, or Gendarmerie, is required’ (ibid. 11). Since its establishment, the Magyar Gárda – in a uniform similar to that of the Hungarian fascists who collaborated with the Nazis in the 1940s – has patrolled Hungarian Romani neighbourhoods, suggesting that it is ‘re-establishing law and order and charged with maintaining public safety’ (ibid. 18). Czech extreme political parties and factions have also established such ‘security units’ meant to ‘oversee the behaviour of inadaptable minorities and immigrants’ (cited in Albert 2009, 27). In many cases, though, violent conflicts have emerged or intensified only after confrontational marches.

**Institutionalized Rootlessness and (some of) its Genealogies**

The securitization of the Roma cannot be isolated from the way in which the relation between freedom and security has been redefined in post-1989 Europe (van Baar 2011a). The conflict over the still-ongoing expulsion of Romanian and Bulgarian Romani citizens from France is a case in point (AI 2012; 2013a; ERRC 2013). While there has been much discussion about the
compliance of the French expulsions with French national or EU law, less attention has been paid to how these exceptional measures were actually normalized and legitimized in practice (but see van Baar 2011b; 2014). At least two issues have played a key role in justifying expulsion: firstly, the framing of the Roma as a ‘public order’ or ‘security problem’ and secondly, the structural representation of their mobility as ‘irregular’. The persistent framing of Romani migrants as irregular, for instance, by suggesting that they are ‘excessively mobile’ or by problematizing them as ‘nomads’, allows authorities to articulate two highly disputable strategies of exclusion.

The French primarily follow the first of these strategies. Their supposedly ‘excessive mobility’ would make Roma both less controllable and more inclined to undertake informal, illegal or criminal activities. Therefore, their activities are often considered as representing a public order or security problem: they would endanger the sanctity of ‘our’ homes and our liberal and neoliberal freedoms. As the example of the fight against ‘itinerant criminals groups’ elucidates, the Roma’s securitization is not merely a threat construction along the lines of the securitization concept of the ‘Copenhagen School’, that is, roughly speaking, securitization based on successful, reiterated speech acts primarily performed by elites and publicly visible and powerful people. The development of new or reshaped security infrastructures and techniques in various European policy and expert networks (Bigo 2008), alongside the relentless circulation of stereotypical images and discourses (Hansen 2011; van Baar 2014) have also played crucial roles in normalizing, maintaining and reinforcing the securitization of the Roma. Acknowledging this variety of processes of securitization (C.A.S.E. Collective 2006; McDonald 2008) also implies that ‘de-securitization’ will not succeed if it is only based on re-framing the Roma in the non-security terms of, for instance, human rights, basic needs or development (van Baar 2011a).

Considering the Roma as a public order issue is neither a French affair, nor a recent phenomenon. In European countries ranging from Belgium, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Denmark and the Netherlands to Germany, Slovakia, Sweden and Switzerland the Roma have been considered as a public order problem on the basis of which unorthodox measures (such as eviction, detention, raids, attachment of property, ethnic profiling and surveillance) are legitimized. Moreover, at least since the second half of the nineteenth century, Western European authorities in particular have regularly framed Roma as a public order or security problem; for instance, when they became refugees and asylum seekers from Germany in the 1930s, and from the former Yugoslavia and East Central Europe in the 1990s.

Italian authorities, most notably, have followed another, though largely overlapping, strategy. In Italy, Roma are structurally problematized as ‘nomads’, not least by calling the places where the poorest among them live campi nomadi. This representation allows officials to take an even more radical step: to suggest that Roma neither need nor deserve a ‘home’ at all. This practice has become clearest in laws enacted by several regional Italian authorities, ostensibly for ‘the protection of nomadic cultures’ (ERRC 2000) but, in actual fact, used to legitimize the regular demolition of Romani encampments and to justify substandard housing, healthcare and education.

Attributing rootlessness to the Roma is a much more general and persistent modern European phenomenon that also surfaced in the communist past. Settlement measures taken, for example, in communist Poland, Romania and Czechoslovakia, were often not primarily instruments to reduce ‘nomadism’. Indeed, the majority of Eastern and Central Europe’s Roma have lived sedentarily since, or even prior to, the eighteenth century. These forms of Roma nomadization were the forerunners of contemporary ones, and were ways to try and regulate Romani minorities and make them economically productive, while at the same time legitimizing substandard forms of housing, education and healthcare.
During the 1970s and 80s, Western European states and European institutions such as the Council of Europe also framed the Roma in terms of ‘nomadism’ (Simhandl 2006). Even during the 1990s, discourses of nomadism were anything but absent from Europe’s institutional approach to the Roma. A serious blunder, made by the Council of Europe at the time of the alarming growth in numbers of Romani refugees from the collapsing state of Yugoslavia, was the claim that ‘the increase in mobility since 1990 must not conjure up pictures of a “tidal wave” of Gypsies sweeping over the West.’ Rather, it was seen as ‘a return to their normal mobility’ (Verspaget 1995, 13). An echo of this absurd claim was to be found in a UNHCR (1997, box 6,2) report, which stated that ‘a common characteristic of almost all Roma communities across Europe is their nomadic lifestyle’. The European Commission (1999, 2) similarly suggested that the Roma experience difficulties in ‘defending their basic human rights’ because of ‘their nomadic way of life’.

Whereas post war Western and Eastern European discourses of nomadism were primarily used to regulate Romani minorities domestically, since 1989, such discourses have been mobilized to manage newly emerging forms of migration among the Roma within Europe’s contested borders. Both then and now, oiling the wheels of mechanisms which represent the Roma as eternal nomads has contributed greatly to denying them adequate protection, either in the form of citizenship or by according them refugee or asylum status.

The Production of Illegality and Enforcing Order through Forced Mobility

What the two strategies of irregularization discussed here share, is the active production of illegality and the undermining of the human and legal protection of Roma as (national and European) citizens, refugees and asylum seekers. In France, for instance, every town with more than 5,000 inhabitants is legally obliged to offer places to stay to so-called gens du voyage, or travellers and caravan dwellers (ERRC 2005, 86-95). Yet many French towns are not meeting the requirements to provide such sites, thereby directly creating an urgent housing problem for close to one third of the estimated 400,000 French travellers. Since they still need to live somewhere, and the sites where they do stay are deemed to be ‘illegal’, this illegality and the subsequent forced mobility it engenders have in fact been produced by those towns that refuse to fulfil this national legal requirement. Many Eastern European citizens with a Romani background have migrated into these ‘disorderly’ domestic practices in both Italy and France. Consequently, an established pattern of deliberately unresolved housing problems – including the difficult if not impeded access to ‘regular’ employment, healthcare and education that arises as a result – has transformed into a new pattern of what is framed as the problem of the Roma’s ‘excessive mobility’.

The displacement of Roma, whether by eviction from their houses, destruction of their sites or properties, their removal from public spaces, limitation of their access to public services – including justice, their fleeing from violent or political conflicts, their expulsion from countries, their ‘repatriation’ after temporary ‘toleration’, or the under-representation of their histories and memories in the narratives of Europe, is an integral part of what Nicholas de Genova has called ‘the border spectacle’. This is the spectacle of border enforcement that renders ‘migrant “illegality”’ visible and lends it the commonsensical air of a “natural” fact (De Genova 2002, 436). Whereas the securitization and illegalization of migration have been relatively recent phenomena in post-war Europe (Huysmans 2006), the securitization, orientalization and stigmatization of the Roma have been persistent components of modern European societies (Bogdal 2011; Lucassen et al. 1998; van Baar 2011a). In contemporary Europe, the newly articulated securitization of the Roma and the correlated irregularization and nomadization of their status as citizens and migrants have to a great extent facilitated the
legitimation of enforcing a social and public order through the forced mobility of many Roma.  

In debates about the EU’s anti-illegal immigration discourses, several scholars in migration, security, border and citizenship studies have argued that we need to ‘de-nationalize’ some of the key concepts and methods that are usually mobilized to analyse practices of migration and deportation. These, and interrelated debates, have led to the emergence of variegated notions of citizenship and borders, as well as to the theorizing of security, mobility, sovereignty and deportation beyond the frames of the nation-state and the EU (Bigo 2008; De Genova and Peutz 2010; Isin and Saward 2013; Mezzadra and Neilson 2013; Vaughan-Williams 2009). The case of the Roma clarifies the way in which the persistent use of reified and biased binary oppositions – such as those between ‘regular’ and ‘irregular’ citizens and migrants, between ‘sedentary’ and ‘itinerant’ populations, between ‘mobile’, ‘orderly’ and ‘excessively mobile’, ‘disorderly’ groups, or between ‘decent’, ‘deserving’ and ‘non-decent’, ‘undeserving’ citizens – has continued to reinforce the Roma’s supposed ‘illegality’ and ‘rootlessness’; to legitimize treating them differently to others, and to demand from them additional efforts before they can be regarded as full and equal members of the states in which they live and the ‘Europe’ to which they belong.

To adequately include Romani minorities and migrants in the study and conceptualization of exclusion from which they have often and historically been excluded, the notions and methods of border and migration studies need to be further rethought along the lines of the current de-nationalization of their conceptual tools. The intra-EU forms of displacement that have dramatically affected Romani minorities in post-Cold War Europe need to be conceptually, methodologically and empirically covered by scholarly analyses. At least one key step is crucially important to achieve this aim.

The mechanisms of exclusion that affect the Roma need to be discussed beyond the so-called ‘Roma problem’ which restricts the discussion of historical, socioeconomic and political problems to a one-sided exercise in terms of ‘their’ social inclusion, integration and participation or, even worse, their willful complicity in their own marginalization and its maintenance. In a compelling analysis of the EU’s anti-illegal immigration discourse, Walters (2010) has critiqued the de-politicization of migration by representing it as a chain in which the origins of migration primarily relate to the ‘disorderly’ regions from which the migrants come. In this imagined migration world, illegal immigration and its causes always run in one direction: ‘from the distant, corrupt, chaotic borderlands populated by “failed states” and “conflict zones”, through the weakly-policing borders and cities of “transit countries”, and into the heart of European territory’ (2010: 89). Walters convincingly argues that this ‘chain’ representation of migration obscures ‘all the ways in which historically, economically, politically, culturally and so on, Europe is already “inside” the so-called countries of origin’ (ibid. 90). Similarly, but then with regard to the situation within the contested borders of Europe, the migration of Roma cannot be comprehended by one-sidedly considering the states in Central and Eastern Europe as ‘migration-producing countries’, as the OSCE’s first High Commissioner on National Minorities once suggested (van der Stoel 1993), and as if we only have to look at these ‘countries of origin’ to understand the so-called ‘Roma problem’. To adequately understand the situation of Romani minorities and migrants, we need to analyse it in the context of the Europeanization of their representation and in that of changing practices, discourses and instruments of security, citizenship and development in post-Cold War Europe (see van Baar 2011a).

Notes
1. In this chapter, I focus on the practices and mechanisms of irregularization, rather than on attempts to challenge and contest these processes of displacement. Elsewhere, I have
extensively discussed various ways in which Romani migrants, citizens and networks of activists and artists have tried to simultaneously critique existing citizenship regimes and enact novel forms of citizenship (van Baar 2011a; 2013a; 2013b; 2013c; forthcoming). Central to the dynamic of this heterogeneous social movement is that its key agents are critiquing not only how the securitization of migration, borders and poverty have generated and legitimized new forms of exclusion and inequality. Through making this critique public, audible and visible, they are also engendering new forms and subjects of political activism and citizenship.

2. This legitimation has gone together with the emergence of what I have called a ‘reasonable anti-Gypsyism’ (van Baar 2014), that is, the generally accepted idea that we can treat the Roma differently to other EU citizens or human beings because ‘they’ would otherwise be involved in ‘illegal’ practices that could harm ‘our’ rights and freedoms. I consider the legitimation of ongoing evictions of Roma – an approach that, if we accept the results of surveys (FRA 2009; 2011), is generally accepted or even supported by a majority of European citizens – as an integral part of this intolerable ‘reasonable anti-Gypsyism’.

Bibliography


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