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# Race, migration and neoliberalism: distorted notions of Romani migration in European public discourses

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## ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the migration of Roma based on recent public, academic, policy and political debates in connection with two specific case studies in France and Italy. Moreover, it aims to understand how contemporary racialized discourses and neoliberal social and political forces (re)create Roma as a racialized internal 'other' to legitimize subtle anti-Romani politics in Europe. By doing that, it argues that the current migration of Roma cannot be understood apart from the proliferation of the hegemonic neoliberal ideology that facilitates the racialization of Roma and normalizes their social exclusion in Europe. Moreover, it explores the role of neoliberalism in the racialization and subjugation of Roma in Europe.

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## Introduction

This article will review and engage, primarily in sociological debates, on the migration of Roma, particularly from Romania and Bulgaria to France and Italy (Fassin, 2010; Hepworth, 2012; McGarry & Drake, 2013; Nacu, 2012; Picker, 2012; Sigona, 2011). Furthermore, it will situate the analysis within this well-developed literature in order to identify mechanisms, which link the processes of migration, racialization and neoliberalism. This theoretical connection between migration and racialization, coupled with neoliberalism, does not appear in a standard Romani migration related analysis.

Accordingly, this paper discusses the fact that the European Union (EU) cannot promise the social inclusion of Roma without social and economic mobility and spatial integration. Furthermore, it cannot promote minority rights and anti-discrimination without addressing the patterns of historical, structural and institutional racial discrimination that paralyze the social, economic and political integration of the racialized Romani migrants in Europe. For the purpose of this article, neoliberalism should not be confused with political liberalism. Traditional political liberalism is based on various democratic values, such as freedom, human rights and active citizenship. Conversely, neoliberalism privileges economic freedom at the expense of political freedom, democratic citizenship and human rights (Brown, 2006). The current debates on the migration of Central and Eastern European Roma within the EU neoliberal framework has created rhetorical and, as a result, material borders between racialized Romani migrants (many of whom are EU citizens) and non-

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Romani citizens. The latter enjoy 'freedom of movement' as a fundamental principle of the EU, whereas the former are excluded from the realm of 'freedom of movement'.

Scholarly discussions regarding the migration of Roma from Eastern to Western European countries tend to neglect the importance of neoliberal forms of governance. At the same time, scholarship on neoliberalism tends to disregard the role that racial neoliberalism has played in the displacement and marginalization of Romani migrants. Migration studies tend to focus either on the irregularization and securitization of Romani or on the impact of right-wing exclusionary discourse that has been internalized by people across the political spectrum on the position of Romani migrants. Huub van Baar argues (2014, p. 29), in the case of Romani expulsion in France, the left-right distinction between political parties does not matter much, since both sides are treating Romani migrants in the same way. Meanwhile, studies principally informed by critiques of neoliberalism tend to underestimate Eurocentric racialization and non-discursive practices that intersect with neoliberalism as forms of governance (Roberts & Mahtani, 2010). In the last few years, scholars have produced comprehensive and novel scholarship on the migration of Roma (see e.g. Hepworth, 2012; Sigona, 2014; Stewart, 2012b; van Baar, 2012, 2014, 2015) without explicit connection between race/racialization and neoliberal governance that shapes the migration, displacement, irregularization, *deportability* (De Genova, 2002) and *evictability* (van Baar, 2015) of Roma. This theoretical connection exposes the combination of neoliberal policies and racist discourse that continues to depict Romani people as racialized subordinated Europeans.

### Critical junction of race, migration and neoliberalism

Migration of Roma is often referenced in public discourse as a cultural characteristic, which subsequently essentializes 'nomadism' as an internal feature of Romani culture (Kóczé & Trehan, 2009). Even today, textual and visual representations of Roma are racialized and take center stage in influencing everyday social practices and policies. Representation is a very complex meaning making process, particularly when we are dealing with European racialized 'others', such as Roma. Their differences are clustered around several main themes, including their subordinated status signified by skin color and bodily differences (Junghaus, 2015). Besides that, Roma are also represented in European cultural discourse as a group with an 'innate laziness' or 'musical talent' (Kóczé & Trehan, 2009). So, this racialized regime of representation essentializes, naturalizes and fixes the subjugated position of Roma in Europe while whiteness remains invisible and unmarked (Imre, 2005).

The emerging trend, regarding the migration of Roma shows similar discursive practices, which are repeated with some variations from one country to another. If migrants are perceived as Romani, then there is a great chance of being characterized in various ways, for instance, as 'bogus asylum seekers' (Guy, 2003; Molnar Diop, 2013), 'ethno-tourist', 'asylum adventurers' (Vašečka & Vašečka, 2003), 'poverty migrants', 'intrusive beggars' (Benedik, 2010), and 'excessively mobile', 'nomadic' (van Baar, 2011) and 'welfare parasites' (Kóczé & Trehan, 2009). The evocative language creates epistemological and rhetorical borders between 'normal' and 'abnormal' migrants, thereby distinguishing Romani migrants from white migrants in the EU. This discursive practice is used to create a coded racialized language between insider and outsider, to control the social and political boundaries between 'Us' and 'Them' (Hall, 1997, p. 258). Similar epistemic boundaries are

created and sustained by various racialized discourses between domestic Romani groups and white local populations (Kóczé & Trehan, 2009).

The migration of Roma in the EU is also distinguished in politico-technical terms. They are known as 'irregular' migrants<sup>1</sup> and also identified as 'security threats' to public order (van Baar, 2015). Huub van Baar expressed concern about the conceptualization of the migration of Roma in terms of 'irregular', rather than 'regular', mobility. One of van Baar's (2012) questions is how 'irregularization' relates to the development of post-socialist neoliberal welfare states in East-Central Europe. Narratives of 'irregularity' are part of discursive and non-discursive practices that contribute to treating Roma differently from other EU citizens. This specific politico-technical approach exacerbates their racialization. I concur with van Baar, who categorizes 'irregularization' as an umbrella term for practices and discourses of orientalization, securitization and nomadization (van Baar, 2015).

The Italian (Hepworth, 2012; Sigona, 2008) and French (McGarry & Drake, 2013; Nacu, 2012) expulsions of Roma in 2008 and 2010 show some striking similarities to the conceptualization of migration as 'irregular', as well as to the nature of racialized political debates that are conditioned by neoliberalism. Davison and Shire (2013, pp. 82–83) refer to the coded meaning of migration that accompanies race and which led to it becoming 'common sense' in neoliberalism. By the same token, when affluent migrants live in a different country we call them expats, but when we are referring to immigration we often connect it with people who are not like 'us'; they are pariahs and not entitled to the same rights. As Davison and Shire succinctly stated, 'whiteness is associated with higher status and wealth, while blackness is associated with poverty and abjection' (Davison & Shire, 2013, p. 83). In this context Roma represent the black Europeans; they are criminal, illegal and not even counted as human (Davison & Shire, 2013, p. 3). Their dehumanization is fortified by the neoliberal state that keeps them outside of the legal boundaries to make them illegal (Goldberg, 2009), cheap and flexible labor for economic exploitation (Bacon, 2013).

### European integration, neoliberalism and right-wing populism

The EU enlargement has offered several opportunities and perspectives for Roma. These offers have been hindered by the neoliberal politics of the EU, which are demonstrated by Hermann, who explains how neoliberalism has impacted major policy issues of the EU. Hermann describes, the 'European integration process was used to adopt mainstream neoliberal policies' and to eliminate state social protection that, in the past, gave Europe's 'distinctiveness compared to other countries, notably the United States' (2007, p. 61). The Single Market Strategy, European Competition Policy, Economic and Monetary Integration, and even the European Employment Strategy are intertwined with a neoliberal approach – including elements such as 'free' trade and 'free' capital mobility, monetary restraint and budgetary austerity, the flexibility of labor markets, and the erosion of employment security – contributed to the structural changes in Europe. Davison and Shire (2013) have reflected on how the acceding Eastern European states represented new opportunities for the EU in terms of new markets, cheap labor and good investment opportunities. The EU accession created favorable investment conditions for foreign capital by the privatization of state institutions and the liberalization of the market (Davison & Shire, 2013). However, the neoliberal agenda to liberalize markets, restructure the state and dismantle

welfare did not improve the social and economic situation of the disadvantaged population, such as Roma in the new member states. Even though, the social integration and human rights situation of Roma in the Central and Eastern European countries were considered as key issues in the EU pre-accession phase (Sigona & Trehan, 2009). The available pre- and post-accession EU financial resources, as well as various Europe-wide policy initiatives such as the proclamation of the 'Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015',<sup>2</sup> did not create an opportunity for the vast majority of Roma in the new EU countries. They rather remained untouched by the promises of economic liberalization and social inclusion, as well as continuing to face systematic discrimination and state-financed segregation (Sigona & Trehan, 2009).

EU enlargement is also considered a landmark opportunity for Roma to enjoy freedom of movement in Europe. By the same token, migration of Roma – even after enlargement – sparked significant public concern in the EU (Sigona & Vermeersch, 2012). For instance, the expansion of the EU in 2004 (Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia) and 2007 (Bulgaria and Romania) intensified the international and national debate around Romani migrants in Europe, particularly in the post-socialist states. National media and public discourse concerning the restriction and expulsion of Romani people was often carried out with anti-Gypsy rhetoric (van Baar, 2014). In most cases, racist motivation has been used, as simple, vivid and easily memorable language to intensify this alienation, memorably in several cases of expulsion of Roma from various Western countries, including Great Britain, Germany, Austria, Italy, France, Denmark, Sweden and Belgium (Cahn & Guild, 2008).

This concern about Romani migrants is exemplified by the neoliberal agenda: The *securitization of mobility of Roma* in the EU.

The concern, *securitization of mobility of Roma*, has been criticized by both scholars and activists. The representation of Romani migrants as 'nomads' and 'criminals' became gradually embedded in European social and political discourses, thus connected intrinsically to the notion of 'irregular Romani migrants'. One of the strongest scholarly critiques was made by van Baar, who notes 'the irregularization of Romani identities and mobilities intensifies the applicability of strategies of criminalization and responsabilization to the situation of the Roma' (van Baar, 2011, p. 205). Later in this article I will focus on two specific case studies in Italy and France, in which the indefinite 'state of exception' (Agamben, 2005) as a case of a neoliberal governmental rationality project became associated with 'irregular Romani migrants'. In the name of security and protection, the government used discourses racializing Romani migration to support a new anti-Gypsy politics in Europe, both overtly and tacitly (McGarry & Drake, 2013; van Baar, 2012).

The development of anti-Gypsy politics operates hand in hand with the development of populism that takes different forms and different political outcomes in Europe. Berezin (2009) suggests that the emergence of populist discourse in Europe has mainly been explained by accelerated Eastern European integration into the EU, which is 'coupled with shifting demographics'. According to Berezin, quantitative changes in demography, such as the increasing numbers of 'non-white' migrants, occurring alongside European integration, has led to an increase in populist discourse. In contrast to Berezin, who stresses the role of immigration in fueling populism, Michael Stewart argues that it 'is a part of a broader shift in European politics' (Stewart, 2012a, p. xx). Stewart explains the unintended impact of European integration from a different perspective, attributing it instead to the

rise of cultural politics, which 'focus less on economic issues than cultural differences between peoples' (Stewart, 2012a). Contrary to Stewart, Berezin connects populism with neoliberal social and economic changes, which are conceived more as free market economic policies that dismantle welfare states, privatize public services and intensify income disparities (Brown, 2006).

Fox and Vermeersch (2010) wrote an informative analysis about 'backdoor nationalism' that has emerged in Hungary and Poland over the past two decades as an unintended consequence of EU integration. They identify backdoor nationalism as a phenomenon whereby nationalist and populist political parties and radical nationalist political movements have actually been indirectly encouraged in Central and Eastern Europe by the EU's politics of enlargement. Richard Saull explicitly draws attention to the re-emergence of far-right populist parties and movements in recent years, which should be understood within the context of contemporary socio-economic structures and processes, that have been generated by neoliberal forms of governance (Saull, 2015). Owen Worth succinctly points out the latest specific policies, such as dismantling welfare and the abolition of state subsidies for refugees, which constitute the central elements of the neoliberal ontology (Worth, 2015).

After all, recent migrations of Roma within the EU have been subjected to securitization, racialization, stigmatization and even welfare-chauvinism (Sigona, 2008; van Baar, 2011, 2014). Yet, the interplay between neoliberal social and economic forces, on the one hand, and extreme-right political forces, on the other, has either been relatively disregarded or only discussed implicitly. This article argues for a more thorough examination of contemporary neoliberal governance which has produced and reproduced rhetoric and social mechanisms compatible with the exclusionary politics of the far right. Their politics have been simultaneously targeted and mobilized against Roma. Hence, neoliberal socio-economic structures provide a political means of creating and excluding racialized groups as aliens, non-citizens, permanent criminals, with the tacit support of right-wing populist parties. While harsh anti-Roma discriminatory rhetoric is obvious, the mechanisms of social, economic and political exclusion remain disarticulated, depoliticized and detached.

### Italian and French case studies as a test for European integration

In the following two case studies, this article focuses mainly on anti-Romani immigration politics in France and Italy for two reasons. *Firstly*, in the period between 1994 and the present, France and Italy were the central sites of right-wing populism in Europe, although in different ways. In both countries, right-wing political parties' racist rhetoric on Romani populations has been mainstreamed by national politics. *Secondly*, with their recent neoliberal securitization of Romani migration, both countries present the Romani people as 'others' and 'abject citizens' of Europe (Hepworth, 2012; McGarry & Drake, 2013). There are already several scholarly articles that analyze some aspects of Italian and French migration policies directed at Romani migrants, particularly from Romania and Bulgaria, but none of them make the theoretical link with racial neoliberalism (e.g. Clough Marinaro, 2009; Clough Marinaro & Sigona, 2011; Fassin, 2010; Hepworth, 2012; Hermanin, 2011; Sigona, 2011; McGarry & Drake, 2013; Nacu, 2012). This article reflects on the normalization of racialization of Roma and exclusion of racialized Romani migrants, who are associated with illegitimacy and a threat to European citizenship.

### Italian right-wing populism

In 1994 in Italy a political party, which has a roots in the Italian fascist past, the *Movimento Sociale Italiano* (MSI) under the leadership of Gianfranco Fini, became part of an Italian governing coalition. This was the first Silvio Berlusconi government (from May to December 1994). Berlusconi allied with MSI and the regional separatist movement, the Northern League (*Lega Nord*), under the leadership of Umberto Bossi. In 1995, MSI became the National Alliance (*Alleanze Nazionale*) and moved towards the center of Italian politics to become the official party of the Italian right. The year 1994 was therefore an important landmark in Italy and throughout Europe, because a political party with a direct connection to a historical fascist party became a legitimate player in European politics (Berezin, 2009). In Italy, this was the period when Yugoslavian Roma were fleeing to Italy from war and post-war persecution. Based on Nando Sigona's account in the '90s, Roma refugees – mainly from Bosnia, Serbia, Macedonia and Kosovo – were treated with 'pre-existing cultural and policy frames rooted in the image of "nomadic Gypsy" [which] normally applied to Italian indigenous Roma and Sinti' (Sigona, 2011). In the 1990s, in his article on the Romani migration in Italy, Giovanni Picker identified the language of the political parties as harsh and dehumanizing against Romani migrants. He claims that this pernicious language became gradually normalized by various political parties, including even left-wing politicians in Italy (Picker, 2012).

### French right-wing populism

At the same time in France, the French right movement gradually and systematically inserted itself into French politics. The breakthrough of the French right was much later than in Italy. In April 2002, Jean-Marie Le Pen advanced to the second round of the French presidential elections. During this period, the French right had significantly increased its constituency. The rise of right-wing discourse, including anti-immigration, became further intensified by the campaign of his daughter and successor, Marine Le Pen. Furthermore, her success was confirmed in the European Parliament elections in May 2015. France (similarly to Italy) carried out several expulsions of Romani migrants from Bulgaria and Romania in 2007 and 2008, following the EU accession of these countries (Cahn & Guild, 2008). An Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) report illustrated through various cases that EU states, including France and Italy, have expelled Roma which is considered a violation of EU legal provisions (Cahn & Guild, 2008, pp. 51–53). The racism against Romani migrants has been appropriated by the extreme right, becoming the epicenter of mainstream governmental politics. According to Alexandra Nacu's account, the summer of 2010 was the culmination of the scapegoating of Romani migrants from new EU members states, such as Bulgaria and Romania. Under the Sarkozy Presidency, Roma immigration became associated with 'insecurity' regarding non-white Romani migrants (Nacu, 2012).

### Italian 'emergency legislation'

In 2007, the EU expanded to include Romania and Bulgaria, allowing their citizens freedom of movement to enter and live in any EU member state, including Italy. According to an



OSCE/Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) publication (Sigona, 2008), since this expansion, the media promoted the notion that migrants from Romania and Bulgaria were set to 'invade' Italy. The word 'invasion' was thereby linked to Romani people and accompanied by a racial subtext.

The hostility against migrants has been stimulated by the murder of an Italian woman, Giovanni Reggani. The homicide was, allegedly, committed by a Romanian Romani male citizen. Shannon Woodcock explores the intersection of gender and ethnicity in the public discourse that was generated by the murder of Giovanni Reggani. She argues that this case generated a specific public discourse on 'dangerous black men' who are sexually threatening to white Italian women. The 'dangerous black man' in this case is Roma (Woodcock, 2010).

This kind of rhetoric is very similar to what has been used in a range of European and colonial nationalist projects in order to justify control over racialized men and white women as objects of the patriarchal structure that maintain the hegemony of white masculinity (Woodcock, 2010).

Sigona (2008) states that as the situation became worse, and as a reaction to anti-Romani public sentiment, Prodi's center-left Italian government issued an 'emergency law' (n. 181/2007) aimed at facilitating the expulsion and repatriation of EU citizens whenever they were perceived to represent a threat to public and national security (Hepworth, 2012).

After the 2008 election campaign which led to the victory of the center-right coalition led by Silvio Berlusconi, the 'emergency law' was extended as part of the 2008 Security Package, triggering criticism by human rights organizations (Merlino, 2009; Sigona, 2011). During a meeting in Naples on 21 May 2008, the Italian Council of Ministers declared a 'state of emergency' in relation to the settlements of nomadic communities in the territory of the regions of Campania, Latium and Lombardy. Later on 25 July 2008, the Italian government passed another decree that extended the state of emergency to the country (Merlino, 2009, pp. 10–11). The following definition explains the consequences of the state of emergency: 'State of Emergency and Power of Ordinance' (Stato di emergenza e potere di ordinanza), states

[i]n case of natural calamities, catastrophes or other events that, according to their intensity and reach, need to be faced by extraordinary powers and means, the Council of Ministers rules on the state of emergency, establishing its temporal and territorial extension. (cited by Merlino, 2009, p. 10)

The state of emergency suspends and limits the general principles of the rule of law.

This legislative package bundled together legal measures for regulating the free movement of EU citizens with legislation addressing organized crime, "illegal" migration and urban degradation' (see Hepworth, 2012; Sigona, 2011). The government also appointed three special commissioners to lead the implementation of the Security Package in order to bring an end to the 'emergency situation', which had been fueled and sustained by the media and the rhetoric of populist politicians. The decree authorized the government to order the identification and census of people, including minors, who were living in 'nomad camps'. Besides checking their documents, the identification process also included taking fingerprints, even though this was harshly condemned by international human rights organizations, as well as the European Parliament.

Despite the international outcry and condemnation, the Italian government continued to label and to racialize Romani and Sinti as 'nomadic groups' and 'illegal and criminal



immigrants' who were seen as threats to national security and therefore needed to be controlled and repressed. A member of the European Parliament, Sarah Ludford from the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), raised concerns about the populist and racist political rhetoric that was attached to the implementation of the 'Nomad Emergency Decree'. She made a statement about the discriminatory and illegal method of collecting fingerprints that targeted Roma, posing the question, 'Have we forgotten the history of Nazi and fascist racial persecution?' (Sarah Ludford MEP).<sup>3</sup> Her comparison is similar to the argument of Wendy Brown, who compares to the 'tacticalization' of law to Foucault's formulation of governmentality, which suspends and instrumentalizes the institution of liberal democracy (Brown, 2006, p. 695). Brown elaborates further, explaining that neoliberalism,

as law is tacticalized or instrumentalized, it is radically desacralized, producing the conditions for its routine suspension or abrogation, and paving ground for what Agamben (2005) drawing on Carl Schmitt's, has formulated as sovereignty in the form of a permanent 'state of exception'. (Brown, 2006, p. 695)

Two days after the extension of the state of emergency to the entire territory of Italy on 27 July 2008, the Interior Minister, Roberto Maroni gave an answer to the European Parliament in a way that twisted the rhetoric about the implementation of the 'Nomad Emergency Decree', justifying it as a humanitarian action and explaining that the government's goal was to give an identity to those living in the nomad camps without ID cards. His strategy was a turning point to de-racialize the discourse, and for this purpose they did not mention 'Roma'; rather, they referred only to 'nomad groups' and 'nomad camps'. Nonetheless, in his speech, Maroni used various historically embedded stereotypical images and racial tropes associated with the Romani people, reinforcing their image as deviant, criminals and nomads (Kóczé, 2014; Kóczé & Trehan, 2009). Robert Maroni's speech in the European Parliament was a shrewd justification of his government's policy, encouraging various other European political parties and governments by providing an example of how they could use racially coded language and discriminatory practice against the Roma in the name of 'social inclusion' or 'humanitarian intervention', without explicit reference to Romani migrants. While invoking the idea that the Italian policy was actually assisting the Roma to secure identity documentation, Maroni reinforced and legitimized widespread, deep-rooted anti-Romani sentiments to mobilize fear and hostility towards Romani migrants from new EU member states.

Edith Bauer from Slovakia and Livia Járóka, the Romani MEP from Hungary, effectively endorsed the same de-racializing tactic that was employed by Maroni to justify their measures against Roma. They declared: 'What is currently happening in Italy is not an ethnic matter, and we must act against injustice, from whomever it comes'. There is a very cynical element in the statement of Bauer and Jaroka which hints that 'the parties are creating hysteria and use the Romani issue for their own short-term, self-serving interests, and it is easy for them to do so since the Romani civil society organisations are too weak to protest against or to oppose it'. Basically, Bauer and Járóka's account indicates that the remaining left, liberal and Green parties in the European Parliament create a public outcry in order to gain political capital at the expense of the voiceless and victimized Romani.<sup>4</sup>

## Romani deportation in France

On 21 July 2010 the French President Nicolas Sarkozy announced a *Déclaration sur la sécurité*. As Alexandra Nacu reported, Sarkozy made a presidential speech which highlighted two events: an episode of rioting in a district of Grenoble following the death of a young man of North African descent, shot during a police search after an armed robbery, and an attack in July 16 on a police station in a small town in Central France by members of families reported to be *Gens du voyage* (French Travelers) (Nacu, 2012, p. 1324). Nacu argues that the unprecedented stigmatization of Romani in the summer of 2010 by the French authorities was intended to misdirect the public from their own struggle with corruption and economic crisis (Nacu, 2012, p. 1323).

This was not the first time that Sarkozy used inflammatory rhetoric against ‘immigrants’. This declaration and the intense media campaign against immigrants contributed to the quick deportation of Romani people from France. In this rhetoric, *les gens du voyage* (Romani people who are French citizens) and Romani immigrants from Central and Eastern Europe have become identified as one homogeneous group, which is considered a security threat to France. In his communiqué on 29 July, Sarkozy denounced the ‘lawlessness’ (lack of legal documentation) that characterized the situation of the Roma coming from Eastern Europe to France as unacceptable (cited by McGarry & Drake, 2013). He also announced a government action plan with regard to ‘illegal migrants’, namely to demolish illegal Romani sites, which he described as ‘being a source of illegal trafficking and the exploitation of children for the purposes of begging, prostitution, or crime’ (cited by McGarry & Drake, 2013, p. 82). Moreover, it implied that ‘irregularly’ residing EU citizens, who were ‘abusing’ EU citizenship and freedom of movement, should be forced to return to their countries of origin (cited by McGarry & Drake, 2013).

The securitized Romani migration crisis generated tremendous national and international media attention and political debate in France as well as in the rest of Europe. The United Nations, the EU, the Vatican, various international human rights groups, scholars, intellectuals and politicians were opposed to Sarkozy’s discriminatory policies. They argued that the policy specifically targeted Roma based on their ethnicity. Therefore, the expulsion of Roma from France was a violation of EU laws prohibiting discrimination and guaranteeing freedom of movement.

In September 2010, news media disclosed the official memo, which revealed that the French government was implementing several administrative guidelines (*circularies*) for authorities to abolish illegal sites. As it turned out, in September the government had already ordered local authorities to target the evacuation of Romani migrants before the violence started in mid-July between police and *les gens du voyage*. The memo was issued in June with a more precise instruction in which authorities were asked for targeted evacuation of illegal settlements and immediate return of Romani migrants from Central and Eastern Europe who were irregularly residing in France. It also identified a number of settlements, which should be eliminated within a 3 month period (at least 100 a month and a target of 300 within 3 months). There was an explicit request in the memo that those settlements that were occupied by Romani should be a priority (Circularé IOC/K/1017881/J du 5 Aout 2010, Paris, Objet: Evacuation des campements illicits, cited in McGarry & Drake, 2013).

When the memo was released to the public, the French authorities were confronted with Europe-wide public condemnation by various international organizations including the European Commission. Viviane Reding, European Commissioner for Justice, accused the Sarkozy government of mass expulsions of Romani people, and of dishonesty in its dealings with Brussels. Furthermore, Commissioner Reding linked the deportation of Romani people to Romania and Bulgaria to Vichy France's treatment of Jews in World War II, concluding that Brussels had no option but to lodge infringement proceedings at the European Court of Justice (Traynor, 2010). As a reaction to the infringement procedure, the French government issued another memo on 13 September to amend the original one. The new memo stated that the police and relevant local officials had evacuated all illegal settlements, regardless of who occupied them. This was meant to show that France had never intended to single out Roma or Travelers (McGarry & Drake, 2013, p. 85). The French government used the same colorblind/de-racialized language as the Italian government used in 2008 by not mentioning the word Roma. Instead, they tacitly referred to them as the 'illegal'.

Viviane Reding's statement on France is reminiscent of the remarks made by Sarah Ludford (MEP) in Italy in 2008. Both Reding and Ludford compared France and Italy's treatment of Romani migrants with the fascist treatment of Jews. The *EU Observer*, an independent online newspaper covered Sarkozy's reaction, stating that

the French politician said on 15 September that Mrs. Reding's 'unseemly' remarks in effect compare France to the Nazi regime. A plane ticket to one's country of origin in the European Union is not a death train, and is not the gas chamber. (Pop, 2010)

Moreover, it unabashedly articulated France's place in a perceived moral hierarchy of EU states by stating: 'This is not how you speak to a major power like France, which is the mother of human rights.' On 29 September 2010 the European Commission announced a press release stating that they would not pursue the infringement procedure against France. The Commission Press Release (IP/10/1207 European Commission Press Release, 29 September 2010) concluded that: 'The administrative instruction ("circulaire") of 5 August 2010 that was not in conformity with this orientation was annulled and replaced by a different instruction on 13 September 2010.' The new memo persuaded the Commission to withdraw the legal proceedings against France.

## Deprivation from political membership

These two case studies suggest that in order to understand the hostile policies of EU member states against the migration of Roma, we must focus on larger economic, social and political restructuring as well as how financial crisis aids rampant nationalism (Fassin, 2010; Sigona, 2014). Fassin explains the 'phobias' and securitization of immigration as a general phenomenon against 'otherized'/racialized groups that are deemed to have biopolitical characteristics, capable of being constructed by political parties as a social threat to 'the nation' and to 'Europe'. People are categorized based on racial or quasi-racial classifications into those who must live and those who may be left to die (Foucault, 2008). Fassin borrows a concept from Claude Lévi-Strauss to explain that these racist and xenophobic discourses are directed against a 'floating signified'. So, the phobia against 'others' such as Romani, Jews or Muslims is a 'rhetorical circulation', which changes

focus according to the particular needs of each political moment. In this sense, the 'rhetorical circulation' of Otherness is a scapegoating process, which may tactically change its target, but consistently works according to the same exclusionary logic. However, while Fassin discusses these 'phobias' as a reaction to various kinds of differences (mainly racialized differences), his critique does not tackle the more fundamental question about the ways in which French-ness itself (and Italian-ness, likewise) has been conceptualized and constructed as presumed opposites to Romani-ness, Muslim-ness and Black-ness. In order to advance this debate, this article pronounces that contemporary neoliberal economic, social and political constraints produce, and reproduce, a new configuration of colonial racism as the politics of anti-Gypsyism<sup>5</sup> that are embedded in discursive and material realities.

The distinct migrant position of Roma within contemporary Europe is derived from a deep-rooted history of racism. The European racist imagination about Roma in art history (Junghaus, 2015), literature (Trumpener, 1992) and in social and political narratives (Kóczé, 2014; Kóczé & Trehan, 2009) contributes to anti-Roma discourses. The mobility of Roma has been distinguished by irregularization and punitive practices. The notion of irregularization, in a different context, has been discussed by several scholars (De Genova, 2002; McNevin, 2011; Squire, 2011). Based on their conceptualizations, the production of the 'irregularity' of Romani migrants functions as a mode of governmentality. In the cases of France and Italy, governments have used the 'state of emergency' to discursively transform 'criminal' and 'nomadic' Romanians and Bulgarians – as well as Italians and French – into 'abject' European citizens (Hepworth, 2012; Sigona, 2014). Thus, the 'irregularization' of Romani mobility also raises the question of political belonging. According to McNevin (2007, p. 671), in the context of neoliberal globalization, irregular migrants are positioned at the frontiers of politics. Their political position is given by a recognition of their precarious life through their 'state of emergency' (Agamben, 1998; McNevin, 2007). Hence, in McNevin's interpretation, the political claims of irregular migrants have a potential to challenge the social and political practices and attitudes of the neoliberal state which construct them as apolitical and illegitimate. By contrast, European Romani 'irregular' migrants have been able to attract some media attention but have not been able to mobilize enough political support and solidarity to radically contest dominant exclusionary discourses.

Scholarship that 'focuses upon the incarceration of irregular migrants' has been considerably impacted by Giorgio Agamben's theoretical work on the 'state of exception' (Agamben, 1998; McNevin, 2007). Sigona's ethnography in Italian 'nomadic camps' offers a critique of Agamben's conceptualization of the camp as a space of exception or incarceration. Sigona instead argues that 'camp space [is] paradigmatic of stratification and diversification of political entitlements, and obligations are reshaped, bent, adjusted, neglected and activated by and through everyday interactions' (Sigona, 2014, p. 12). Sigona introduces the concept of 'campzanship' which 'captures the situated forms of political membership produced by the camp'. He criticizes that scholarship which over-emphasizes the segregating and exclusionary forces of the camps and 'portray[s] them exclusively as spaces of control over a group of people deemed to represent a threat to society' (Sigona, 2014, p. 12). In contrast, he argues, 'campzanship' creates a situated political membership. While this insight is crucial, we should not undervalue the asymmetrical power relations with the external world (governmental authorities, entitled citizens) that

mark these camps' boundaries, and delegitimize their political belonging and citizenship. Furthermore, the temporal and spatial construction of the camp serves to create and sustain the politico-technical control and uncertain sociopolitical predicament of Roma. This article argues that permanent 'campzanship', and permanent criminalization sustain the state of insecurity and state of exception that legitimize and normalize precariousness and deprivation of Roma from political membership.

## Politics of anti-Gypsyism

Neoliberalism has frequently been conceptualized as a race-neutral discourse, yet several studies show that the functioning of the contemporary global economy is deeply embedded in (while also reconfiguring) histories of colonization and racism (Lentin & Titley, 2011; Roberts & Mahtani, 2010). The operations of the market are always supported by unequal gendered and racialized power relations. As Shiva (2014) explains, contemporary neoliberal capitalism maintains unequal gender and racial relations based on the 'law of exploitation', which is a normative set of 'Western' values that determines our hierarchical relationships. The maintenance of the entitlement to practice exploitation and the denial of racial hierarchy are supported by the neoliberal ideology of meritocracy (Knowles & Lowery, 2012). Meritocracy is the belief system in neoliberalism which does not recognize the historical and social forces that determine people's social conditions and life circumstances, and therefore does not acknowledge the structural discrimination and racism that create enduring obstacles to the improvement of life. One of the basic tenets of this ideology is that those who are at the top or in a very advantageous positions are there, simply based on merit. Consequently, those who are in disadvantaged positions and are under-represented in various parts of the society simply lack merit in some way (Soss, Fording, & Schram, 2011). The lack of success is thus interpreted as an individual failure to work hard, or attributed to personal defects such as laziness, criminality, etc.

In the French and Italian cases, public discourse has also invoked neoliberal tropes to justify mistreatment against Romani migrants. Racialized rhetoric and spatialized material borders maintain the difference between 'us' and 'them'. Based on that, Romani people are fashioned as 'criminals', 'illegals', 'invaders' and 'nomads' who are taking 'our' resources and threaten 'our' security. Across these discourses, the presumed priority and privilege of the (white) Italian-ness and French-ness are maintained and reinforced by the construction of a binary between the ideal neoliberal citizen and those abject 'non-citizens' who inhabit the illegalized 'nomad camp'. The image of Romani migrants reiterated as deviant, antithetical to the very ethos of the free market.

Neoliberal governance, as Zygmunt Bauman suggests, has created a disposable (racialized) surplus labor force, 'populations of migrants, refugees and other outcasts' (Bauman, 2004). In summary, neoliberalism, in interaction with post-socialist domestic industrial and social policies' schemes in particular, has further forced some Roma from Central and Eastern European countries to migrate in order to escape from the violent manifestations of anti-Gypsyism (van Baar, 2011, 2014). Recent Italian and French anti-Roma policies have therefore become test cases, which may have polarized the EU's political elite, but not enough to challenge the neoliberal structural foundations of anti-Gypsyism. As this article has illustrated, Italian and French authorities acted against inter-EU Romani mobility and used coercive force, such as eviction and deportation, and discursive strategies of

criminalization to alienate them from the 'color-blind' French and 'white' Italian citizenry. Therefore, promises of 'European' equality, equal opportunity and anti-discrimination protections remain empty. The histories of accumulated social inequalities and the persistent exclusion of Roma from citizenship, as well as a lack of social and political solidarity with their struggles, provide ample reasons for continued and renewed critical scholarly attention to the structure of anti-Gypsyism in Europe.

## Notes

1. Undocumented migrants, often referred to as 'irregular', 'illegal', 'unauthorized' or 'clandestine migrants'.
2. The Decade of Romani Inclusion 2005–2015 is an unprecedented political commitment by European governments to eliminate discrimination against Romani and close the unacceptable gaps between Romani and the rest of society. The Decade focuses on the priority areas of education, employment, health and housing, and commits governments to take into account the other core issues of poverty, discrimination and gender mainstreaming. <http://www.Romanidecade.org/about-the-decade-decade-in-brief>.
3. See: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+CRE+20080707+ITEM-018+DOC+XML+V0//EN>.
4. See: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+CRE+20080707+ITEM-018+DOC+XML+V0//EN>.
5. Anti-Gypsyism used in the text as it is defined by a wide coalition of Roma and non-Roma activists and scholars; 'Antigypsyism is the specific racism towards Roma, Sinti, Travellers and others who are stigmatized as "gypsies" in the public imagination.' [http://antigypsyism.eu/?page\\_id=17](http://antigypsyism.eu/?page_id=17).

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