ANA NICHITA IVASIUC[*]
Social Mobility and the Ambiguous Autonomy of Roma Migration

[*] [ivasiuc@staff.uni-marburg.de] (Center for Conflict Studies, Philipps University of Marburg)

Abstract

Since the institutionalisation of the 'nomads camp' as housing policy for the Roma in Italy, various securitising discourses have ambiguously incorporated the motifs of mobility and stasis to construct Roma as a highly mobile – hence potentially ubiquitous – threat, while deploring their perceived social and cultural immobility through the tropes of their unwillingness to 'integrate' or to become 'civilised'. Against the backdrop of these securitising narratives surrounding Roma (im)mobility, the article will bring to the fore the lived experiences of movement of two Roma women currently living in Rome; as they try to navigate economic hardship, the (im)mobility and pressures imposed by states' or local authorities' regulations of their lives, and personal contingencies, they contest, side-track or submit to the regimes of (im)mobility imposed on them. Applying a transnational and intergenerational lens to their social mobility projects contributes to nuance the autonomy of migration thesis within mobility studies: while some of their moves do challenge the categories upon which state power is predicated, in other respects they submit to prescribed paths of social mobility.

1. Introduction

Roma mobility has been contemplated as paradigmatic and revelatory for transformations and enactments of the European citizenship; subsequently, scholars have found it useful to conceptualise the contradictions and ambiguities of the emerging European citizenship regime (Squire, 2011; Aradau et al., 2013).[1] Very recently, it has also been argued (Yıldız and De Genova, 2017) that the mobility of Roma may offer a critical perspective to mobility studies, too. My argument is situated within recent efforts to link Romani studies literature, in 'splendid isolation' (Willems, 1997) – however decreasingly so – from broader theorising efforts, with scholarly debates developing on wider themes. I will build on mobility as lived and experienced by two Roma women from Romania who settled in Rome in the last two decades. By means of life stories, they recount their various spatial moves, imposed or chosen, but invariably inscribed in projects of social mobility, which implicate their families on a transnational and trans-generational scale.[2]

The aim of my argument is to contribute to one of the conversations, which has developed in mobility studies in the last decade around the concept of the 'autonomy of migration' (Bojadžijev and Karakayalı, 2007; Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos, 2008; De Genova, 2010; Mezzadra, 2011; Mezzadra and Nielson, 2013). The general argument of this thesis is that migration is an autonomous, subversive social movement questioning, and thus implicitly challenging the very categories upon which state power and the global capitalist order are predicated. Recently, there have been convincing attempts to nuance what for some critics seemed like an over-celebratory appraisal of mobility within the autonomy of migration thesis (Scheel, 2015), emphasising, against the romanticisation of mobility and resistance, the inherent ambivalence of migrants' subjective practices (Mezzadra, 2010). I wish to contribute to this argument and propose conceptual and methodological tools to further safeguard the thesis of the autonomy of migration against the risk of romanticising migrants' strategies and tactics of resistance to attempts at confining and disciplining their movement. I argue that by extending the examination of migrants' (im)mobilities across borders (against methodological nationalism), but also across generations, ethnographic research may reveal a wider, and more complex perspective on the ambivalence of migrants' tactics grounded in projects of social mobility.[3] These are inevitably always intersecting, transforming, appropriating, or submitting to the

[3] In speaking of (im)mobility, I wish to emphasise that the lived experiences of the Roma women I interviewed, like of many other migrants, alternate between moments of mobility and moments of stasis; according to the particularities and contingencies of each life trajectory, mobility and immobility are invested with different – and ambivalent – meanings.

constraints imposed by the exclusionary regulation of mobilities, and of residence and citizenship regimes. Examining to what extent the migrants' aspirations and projected pathways of social mobility intersect with prescribed 'integration' categories is key to avoiding the romanticisation of Roma mobility as inherently subversive.

In the first section, a short incursion in the development of the *campi nomadi* in Italy and the political context in which Roma mobilities have recently been securitised will provide the background information to situate the life stories of the two women and the constraints they had to circumvent or to appropriate. In the second part, I discuss some of the key arguments of the 'autonomy of migration' scholarship, which conceptualises mobility as subversive to existing categories, and explore how this argument resonates in recent Romani studies scholarship building on Deleuze and Guattari's nomadology. The third part of the article develops on the stories of Speranța and Monica, showing how enlarging the perspective on (Romani) migration beyond methodological nationalism and articulating spatial and social mobility helps to nuance, in some regards, the autonomy of migration thesis. By tracing the endpoint of these women's life projections, I warn against the pitfalls of conceptualising the strategies of Romani people as inherently subversive to current orders of political economy, as well as of the view that migratory 'lines of flight' can always be seen as a social movement attempting to create escapes from the global capitalist order.

2. The securitisation of Roma mobility: nomadism and campi nomadi in Italy

In the spring of 2008, soon after its election, the Berlusconi government declared the state of emergency in the regions of Latium, Lombardy and Campania, comprising the three largest cities in Italy. This time, against the rule that the state of emergency could only be declared in the event of natural catastrophes, no flood, earthquake or other disaster was at the origin of the decree. What was posed as an existential threat demanding extraordinary measures was the presence of 'nomad' settlements (*campi nomadi*), that is, of groups of people categorised as 'nomads', or '*zingari*', particularly from Eastern Europe, who had migrated to Italy in waves starting from the '60s in search for better living circumstances, or, later, to flee the Balkan wars. In the case of many of them, their precarious conditions pushed them to improvise shacks in the urban interstices and peripheries of Rome, Milan, Naples, and other urban centres. The securitising move (Buzan et al., 1998) articulated by the government posed that these settlements were inherently dangerous, removing the issue of Roma immigration from deliberative politics into the realm of exceptionalism.

The wider context in which must be placed this particular problematisation of the mobility of Roma from Eastern Europe to and within Italy is the rise of the security paradigm: a social and political organisation in which security became one of the main structuring and productive dimensions of social life, generating (political, social, financial) capital, legal norms and acts, and social and institutional practices aimed at reducing perceived or existing insecurity on a multiplicity of levels. The security paradigm restructured socialities in the security register, leading to the securitisation and subsequent greater state control of many aspects of social life,

including migration (Bigo, 2002; Huysmans, 2006; Walters, 2008; van Munster, 2009; Feldman, 2011). In several Western countries, starting in the '90s, migrants were increasingly portrayed as a danger to national and urban order, to particular ways of life produced as Western and thus 'civilised', and to the already eroding social security systems in late capitalism. In Italy, the link between migration and criminality – thus insecurity – stabilised in the '90s (Cole, 1997); my own research shows that in the '80s, discourses securitising the presence of immigrants on the urban scene – among whom, Roma from Yugoslavia – were already emerging in national and local newspapers.

In Rome, the politics set in motion by the *emergenza nomadi* – the declaration of the state of emergency – focused on moving Roma[4] around: the then ruling Alemanno mayoral administration dismantled several of the largest *campi nomadi* of Rome and evicted many informal settlements. A number of families agreed to move to the large official camps called 'villages of solidarity', which in 2014 came to host approximately 4,400 people (Associazione 21 Luglio, 2015). Some families were moved to so-called 'reception centres' managed by non-governmental organisations with direct funding from the local administration; the remaining families, for whom there was no place, or who refused the dubious alternative conditions proposed, settled again informally in other places: interstices of urban tissue, such as the spaces under bridges or highways, difficultly accessible areas in public parks and on the banks of the Tiber or Aniene rivers, or abandoned industrial buildings. In these places unauthorised for settlement, the Roma took the risk of undergoing repeated evictions, and in fact, since 2008, many families have been kept on the move under subsequent local administrations, in an entrenched condition of 'evictability' (van Baar 2017).

The genealogy of *campi nomadi* in Italy is often traced back to French legislation for the *Gens du voyage* implemented in the '60s. 'Roma' culture was – and still is – essentially, often erroneously, and always in oversimplified ways interpreted as revolving exclusively around the practice of nomadism. Camps were initially envisaged as spaces in which nomadism could be nourished and somewhat tamed, while kept away from the spaces where it could disturb the cultural sensibilities of the sedentary population, in spatial and social isolation. However, beyond the French inspiration for Italy's policy of camps, several authors (Piasere, 2006; Picker et al., 2015) trace the genealogy of *campi nomadi* to the 19th century colonial era, as the spatial expression of domination and racial exclusion. Much has been written about camps as spatialisations of biopolitics (Clough Marinaro, 2009) and as technologies of governance of racial exclusion (Picker et al., 2015), so I will not dwell on these themes. What I do wish to underline is the ambiguity of the camps in the Italian imaginary, both as spaces of protection, and as spaces where the danger posed by '*nomadi*' could be confined.

The ways in which the inhabitants themselves relate to camps is rife with contradictions, too. A general consensus is that informal settlements are better in

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[4] There are many groups in Italy that are generally subsumed under the umbrella term of 'Roma', the misnomer '*nomadi*', or the racial slur '*zingari*'. They come from different Eastern European countries, have various social organisation systems, and claim belonging to various groups such as Cărămizari, 'Romanianised' Roma, Dassikhané, Khorakhané, Xomá, etc. Evidently, although I do use the general category of 'Roma' for linguistic parsimony, I do not claim the homogeneity of these groups' strategies of migration and social mobility.

every way than authorised camps: they are embedded in the social urban fabric and develop organically in autonomous ways, while evading state control and offering openings for informal economic activities. Once the ethnographic lens is used in research, it illuminates certain ambivalences in official camps (Sigona, 2015): for instance, the authorised camps are sometimes perceived as able to offer a sense of security to the ones who submit to the rules of the camp – no visitors overnight, no absences of over three months, no swapping containers in unauthorised ways. Authorised *campi nomadi* are insalubrious, overcrowded places rife with tensions; yet moving out of the camp is a wish that is not always easy to act on: despite the will to leave the camp, many families who would be able to produce all the documents to apply for social housing do not do so. In turn, a significant share of the academic literature on *campi nomadi* in Italy often falls short of ethnographic thickness in accounting for forms of agency of camp inhabitants, and particularly in the way that camps and their effects may sometimes be subverted and used for particular life projects.

For many inhabitants – although not all – the camp is a temporary, often imposed stopping place in a larger envisaged project, a place they hope to escape as soon as possible in the transition to a higher socio-economic status. The stigmatising effects of living in a camp, and the ways in which the camp is an obstacle to finding work and to a 'normal life', are recurrent themes in conversations, and they mark the peculiarity of their inhabitants' experience of migration and post-migration social mobility efforts, in contrast with other migrants unaffected by the stereotype of nomadism. While the Roma strive to maintain forms of autonomy in the movements which are imposed on them, their decisions to submit or, to the contrary, to evade the disciplining power of the state, must be placed in the wider context of their projects of social mobility, in a multigenerational and multispatial analysis transcending methodological nationalism.

3. Subversive agency: the autonomy of migration thesis and nomadology

Romani mobility in Italy has often been framed in terms, which do not underscore sufficiently the agency of Roma, predominantly portrayed as powerless victims of state intervention. However, accounts grounded in ethnographic thickness have challenged the representation of Roma groups in Italy as entirely devoid of agency (Daniele, 2011; Rossi, 2011; Solimene, 2013; Sigona, 2015). As an overarching concern, my epistemological commitment is to write about the Roma in ways respectful of their agency, thus of their world-making abilities, against the pervading narrative which centres disproportionately on their victimhood through the exclusive focus on the processes to which they are subjected (Ivasiuc, 2018). This concern to represent agency echoes a recent emphasis within migration studies (Anderson and Ruhs, 2010), seeking to bypass the problematic public opinion binary between victimhood without agency, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, agency grounded exclusively within deviance and criminality; on a theoretical level, this emphasis attempts to transgress the oversimplified analytics of the structure versus agency debate in migration (Squire, 2016).

In a similar vein, the 'autonomy of migration' thesis has developed as an agency-oriented approach, posing that the often subversive tactics of migrants invite a re-examination of the very categories upon which state power is predicated; instead of being the victims of migration policies, in fact migrants trigger change by forcing policymakers to react to their mobilities and flows (Bojadžijev and Karakayalı, 2007; Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos, 2008; De Genova, 2010; Mezzadra, 2011; Mezzadra and Nielson, 2013). Thus, migrants' agency is seen to both *precede* and *exceed* power and the attempts at arresting mobility. The autonomy of migration scholarship emphasises the proclivity of human mobility to circumvent borders, obstacles, and control, and to maintain the autonomy of desires, projects, and aspirations despite states' attempts to discipline the movement of migrants, and beyond existing and enforced regimes of immigration, residence, and citizenship. Some scholars (Mezzadra, 2004; Bojadžijev and Karakayalı, 2010; De Genova, 2010) have suggested that migration can be seen as an essentially global, bottom-up anti-capitalist critique, in the attempt at autonomising a labour force rebellious to its own captivity to particular regimes of labour.

Agency-centred approaches, however, inherently entail the risk of romanticising the acts of the subordinate, while overstating the outcomes of such acts and downplaying the repressive character of the control against which the subordinate act. The autonomy of migration perspective has been duly criticised in this regard (Mezzadra, 2010; Scheel, 2013; 2015), although its sophisticated arguments have generally been able to withstand this critique (Mezzadra, 2011). Sometimes perhaps too abstract, the argument may be criticised for what Sherry Ortner (1995) would call 'dissolving the subject' into abstract positions disconnected from lived experience. Against this latter criticism, Scheel (2013: 283) proposes, for instance, to see migration through the lens of 'embodied encounters' in order to '[bridge] the tension between particular practices, struggles and experiences of embodied subjects and general conclusions about the autonomy of migration'.

Recently, there has been a positive reinvestment of the conceptual frame of 'nomadism' in theorising Romani mobilities, through the lens of Deleuze and Guattari's nomadology. In a recent article, Ada Engebrigtsen (2017) argues that the nomad, as conceptual figure, inhabits subversive possibilities, and although the nomad is the 'subject of the law of the other' (de Certeau, 2002), she never subsumes to its power (Engebrigtsen, 2017: 48), but perpetually challenges the very classifications essential to the preservation of state power. Against criticisms pointing out the disconnection between this particular figure of the nomad applied to migrants and their lived experiences of exclusion, racialisation, and oppression, she argues that Deleuze and Guattari have grounded their nomadology in ethnographic accounts, and advances that in many ways, the Roma from Norway may be fruitfully analysed through this particular lens. In line with previous ethnographic work (Engebrigtsen, 2014), she sees the refusal of Roma to submit to the rules of the majority, and their tactics to escape education and wage labour as mechanisms of subjection to the state, as a productive and subversive critique of the latter, a nomadic 'war machine' (Engebrigtsen, 2017: 50). Her argument engages, although secondarily and rather lightly, with the autonomy of migration scholarship (Papadopoulos and Tsianos, 2007), when she draws a parallel between the figure of the nomad devising tactics of

evasion and resistance, and the undocumented migrants escaping state control (Engebrigtsen, 2017: 50-51).

Through my examples, I wish to show how expanding the spatial and temporal focus on the trajectories of Roma migrants – both across borders and generations – may be helpful in avoiding the romanticisation of their tactics and an unqualified 'aestheticising apology of nomadism' as subversion of existing orders (Mezzadra, 2011). Thus, building on the argument emphasising the need to transcend methodological nationalism in mobility studies (Wimmer and Glick-Schiller, 2002; De Genova, 2013; van Baar, 2017), I argue that an intergenerational analysis carried out transnationally makes it possible to grasp broader dynamics of social mobility bringing together apparently contradictory processes: what in one setting seems like a subversive evasion from state power, in another place may become submission to it; conversely, what may be seen as forced spatial immobility may be appropriated for an envisaged social mobility in a future temporality.

4. Questioning subversiveness through the lens of social mobility

The spatial mobility of the subaltern is a key theme of concern for the dominant (Cvajner and Sciortino, 2010). Social mobility, as a dynamic of betterment of one's social standing, however tightly linked to the people's motivations to leave for better conditions, is only secondarily and ambiguously intertwined with discourses securitising the mobility of migrants. The case of the Roma is paradigmatic of the perceived immutability of social hierarchies. Their spatial mobility, through the emphasis on the dangers it poses, is seen in disconnection from their own projects of social mobility: it is often axiomatically said of the Roma that they are unable, or do not wish to 'integrate', in a culturalising move producing them as inept or deviant others. While some of the autonomy of migration scholarship addresses the critique of the integration rhetoric (Bojadžijev and Karakayalı, 2010; Mezzadra, 2011), such a critique can only be viable when it takes seriously the aspirations of migrants themselves regarding the betterment of their social standing, *from their own perspective*.[5] This vantage point problematises one of the arguments of the autonomy of migration scholarship representing migrants' tactics as essentially rebellious to conceptions of upward social mobility derived from the capitalist system (Mezzadra, 2011): what happens, then, when such conceptions are claimed and appropriated by migrants themselves, in a move ambivalently weaving evasion and submission?

4.1. Speranţa: Evading/submitting to state power

Speranţa[6] is a 40-year-old woman from the Southeast of Romania. Born in one of the largest Roma neighbourhoods in the country, she comes from the Cărămizari subgroup; traditionally, they were producing bricks, either for private consumption or for the state's agricultural facilities during the communist times. The collapse of state

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[5] In the case of the Gabor from Transylvania, Martin Olivera (2012) has made a convincing case about the relevance of examining how they see and produce their own 'integration.'

[6] The names are fictive.

economies post-1989, as well as the pauperisation of many Romanians during the 'transition' period, has diminished the demand for the Cărămizari's bricks. Many inhabitants of the settlement in which Speranța was born subsequently took the path of migration, mostly towards Italy. Speranța owns a small, two-room house in the same neighbourhood, but since it has been disconnected from the power grid due to arrears, it is impossible to live there, especially in the cold Romanian winters. She spends most of her time begging in a relatively well-off Roman neighbourhood in the Northwest of the city, where she established many connections with the locals. Occasionally, she also does small cleaning jobs for her contacts. Although in extreme precarity and under perpetual threat of being evicted, she earns more than she ever could back in Romania. A few years ago, she worked for a while in a sewing workshop, where she was making theatre costumes that would sell for considerable money on Rome's rich cultural scene. With the financial crisis, the workshop closed and Speranța was left unemployed.

I met Speranța through one of my key informants in Rome, whom she had asked for help to register her at his address so she could receive financial state support in the form of food tickets. We went together to the post office where he had to declare that she can receive her mail at his address, and the long queue and complicated procedure involving long waiting times allowed us plenty of opportunity to talk. She quickly recounted the story of her arrival, but what in our unstructured discussions she privileged was the topic of how the authorities had threatened to take away one of her children, when they found her begging on the streets while carrying him in her arms. That event was clearly key in her story, and her fear of authorities' attempts to remove her children a central theme throughout several of the episodes she recounted. Her fears were well-grounded in the recurrent practice of Italian authorities taking away Roma children from their families, if they suspect that the child is being abused, neglected or exploited.

Speranța arrived in Italy in 2001, with a three-months visa, which she overstayed. She went to the authorised camp in which her brother and sister in law were staying with their children. As she was not officially registered in the camp, she built a shack next to it. There were often police controls during the night, in order to evict, and subsequently deport, the families which had not been granted permission to stay in the camp; their shacks were regularly destroyed, and then rebuilt again. Speranța recounts one of these controls in which she had to take her four-months old baby through a vicious storm and hide in the bushes while trying to protect him from the weather. She comments with irony on her life at that time as being the opposite of what she had expected when she decided to move to Italy. However, poverty back in Romania and the necessity to ensure a bare minimum for her three children pushed her to stay. The camp next to which she initially stayed was destroyed in a fire. After the fire, she recalls:

[t]he social workers came to get us, took us and put us in a centre, all of us who had small children, (...) up to ten years of age. Just the mothers and the children. They did not care about the men. We had to go willy-nilly. Now there were many rumours: 'Well, if they took us with our children, it's because they want to take our children away.' We were all afraid; we were about thirty mothers, with two-three children each. (...) They took us, brought us there, and they begged us not to go (...). Me, [I kept

thinking] no, they want to take my child away. (...) I didn't know the rules, the law, I was at the beginning, fearing, 'cause the social workers had taken other children away, and that was our fear. We escaped from there; all of us ran away wherever we could, no one stayed.

The fear of having her children removed kept haunting her. She moved from camp to camp, and then from centre to centre, when the authorities closed down the camps. Recently, the authorities have started closing down the centres, too, following the corruption scandal known as *Mafia Capitale*: in 2014, it was discovered that many politicians were profiting from the direct attribution of contracts for the management of either *campi nomadi*, or centres for migrants. The last time the authorities closed down the centre where she was living, they offered as only alternative a shelter for the homeless. She refused ('too many crazy people there, and violent, and smelly'), and, together with an older woman who had become her roommate after she broke up with her husband, she built a shack on a green area inside the city. Evicted from this small settlement months later, she rebuilt a shack in another area, far from sight but well within the urban tissue.

In the interview that she granted me on the next day, Speranța recounted how the social worker who was overseeing her where she begged on the street kept warning her about the risk of having her child removed by the authorities. One day, while her husband was away buying food at the nearby market, the social worker came with the police, and they wanted to take away her child. She resisted as much as she could, kicking and screaming, to the point they had to call in reinforcements. When her husband returned from the market, the police handcuffed him and told her she had to follow them, or else he would be put in prison. They wanted to submit the child to a medical check up, and accused her of having drugged him. Fearing for her husband's freedom, she followed them to the police station, where she told her child in Romanes to wreak havoc in the office, which he did, Speranța recounts amused. In the end, they took her and her son to the hospital, where she was lucky to find a doctor who defended her. The check up was flawless, the verdict came: the child was both very healthy and very clean. She was then sent home together with her child, but she did not dare to leave the camp again, for fear they might follow up on the threat the social worker addressed to her: that if she would catch her again with her child on the street, she would take him away for good. She decided this was no life, perpetually fearing to have her child taken away from her. She brought him back to Romania. Her three children are now raised in two different homes by her sister and her former mother-in-law, and she sends them every penny she can. Pondering on her existence, she concludes that it is not a worthy life, reinvesting with a bitter meaning a move, which once seemed to open a better future. She wishes her children were with her and misses them desperately, but the only reason she is still in Rome is to get money for them, so they can get a better education, and, later on, a good job. She recounts with indignation how they do not teach children anything in the school to which her younger son goes, and proudly narrates how she spoke to his teacher and prompted her to do her job, 'even if we are Gypsies.' She continues to hope that her children will get a good education that would justify her sacrifices.

Although her social mobility is stagnating at best, if not outright downward, her money feeds the projected upward social mobility of her children. On most days, she

can barely make ends meet, but for her it is crucial that her children do not miss anything they need, and most of all, that they get a proper education now and good jobs later. Although she clearly enacts all sorts of evading strategies and tactics, escaping state power in Rome by fleeing from one unauthorised settlement to another, she has other plans in mind for her children, and sees them well within prescribed social mobility paths, with education and wage labour at the core. Her own evasion from state power sustains her children's submission to it, and the fact that these processes happen in two different places and through different people may occult their interrelatedness, and, indeed, the embodiment and relationality inscribed in mobility projects (Scheel, 2013).

4.2. Monica: the autonomy of entrepreneurship

Monica is a woman in her late '40s, born and raised in a small town in the Southeast of Romania. She speaks Romani with a soft, but commanding voice, asking her daughters to bring us coffee on the patio in front of her container in one of the largest *campi nomadi* of Rome. She recounts with pride that her extended family are thriving and respected people back in her town. Some of the family's members have held positions in local institutions; there has even been a mayor in their family. They have always kept busy and have always managed, in all circumstances, to thrive, by doing trade and shifting to whatever opportunities opened up in Romania.

I met Monica in the summer of 2016. At the end of a full day at the camp, I went to look for one of the young men who provide taxi services to and from the camp. Located outside the ring road, the camp is detached and isolated from nearby neighbourhoods. Public transportation is at least three kilometres away, and to get to the nearest bus or train stop, one must walk a circulated road without sidewalks. Some of the Roma do that: women frequently walk by the road, pushing prams with small children or topped with bulky objects that they recover from containers and re-purpose to sell. However, this is a dangerous option, with cars driving at high speed past the camp, so many Roma use Mario's taxi services. Five euro to the nearby neighbourhoods, five euro back again, the gains from this informal entrepreneurial activity seem substantial, and, above all, regular: hardly 15 minutes would pass before someone would drop by to ask for Mario's driving services. In fact, he often has to refuse clients because he cannot handle them all. I found Monica, his mother, preparing the evening meal at the table in front of their container. Monica arrived in Italy in 1999 and settled in the Casilino 700 camp, where she had some relatives and knew some people from her region back in Romania. 'It was good there', she recalls the camp, 'we all knew each other, we helped each other.' At first, she made a living by shoplifting, even though she morally condemns the practice, especially since she became a Jehovah's Witness and reads the Bible regularly. 'I was obliged to steal, 'cause no one helped us at all.' She was caught stealing and served time in prison, then decided to quit. Then, together with her husband, she started collecting scrap metal: they were paying taxes regularly, and it was a benefit for all: 'We worked for us, but we worked for the state, too, and the people were happy because we were cleaning up.' In 2000, the Casilino 700 camp was 'broken', like the Romanian Roma say: the authorities tore down the shacks and evicted the inhabitants, assigning them to

different other camps throughout Rome. Her family was moved to the camp where she has been living for the last 16 years. During these years, she changed container once, to move from an area inhabited by the Khorakhané – Bosnian Roma – to one of the Romanian areas in the camp. She brought her youngest daughters from Romania and registered them at the nearby school, where they like it very much. The girls almost do not speak any Romanian anymore.

Her husband left her for another woman and moved to another country, but she had the inspiration to keep all her children on her name, so he could lay no claims on them, and they all stayed with her, except for the oldest daughter, who is in Romania, and has her own house 'with everything she needs'. After her husband left, she opened an informal bar in the camp, and, although the profit margins are rather small, she 'made good money', as she puts it (*am făcut bani frumoși*).

She deems her life in the camp a good life. True, the camp is ugly and dirty, but she maintains their space clean, she says, pointing towards the space under her container and prompting me to check its cleanliness for myself: 'I use a bottle of chlorine a day to clean, it's so clean you can eat off the floor.' The container is 'almost like a house, see for yourself, the way it is inside it's just like a normal house, and we keep it clean.' The two living spaces of the container are shared by Monica, her two teenage daughters, her 20-year-old son, his wife and their newborn son. Monica is the architect and evident leader of a social mobility project encompassing three generations. The English resonance of her grandson's name, whose baptism they had just celebrated, testifies to the dreams and desires of social ascension that they cherish.

Monica also earned her living with various cleaning jobs. She is confident that if she had to, she could find a job in no time, were it not for the fact that when people hear she is from the *campo nomadi,* they are reluctant to offer her a job. In fact, the plan is to remain in the camp until her family gets the Italian citizenship, and 'with a bit of help from God' they will get the social housing for which they have filed a request in the spring of 2016. 'When we have documents and a house like the Italians, not like the Roma on the camp, there won't be racism any longer.'

Her contentment with the life conditions in the camp is a dissonant voice among the camp's inhabitants. Monica is one of its oldest inhabitants, and it certainly does sound as if her entrepreneurial skills could have gotten her family out of the camp earlier; she claims this herself. Her immobility, however, must be linked to the use of the camp as economic strategy. In this respect, others, too, explain the advantages of the camp: there are no expenses and no rent. When these saved costs add up to the fruition of entrepreneurial openings inside the camp, just like Monica and her son, the camp facilitates accumulation with relatively low expenses, allowing for family projects of social mobility.

Living in the camp can thus be an economic strategy, as it is for some Roma who in the meantime have managed to buy land in the Eastern periphery of Rome. Temporary spatial immobility – often deplored and reified as such in some academic accounts lacking ethnographic thickness – is used as strategy of upwards social mobility in this case, revealing the agency of women like Monica to take advantage of 'the system' and appropriate the camp for her own social mobility projects. The space of the camp, her immobility and the imagined future mobility, both in spatial and social terms ('when we have a house', 'when we have the Italian citizenship'), are

reinvested with the meaning of a long-term social mobility project initiated with the migratory move nearly 20 years ago. The exploitation of an entrepreneurial niche and the logic of maximising profits while minimising costs is essentially what Monica's family has designed as social mobility strategy. Thus, the migratory 'line of flight' that Monica has undertaken runs counter to the argument that such projects inherently contest the exploitative capitalistic order. Undoubtedly, Monica's labour is not captive, nor does she exploit others' labour; yet, her family economically exploits the remoteness of the camp – the very obstacle that many other camp inhabitants name when they deplore their own social immobility and being spatially stuck.

5. Conclusion

The mobility turn in migration studies has been criticised for privileging the stories of those with the right amount of capital – both financial and social – to cross boundaries in what seems to be unimpeded movement, and for its celebratory overtones betraying a tendency to romanticise and aggrandise movement, while ignoring the immobilities, difficulties, dangers and defeats in the projects of mobility of many underprivileged. Mobility may be an essential mode of being in the world (Urry, 2000), but for those of the 'wrong' citizenship, class, religious background, and 'race', it is often punctuated by significant instances of immobility, of 'getting stuck' while waiting (Hage, 2015). In a similar vein, the thesis of the autonomy of migration is grounded in the emphasis on the 'politics of incorrigibility' of migrants (De Genova, 2017) as challenging the existing categories upon which state power rests, as well as the global capitalist order. In this article, I have argued that the autonomy of migration thesis may be nuanced by the careful examination of the intersection between spatial and social mobility through the lens of transnational and trans-generational projects of social mobility. Taking a cue from earlier criticism of facile oversimplifications or romanticisations of projects of resistance (Abu Lughod, 1990; Ortner, 1995), I warn, through the examples of my fieldwork, against a thinned, decontextualised concept of subversion. The life experiences of Speranța and Monica uncover the ways in which they reinvest their (im)mobility with meaning.

Speranța's story – illustrative of the sacrifices that many other migrants make in order to bring about the social ascension of their children – suggests that the conceptualisation of the logic of evasion from state control as subversive needs to be placed in the larger context of multigenerational projects of social mobility which migrants devise for their families. If Speranța is clearly evading state control and the spatial technologies through which this control is exerted – the camp, the homeless centre – she does so in order to navigate her own fears and the constraints imposed on her mobility, but also to protect the access of her children to a better future through the money she is – although not always – able to send to Romania. If she remains completely at the margins of Italian society, living in the bush and seemingly not submitting to state control, it is so that she maintains her ability to pursue the project of social mobility she has in mind for her children. Yet, were she offered a steady job and housing, she would not refuse them: she is far from embodying the subversive nomad challenging prescribed ways of being in the world.

On the other hand, Monica's economic strategy of shoplifting used in her youth could, at that time, be seen as a way to evade state control and the rules which come with one's submission to it. In the course of her life, Monica's evasion gradually turned into an embrace of the rules of entrepreneurial profit-making, as she and her son became entrepreneurs exploiting the very effects of the camp, which otherwise hamper the life projects of many Roma. Monica's strategy of using the camp's remoteness as entrepreneurial grounds for financial accumulation equally nuances the celebratory conceptualisation of migration as an anti-capitalist movement. The remoteness of the camp allows for forms of exploitation, the outcome of which is upward social mobility for those camp inhabitants who are able to navigate the system to their benefit, embracing and operating precisely those entrepreneurial skills acclaimed by neoliberal rationalities of profit-making.

I do not wish to effect a trenchant definition of their tactics and strategies as ultimately *submissive* to existing categories, orders and pathways, either. Their resistance to be incorporated as 'living labour' is a non-negligible particularity many migrant Roma share in Italy, which unsettles one of the constitutive arguments within the autonomy of migration thesis, which sees migrants as exploitable excess to be subjected, through their differential inclusion, to the capitalist mode of production (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2010; Mezzadra, 2011; De Genova, 2013). Rather, Roma migrants' agency is ambiguously interwoven with dynamics of rejection, at time, and embrace, at other times, of dominant ways of being and of social mobility paths prescribed by contemporary political economies. In order to grasp these ambiguities, analyses of mobility must account for spatial and social mobility dialectically and across generations, highlighting the ruptures and contradictions resulting from migrants' conscious strategies, the constraining or enabling effects of public policies, the appropriations of those by migrants, and the contingencies of personal lives.

Perceiving subversion in the life strategies and tactics of migrants raises the unavoidable issue of a politics of representation which risks relying on 'writing things into existence in order to subvert dominant ways of thinking' (Rosenow, 2013: 432). Just how much political wishful thinking taints the way in which we interpret real people's lives is a crucial question – one that anthropology has often raised under the critical examination of one's positionality. Conceptually, it is crucial to distinguish between a scholarly radical critique of existing orders, and the subversive potential of migrants' agency; tracing the end-point of migrants' desires may support the intellectual project of engaging lucidly with this distinction. Methodologically, approaching migrants' experiences through life stories privileges the re-interpretative moment of movement and immobility, of their trajectories, and of the values they come to inhabit at particular points in time (Rogaly, 2015), thus relinquishing to our interlocutors the power to interpret and signify their own acts at a distance from our frames. Turning towards a 'nomadic science', like Ada Engebrigtsen (2017) suggests, must not preclude reflection on the representation of our interlocutors as political subjects, and the entanglement of our own subjectivities in writing.

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