



SESSION ABSTRACT

Challenging mechanisms of exclusion - Romani mobilities and social networks in Europe and beyond

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Abstract: In this panel we draw on the diversity and consistency of Romani mobilities in Europe and beyond. Romani migrants have been constructed as “the Other” through racialized and exoticizing discourses, separating them from conventional migration studies (Benedik 2010; Fekete 2014; Grill 2012; Van Baar 2014) and legitimizing the implementation of targeted restrictive policies (Nacu 2011; Sigona 2011). This panel will analyze the potentials, limits and constraints of Romani migrants' social networks in reacting to such restrictive policies and discourses of exclusion.

In particular we ask how meaningful social relations are built and which social relations are constitutive aspects of networks? Which role do family and relatives play in translocal migration networks? Are there different understandings of family and kinship among the various communities of Romani migrants? What kind of solidarity is created through family and kinship in the context of migration?

Given the marginalized position of Roma in both the countries of origin and destination the panel will explore possible strengths of “weak ties” (Granovetter 1973, 1983) to non-Roma as facilitators in order to get access to social services and occupational niches. On the other hand, it is crucial to understand “strong ties” among and between extended family networks for those who migrate and those who stay behind (remittances). What can we learn from translocal networks about mobility, modes of adaptation to the country of destination and future orientations?

In particular, we encourage paper proposals (from young Romani scholars) that discuss ethnographic and methodological perspectives on the above mentioned questions.

SESSION SCHEDULE

Wednesday, September 28, 2020 | Slot 1 | Room 1

Agnieška Avin: Imaging a Better Life: Participation of Vilnius Roma Families in Transnational (Im)Mobility

Sabrina Steindl-Kopf and Sanda Üllen: Romani migrants activism and networks in Austria

Wednesday, September 28, 2020 | Slot 1 | Room 1

Marijeta Rajković Ivetić: Romani football on the border between social mobility and transcultural processes

Davina Kaur Patel: Ethnography of the health of Romani street-workers in Oslo

SESSION PAPERS

IMAGINING A BETTER LIFE: PARTICIPATION OF VILNIUS ROMA FAMILIES IN TRANSNATIONAL (IM)MOBILITY

Agnieška Avin

Growing literature of (im)mobility studies shows that the concept of ‘immobility’ is being recognized as an essential component of migration studies. Immobility is actually a flip-side of mobility and these two concepts can be examined in a particular relationality. Immobility is not a fixed and grounded state but rather a fluctuating, varying process in which individuals are negotiating between places and possibilities that can change over time. My paper will be based on my long term ethnographic research among Vilnius Roma families and their participation in current transnational migration processes from the perspective of “those who stay”. I will try to explore and present the ways how participation in transnational (im)mobility shapes Vilnius Roma families’ imaginations about a better life and look into the emerging tensions between here and there manifested through (im)mobility imaginations among Vilnius Roma. For Vilnius Roma (im)mobility imagination becomes a space for social critique of experienced inequality and injustice. Circulating ideals about the abroad can be read as a disappointment with a life here – what is idealised, fantasized and seen as a goal out there, it is what people would wish to have in Lithuania. The research reflects the goals of engaged anthropology as it highlights major fields where local policies fail to assure basic social rights for citizens of Roma origin, forcing them to imagine (and pursue) better lives abroad.

Romani migrants activism and networks in Austria

Sabrina Steindl-Kopf and Sanda Üllen:

The migration of Romani communities from Eastern and Southeastern Europe to Vienna has been diverse both with regards to their national, regional, socio-cultural and religious background. Despite its historical continuity and diversity and although Romani migrants represent the majority of Vienna’s Romani population today, research on migration in Austria - with the exception of few studies - has neglected Rom*nja leading to a situation in which information on Romani migrants is fragmentary. Although Romani migrants represent the majority of Austria’s Romani

population today – with some families having lived in the country for decades –, they are still labelled as a ‘new minority’ (Weiss 2000) or ‘European Other’ (Yildiz and De Genova 2018; Steindl-Kopf 2019; Kopf 2012; McGarry and Drake 2013; Vermeersch 2012) in public and political discourse. Moreover, much of migration literature on Rom*nja discuss Romani migration as a ‘separate or marginal case’ thus reproducing the image of Rom*nja as ‘the Other’. As such they are confronted with specific forms of discrimination and marginalisation that are directed against them both as Rom*nja and migrants. The socio-political inclusion of Romani migrants in Vienna is hampered not only by antigypsyism and xenophobia but also by the heterogeneity of Romani communities which differ with regards to national and religious affiliations as well as multiscalar (national, regional, local) belongings, socioeconomic position, gender, as well as age and generational positioning. Despite the heterogeneity of experience and needs, Romani migrants in Austria are actively voicing their interests and demands vis-à-vis society and politics. Besides established NGOs that offer assistance to Romani migrants in different fields (labour market, education, dwelling), informal networks and committed individuals are actively engaged in doing youth work, memory work or providing information on Rom*nja and antigypsyism. Through their diverse ‘postmigrant experiences’ (Hill and Yildiz 2015) and forms of activism Romani migrants effectively challenge hegemonic discourses on integration as well as discourses on ‘parallel societies’.

Against this background the presentation discusses Romani migration and the social networks of Romani migrants as an inclusive part of Austrian migration history providing an insight into the multi-layered and complex experiences of a particular group of migrants who are usually perceived in a one-sided manner by Austrian politics and media.

Romani football on the border between social mobility and transcultural processes

Marijeta Rajković Iveta

Southeast Europe is home to numerous Romani communities, each distinctive in their own way, depending on the country of origin and time of immigration (during the 20th century), language, customs, religion etc., which delineate such communities and demonstrate the heterogeneity of their heritage. The Romani are also the most marginalised community. Following up on ethnological field research, this paper discusses the role of football in social mobility and transcultural processes. Special attention has been dedicated to football camps through which the Romani of Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia are integrated into the mainstream society. Research has shown that the Romani youth who exhibit a serious commitment towards football and wish to become professional footballers are required to attend school regularly, adopt a healthy lifestyle and socially acceptable behaviour, which results in (easier) economic and social integration and social mobility. This paper relies on the ethnographic of individuals to analyse different experiences of adaptation/movement/migrations and transcultural processes in the context of the Romani players’ matches with other Romani teams in their own countries and abroad (Southeast Europe) and the official matches (i.e. matches organised by national football associations according to the football rules). This paper also discusses the importance and role of culture and heritage when it comes to transnational activities and the cohesion of Romani communities which persist despite national borders, both within the European Union and beyond. The research has also shown that

social mobility and integration into the mainstream society, apart from temporary migrations to a place where a player's football club is located, often results in permanent migration/moving out of the Romani settlements and subsequent loss of the Romani identity, as well as numerous transcultural processes.

Ethnography of the health of Romani street-workers in Oslo

Davina Kaur Patel

Since the expansion of the EU and European economic crisis in the late-2000s, there has been an increasing presence of Romani street-workers from Romania in Norway. NGOs have raised concerns of a significant prevalence of health problems and unmet health needs, limited rights to healthcare, poorly adapted services and challenges imposed by Oslo's sleeping ban. Little research exists on the health of this group and how this is impacted upon by their living conditions in Oslo. This paper employs structural violence as the main framework in which to understand their experiences of health, and its objectives were broadly to explore the: participants' experiences, understanding and practices around health including those related to protecting health and preventing ill-health; relationship between their health-related experiences and practices and the control measures of Oslo municipality and its contractors, police and private guards; potentials for individual and community social actions to safeguard their health. Three months of participant observation, informal conversations and unstructured/ semi-structured interviews with migrating street-workers were subsequently undertaken. Study sites included various spaces in Oslo, such as outdoor sleeping areas, the streets of downtown Oslo, and non-governmental services. This paper finds that poverty, the policing of public and private space, lack of access to shelter and limited health and social rights, collide to shape the ill-health of this group. In response, Romani streetworkers in Oslo develop strategies to both prevent and cope with ill-health, maintaining their survival and income-generating activities. Structural violence shapes the ill-health of this group in pernicious ways from which preventative and coping responses ensure. The results establish ill-health as an outcome of the social and structural conditions this group are met with in Oslo. Health must be central in the delivery of services to this group, with consideration to the structural vulnerability that characterises their daily lives.
