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## Commentary

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### **Europe's Romaphobia: problematization, securitization, nomadization**

Recently, a statement of the philosopher Slavoj Žižek on the Roma has become the center of a heated debate. He accused liberal multiculturalists of an inadequate and hidden racist reply to populist racist violence against a group of Slovenian Roma. Although Žižek commented on this issue in 2009, the recent attention to the expulsion of Roma from France has given new topicality to his statement. What did Žižek actually say?

“[T]here was... a big problem with a Roma (Gipsy) family which camped close to a small town. When a man was killed in the camp, the people in the town started to protest against the Roma, demanding that they be moved from the camp (which they occupied illegally) to another location, organizing vigilante groups, etc As expected, all liberals condemned them as racists, locating racism into this isolated small village, while none of the liberals, living comfortably in the big cities, had any everyday contact with the Roma. ...When the TV interviewed the ‘racists’ from the town, they were clearly seen to be a group of people frightened by the constant fighting and shooting in the Roma camp, by the constant theft of animals from their farms, and by other forms of small harassments from the Roma. It is all too easy to say (as the liberals did) that the Roma way of life is (also) a consequence of the centuries of their exclusion and mistreatment, that the people in the nearby town should also open themselves more to the Roma, etc—nobody clearly answered the local ‘racists’ what they should concretely do to solve the very real problems the Roma camp evidently was for them” (Žižek, 2009).

Critics of Žižek have accused him of regurgitating the usual anti-Gypsyism—they are asocial, inadaptable, unwilling to integrate, and involved in illegal activities—and of defending the ‘racists’ and their resentments against the accusations of tolerant liberal elites. I think these critics and those who have expressed similar voices are wrong and read Žižek’s remarks in isolation. He does not defend the racist mobs; he is against what he calls their “horrible logic” (2010). Yet, there remains a problem with his statement—which is not what he says about the Slovenian Romani issue but is the fact that he does not explain the current Romaphobia and outburst of violence against the Roma in Europe.

Liberal multiculturalism, Žižek claims, offers us the opportunity to experience the other deprived of her or his otherness. These “decaffeinated others” (2010) are representatives of minorities and migrants we enthusiastically welcome, at least, as long as they and theirs do not harass us or intrude too much on our own space. In one and the same line of reasoning, Žižek compares this sweeping mechanism of ‘detoxification’ with how the French fascist intellectual Robert Brasillach invented the formula of ‘reasonable anti-Semitism’ in 1938. Brasillach, who saw himself as a ‘moderate anti-Semite’, suggested not being in favor of violence against the Jews but of “hindering the always unpredictable actions of instinctual anti-Semitism [by organizing] a reasonable anti-Semitism” (paraphrased by Žižek, 2010). Presently, Žižek observes a similar attitude toward minorities and migrants: liberal multiculturalists reject populist racism as ‘unreasonable’ but at the same time they “think that the best way to hinder the always unpredictable violent anti-immigrant defensive measures is to organize a reasonable anti-immigrant protection” (Žižek, 2010). Mindful of this argument, Žižek presents his

analysis of the Slovenian Roma in the context of what could be considered as the current legitimization of organizing 'a reasonable anti-Gypsyism'.

So far so good. Indeed, opinion polls, for instance, support the idea that anti-Roma measures are generally met with approval by large parts of both East and West European populations (FRA, 2009). The problem with Žižek is not so much his diagnosis, but his attack on liberal multiculturalism. When he accuses it of prohibiting popular racism at the front door while letting in what he calls "liberal-tolerant racism" through the back door, he still seems to live in the 1990s. Already since the turn of the millennium, liberal and social democratic center parties have considered 'liberal multiculturalism' as a term of abuse. When late last year German Chancellor Angela Merkel declared that liberal multiculturalism has "utterly failed", this was nothing more than a late echo of what many leaders of center parties declared more than a decade ago. The way in which Romaphobia has become socially acceptable throughout Europe is not dependent on liberal multiculturalism's supposed latent racism and its subsequent inability to challenge manifest racism. Rather, it is the inability of center political parties to formulate an adequate answer to their own and others' critique of liberal multiculturalism in order to avoid what has happened afterwards: the Europe-wide move of almost all former center political parties to the right of the political spectrum.

#### **The Europeanization of Roma representation and its discontents**

Accordingly, we have been able to notice an ambiguous transformation of the representation of the Roma in Europe: they are now seen as a 'European problem' rather than a 'European minority'. Shortly after the fall of communism, when mob and institutional violence against the Roma emerged throughout Central and East Europe, the Romani case was embraced by the European Union and human rights organizations and considered as a 'human emergency'. When anti-Roma sentiments in Central and East Europe radically manifested themselves and the Roma became massively unemployed in the aftermath of '1989', adequate protection of the region's Romani minorities became one of the Copenhagen criteria for EU membership formulated in 1993. "Living scattered all over Europe, not having a country to call their own," as a famous pamphlet of the Council of Europe (1993) put forward, "the Gypsies are a true European minority". It was during these days, when Glazer claimed that "we [were] all multiculturalists" (1997), that the Roma were increasingly framed as a European minority. This Europeanization of their minority status was not limited to the discourses of international governing organizations. Romani intellectuals, organizations, and activist networks also contributed to the trend to Europeanize their status. Reframing Romani identities as 'European' had to become a catalyzing tool to empower the Roma, to facilitate their inclusion, to guarantee their access to justice and public services, and to renounce the authoritarian Roma approaches of former communist regimes in Central and East Europe.

However, at this moment in time and particularly since the publicity given last year to the expulsion of Roma from France, they are increasingly considered as representing a 'European problem'. Admittedly, their framing in terms of a European minority has never been immune to their representation as a 'European problem' and to the EU member states' use of their supposed European identity to running away from their own responsibilities to improve the living conditions of their Romani minorities. Yet, the current shift is symptomatic of the Europe-wide increase of nationalism, hate-speech, and violence against migrants and minorities, and against the Roma in particular. For some time, this shift has been announced by the recurrence of violence against the Roma in a number of both West and East European countries, as well as by the

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increase of anti-Roma voices at the heart of Europe's decision-making centers in Brussels. Political and economic instability throughout Europe has led to an alarming outburst of institutional and citizen violence against the Roma, leading, for instance, to nine Romani deaths since 2008 in Hungary, to the chasing away of Romanian Romani migrants by Northern Irish citizens, and to controversial security measures affecting the Roma taken by Italian authorities (ERRC, 2008; 2009). At the same time, some new Romanian and Bulgarian members of The European Parliament have utilized the EU's official Roma discourses to shift the responsibilities for solving 'the Roma problem' from EU member states and their local authorities to European institutions. If the Roma are a truly European minority, so their argument goes, then their 'problems' need to be addressed at the European, rather than national level.

Yet, political sparring about the institutional level at which Roma-related issues should be addressed is part of the problem and does not help much to touch the sore spot of largely ineffective EU Roma policies and of growing hostility against the Roma throughout Europe. For example, much of the debate about the expulsions of Romanian and Bulgarian Roma from France was also framed in terms of a controversy between the EU and one of its member states. In September 2010, for instance, the European Commission suggested that France was violating European rules, particularly the EU's race equality and free movement directives. Yet, after minimal French efforts to meet the EU's terms, and even though there was much evidence that France continued to violate national and international rules, in October 2010 the EU canceled its initially announced infringement procedures against France. For their part, the French authorities, President Sarkozy in front, claimed that the EU and its new members of Romania and Bulgaria were not doing enough to address the plight of the Roma.

Representing the dispute over migration of Romani citizens to France in this way—primarily as a controversy between the EU and its member states or between different member states—tends to deny how they have all been involved in the development and reshaping of European governmentalities toward the Roma. This framing of the conflict depoliticizes the socioeconomic, political, and historical reasons that have contributed to the Roma's marginalization and led to the migration of some of the better off to West Europe. The answer to what needs to be done to challenge discrimination against Europe's heterogeneous Romani minorities and to improve their living circumstances cannot only be addressed in terms of articulating legal rules or policy measures at local, national, or supranational levels. Rather, we need to interrogate how the Roma's mobilities and identities have recurrently been considered as irregular, rather than regular (cf Squire, 2010). This 'irregularization' has contributed to the maintenance and development of different kinds of population management in Europe according to which the Roma could be dealt with differently than other EU citizens. As current debates about the situation of the Roma show, it is often their problematization as profiteers who do not want to work, as criminals involved in illegal activities, and as nomads unwilling to integrate that has led to the legitimatization of their eviction, expulsion, substandard housing, education, and health care, and to ambiguously making them productive in formal and informal economies across Europe. Strategies of criminalization and making the marginalized responsible for their own problems are evidently not limited to the Roma. Such strategies are applied to the poor more generally in several countries (eg, Wacquant, 2009). However, the irregularization of Romani identities and mobilities intensifies the applicability of strategies of criminalization and responsabilization to the situation of the Roma. It is these problematizations as profiteers, criminals, and nomads, and the forms of minority governance they have inaugurated, that urgently need to be addressed in current scholarship, the media, and policy (trans)formations regarding Europe's Romani minorities.

### From a ‘human emergency’ to a ‘public emergency’

Interrogating the history of different kinds of truth regimes, Foucault suggested, is “a matter of analyzing, not behaviors, or ideas, nor societies and their ‘ideologies,’ but the *problematizations* through which being offers itself to be, necessarily, thought—and the *practices* on the basis of which these problematizations are formed” (Foucault, 1990 [1984], page 11, emphasis in original). Problematizations do not primarily focus on solutions and answers to specified problems, but rather on why and how certain things, such as behavior, phenomena, and processes became a problem to be solved, managed, or regulated in certain ways. Similarly, looking at the Roma from the angle of their problematization implies that we interrogate how policies, measures, imaginaries, and sentiments have framed the Roma discursively and proposed, developed, and legitimized instruments to deal with them. Minority governance in Europe has prevalently dealt with the question of how and at which level the most adequate tools need to be situated and developed to enhance the participation and self-articulation of minorities and to prevent or reduce minority–majority conflicts. However, if we look at the Roma through the lens of governmentality and minority problematization, we can interrogate a more fundamental question. How could the existence of Romani groups in various countries in Europe actually develop into a question and transform into a specific set of European ‘problems’ to which various policies, tools, interventions, and processes attempt to give an answer?

The French and Italian situations clearly illustrate how the Roma’s problematization—be it in terms of nomadism, illegality, or public or social security—is mobilized to create a legal state of exception and legitimate unorthodox policy interventions. The French MP and member of Sarkozy’s ruling party the UMP, Jacques Myard, for instance, has stated that the key issue of the “European Roma problem” is the way in which the Roma interpret and practice the right to travel freely in the EU. He said that their “excessive mobility” and “related medieval lifestyle” cause serious security problems (Myard interviewed by Kahn, 2010). The French government considers the Roma as a threat to public or social security. On the basis of such a security risk assessment, it argues that a differential treatment of the group should be considered an appropriate measure. Indeed, if it concerns people who pose a threat to the national public order or social security system, an exception to the European constitutional right on free circulation can be made. But such an exception can only be judged as legal if it is based on a case-by-case assessment of individual situations, and it may never lead to the singling out of a specific ethnic group or amount to collective expulsions. However, as Myard’s claims illustrate, combining the Roma’s nomadization and illegalization has enabled the French government to consider them as a ‘security problem’ and thus legitimate their expulsion and their exception to the EU’s free movement directive. Put differently, the crucial problem is not the conflict between the EU and one of its members but the way in which the securitization of the Roma and their problematization as a ‘public emergency’ suggests ways of dealing with EU citizens who break the EU rules.

For their part, the Italian authorities have not nomadized the Roma primarily to expel them from the country but to constantly evict and circulate them at the domestic level. In Italy the Roma’s irregularization has gone together with the development and planning of a widespread technological apparatus. Around 1990 many Italian regions adopted laws aimed at the ‘protection of nomadic cultures.’ According to these laws, Romani cultures need to be ‘protected’ through the construction and surveillance of segregated camps, the so-called *campi nomadi*. Since the late 1980s, an already existing and historically grown infrastructure of segregated and semisegregated urban areas has been mobilized to develop a complex apparatus of *campi nomadi*. However, the ‘laws

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to protect nomadic cultures' also enable Italian authorities to destroy, on a regular basis, the *campi nomadi* where many Roma live. By so doing, their permanent settlement and participation and integration in mainstream society are made extremely difficult. This form of population management has rendered official the perception that the Roma are 'nomads' who can only survive in camps, isolated from Italian society (ERRC, 2000). The irregularization of their social mobility is used to reinforce the popular idea that Roma do not belong to Italy, even though most of Italy's Roma are Italian or non-Italian EU citizens. We can even say, more radically, that 'the protection of nomads' has become a euphemism for prohibiting the Roma to integrate in Europe and to articulate their rights as European citizens. Since 2007 the Italian camp apparatus has been cross-fertilized with so-called 'security pacts', signed by the authorities of several big cities. According to these pacts, the mere presence of Roma in Italian public space is considered a security risk and allows authorities to take special measures against them, including eviction and their and their children's ethnic profiling through fingerprinting (Picker, 2010). These governmental interventions tend to turn the Roma into nonpolitical, or even inferior, dehumanized subjects. The extremely bad housing and health situations in the camps—which are primarily the effects of how the system has been developed—tend to be naturalized as the normal, yet substandard, way in which the Roma live.

The Italian case represents one of the most radical examples of how many countries throughout Europe, including the United Kingdom (Drakakis-Smith, 2007), France (ERRC, 2005), Greece (ERRC, 2003), and the Netherlands (Davidović and Rodrigues, 2010), have illegalized the Roma. Refusing to organize the services for their national Romani minorities that these countries are required to organize according to their own or European legislation, these states have forced some of their Roma to create 'illegal' sites for sheltering themselves. In recent times, these persistent domestic traditions of illegalizing the living conditions of national Romani minorities have delicately started to overlap with how new Romani migrants from Central and East Europe are approached in West Europe.

### **The limits of pro-Roma rhetoric**

International governing organizations have developed various pro-Roma initiatives. Under the banner of telling titles, such as *Avoiding the Dependency Trap* (UNDP, 2002), *Breaking the Poverty Circle* (World Bank, 2005), and *Instruments and Policies for Roma Inclusion* (European Commission, 2010), these organizations have presented their initiatives as answers to the Roma's marginalization, discrimination, and securitization. Yet, it would be inadequate to suggest that it is merely states that currently articulate anti-Roma measures and policies. Analyzing the situation of Europe's Roma in terms of a binary opposition between national and local actors who have taken anti-Roma measures, on the one hand, and international actors who try to challenge their securitization by developing 'pro-Roma' policies, on the other, tends to overlook the role the latter have played in marginalizing tendencies toward the Roma. This issue relates the migration of Roma to West Europe to hopelessness and long-term unemployment among them in Central and East Europe. In order to challenge the latter, the World Bank and the EU, for instance, have introduced and supported neoliberal activation policies in Central and East Europe. On the basis of socioeconomic contracts—usually on the condition that unemployed persons participate in training or public works programs—these policies aim to help the Roma improve their employment chances. A recent World Bank report (2008) on these labor market interventions problematizes long-term unemployed Roma as 'inactive' and frames their socioeconomic mobility as irregular, rather than regular.

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Elsewhere (van Baar, forthcoming) I have argued that the East Central European articulation of activation measures tends to marginalize or even dehumanize the Roma. The most serious consequence of how these policies have been enacted in Slovakia, for instance, is that activation work has enabled employers to recruit a cheaper, well-exploitable labor force. Several companies, for instance, have replaced their employees with individuals from activation projects. This has particularly hit the most marginalized Roma. Some 60% of the members of this group currently involved in activation schemes carry out the same work as they did before (Filadelfiová et al, 2007). Their working status has shifted from doing work on the regular labor market to doing it as part of activation programs. Since the general payment for activation work is substantially lower than the official minimum wage in Slovakia, some have called this “a modern form of slavery” (Oravec and Bošelová, 2006, page 15). The Roma activation workers usually need to do the most degrading and physically heaviest tasks. They are also demanded to do work that does not belong to their official duties, such as work in the households of non-Roma and the performance of personal tasks for activation project managers and mayors. Even in cases where activation involves public works, it regularly happens that municipalities mobilize the participants to do more or less useless work, such as the daily cleaning of the streets of the town where this was formerly done once a week.

Due to the fact that the Roma are generally overrepresented in activation work in Slovakia, in many cases programs initiated to enhance their ‘employability’ actually function as a form of ethnicity-based governmentality. Since the activation programs have thus far not resulted in regular employment for most of the involved Roma, these policies tend to reinforce stereotypical representations of Roma as lazy, useless, and inactive. The focus in activation policies on those who need to be activated and on what the World Bank considers the enhancement of their ‘human and social capital’ has an important drawback. Practices of activation and related narratives of empowerment and development one-sidedly tend to represent existing practices of exclusion as problems of inadequately mobilized social and human capital (Harriss, 2002; Mayer, 2003). Isolating an individual’s biography or a group’s history from the larger political, historical, and socioeconomic context has strong moralizing and depoliticizing effects. Politically complex trajectories toward marginalization tend to be transformed into problems of morality and individual or group responsibility, which primarily need to be solved by the marginalized themselves.

Recently, Fox and Vermeersch (2010) have convincingly shown that the EU’s integration discourses have transformed, rather than challenged, East Central European nationalisms. Contrary to what is often believed, they argue that the EU has indirectly contributed to the rearticulation and revitalization of nationalism, including Romaphobic and anti-Semitic sentiments. Similarly, the ways in which the new-fashioned narratives developed and propagated by international governing organizations—from activation, open coordination, social inclusion, and private–public partnerships to lifelong learning, exchange of best practice, social capital formation, and mainstreaming—are said to contribute to the improvement of the Roma’s situation need to be approached with a full measure of skepticism. There is nothing in these discourses that beforehand guarantees their successes, and we need to critically interrogate the situation on the ground before we celebrate the pro-Roma programs of supranational actors.

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**Beyond 'presentism': legacies of the past and the Roma's own contribution**

The way in which the Roma are currently problematized is not a recent phenomenon. If we dig into the communist past, for instance, we can observe some surprising similarities—apart from clear dissimilarities—with the current trend to nomadize the Roma. Settlement measures taken in communist Poland, Romania, and Czechoslovakia, for example, were often not primarily instruments to stop or even reduce 'nomadism'. Indeed, the majority of East and Central Europe's Roma have lived sedentarily since or even prior to the 18th century. We can understand these forms of Roma nomadization as forerunners of contemporary ones. They were ways to try to regulate Romani minorities and make them economically productive while legitimizing the introduction of substandard forms of housing, education, and health care. In Czechoslovakia, for instance, Slovak Roma were forced and encouraged to work in the heavy industries in the Czech border regions that were largely depopulated after the Nazi genocide of the Czech Jews and Roma and after the postwar expulsion of more than 2 million Sudeten Germans. These Slovak Roma were generally denied resident permits in these borderlands and thus continued to be involved in commuting and labor migration, traveling back and forth between their Czech workplaces and Slovak relatives. At the same time, they became the main target of the antinomadism legislation, which, in turn, formed the beginning of one of the most notorious communist histories of excluding the Roma from mainstream public services on racial grounds. Romani children were systematically segregated in the education system and sent to special schools, and numerous Romani women were forcibly sterilized (Guy, 2001; Sokolova, 2008).

During the 1970s and 1980s West European states and European institutions, such as the Council of Europe, also often framed the Roma in terms of nomadism (Simhandl, 2006). Even during the 1990s, discourses of nomadism were far from absent in Europe's institutional Roma approaches. One of the most serious blunders, made by the Council of Europe at the time of the alarming increase of the number of Romani refugees from the former 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 would have been "merely a return to their normal mobility" (Verspaget, 1995, page 13). We could hear an echo of this claim in a report by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, which stated that "a common characteristic of almost all Roma communities across Europe is their nomadic lifestyle" (1997, box 6,2). In 1999 the European Commission similarly suggested that the Roma have difficulties in "defending their basic human rights", because of "their nomadic way of life" (1999, page 2). References to the Roma's alleged nomadic lifestyle have also led to dubious scholarly statements, such as the one of the Czech sociologist Pavel Barša that the Roma "do not have a territorial basis in Central Europe", that they—"unlike other national minorities in Central Europe"—are "not Europeans", and that "they lack the cultural resources necessary to develop their own distinct society", something he considers as "indispensable for a modern way of life" (Barša, 2001, page 254).

Whereas postwar West and East European discourses of nomadism were primarily used to regulate Romani minorities domestically, since 1989 they have increasingly been mobilized to manage newly emerged forms of migration among the Roma within Europe's contested borders. One serious problem of the politics of European migration management as well as of the securitization of the Roma is that these trends impede their ability to effectively challenge how others continue to represent them. Yet, one of the most remarkable developments of Europe's post-1989 history is how pro-Roma advocacy and Romani activist networks have tried to challenge European governmentalities toward them. Contrary to how the Roma are usually portrayed, they have actively contributed to the development of Europe's minority policy and to the

discussion of the Roma's situation in all Europe and, thus, beyond the initial focus on East and Central Europe. When the EU launched its new enlargement policies in 1993 and suggested to guarantee the 'protection of minorities', for instance, it had almost no minority policy. Due to permanent pressure of Romani actors and pro-Roma groups, as well as other advocacy groups, the EU has gradually shaped its current minority and antidiscrimination policy, including its race equality directive. Similarly, the extension of the debate about the Roma's situation to all Europe has much been the work of Romani and Roma advocacy organizations that have persistently targeted the hypocrisy related to the blaming of the Roma's situation in East Europe by West European countries. Last but not least, as I have discussed elsewhere (van Baar, 2010; 2011), Romani cultural and memorial practices have increasingly challenged the exclusion of Romani histories and memories from national and European ones. These three cases are illustrations of how Romani networks across Europe have critiqued the Roma's irregularization and repoliticized the socioeconomic, political, and historical reasons of their marginalization.

Thus, even though current European governmentalities toward the Roma tend to contribute to their marginalization and the displacement of their voices, we have been able to notice how Romani and pro-Roma groups have constantly tried to challenge these trends. Foucault suggested that the emergence of certain forms of governmentalities as well as of what he called "counter-conducts"—ways to challenge these dominant forms of population management—"are inseparable from each other" (2007, page 357). Particularly since the summer of 2010, we have been able to notice an increased activity in various Romani activist networks throughout Europe. These networks capitalize on the French momentum to try to make a change. In November 2010, for instance, a group of Bulgarian Romani activists wrote a letter to the European Commission in which they put forward: "We demand putting an end to the discriminatory practice of treating all Roma as a socially vulnerable or disadvantaged group. The stigmatization of Roma as 'vulnerable' in EU documents contributes to their forced marginalization" (Tahir et al, 2010). In this line of reasoning they also encourage the EU to invest more in existing Romani social capital, and thus they contest the idea that the Roma are not able to empower themselves. Whether these and similar kinds of attempts at challenging European governmentalities toward the Roma will be able to contest and change them remains to be seen. Whether these endeavors will be able to challenge 'reasonable anti-Gypsyism' and its racist subtext also remains to be seen. Yet, making these Romani voices audible and their struggles visible in the current debates are the first steps necessary to challenge the multiple forms of exclusion with which substantial parts of Europe's Romani minorities are currently confronted.

**Acknowledgements.** I would like to thank Marieke de Goede, Peter Vermeersch, Yolande Jansen, and Stuart Elden and his coeditors for their encouragements and comments.

Huub van Baar, University of Amsterdam

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