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**Book Review: *Romaphobia. The Last Acceptable Form of Racism*, by Aydan McGarry, London: Zed Books, 2017, 294 pp**

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The text of Aydan McGarry brings to light a topic which, despite its relevance in contemporary society, has not attracted much scholarly attention: *Romaphobia*. As the author emphasizes in the title, *Romaphobia* is the last acceptable form of racism; a fact that is sadly observable not only in the increasing xenophobic attacks on Roma all over Europe, but also in the general tendency of justifying and legitimizing racist comments towards this community within media and political debates. Notwithstanding, the scholars who are engaged in the analysis of the marginalization of Roma have so far mainly focused on the supposed social and/or cultural characteristics of this group, instead of questioning the broader system which keeps the Roma at its margins. In this book, the explicit aim of the author is to divert this discourse and to look for the roots causing the persistent vilification of the Roma in the values and structures that regulate social life within the state (p. 4). With this purpose, he investigates the way the nation-state has constructed the relationship between identity, territory and belonging and how such construction has contributed to the persistent representation of the Roma as “the eternal other”.

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This book's results are particularly interesting and timely, as the issue of "Roma inclusion" has gained more attention both within academia and at the EU policy level in recent years. The EU is engaged in the promotion of the rights of the Roma since the beginning of the 1990s, initially with a legal anti-discriminatory approach and then with a socio-economic one, but its intervention has failed to bring a sustainable and concrete change. Consequently, many scholars are investigating the reasons behind the shortcomings and debating potential ways forward. Within this context, the text of McGarry makes an important contribution, since it seems to open up a new path and contributes with fresh perspectives in this field. The second aspect that makes *Romaphobia* innovative and timely relevant is its interdisciplinary content, which goes beyond the narrow field of Romani Studies by also engaging with other disciplines, such as Critical Geography, Politics, Sociology and Post-colonial Studies. For this reason, the text represents one of the first attempts to provide a comprehensive account of the systematic reasons behind the vilification and consequent marginalization of the Roma.

The topic tackled by the book is strictly linked to the issue of representation of the Roma, an issue already analysed by this author in previous works (McGarry 2014; McGarry and Drake 2013). The Roma are still associated with a variety of different connotations—poverty, criminality, deviance, parasitic lifestyle etc.—which continue to inform prejudices and policies centred on securitization and exclusion. The main outcome of such representation is the denial of the subjectivity and agency of the Roma individual, who remains bound within a collective identity constructed by others. As the author writes, 'stereotypes are the ultimate expression of out-group power, an expression created by diminishing individuality and reducing a group identity to unflattering homogeneous characteristics' (p. 96). The second outcome is the reinforcement of the narrative us vs. them, which sees the Roma as not belonging to our society and reinforces the typically colonial opposition between an "us"—western and modern—and a "them"—others and backwards. McGarry investigates the roots of such a narrative in the context of the development of the nation-state, based on the control of a population within territorial boundaries, and in the consequent construction of a Roma de-territorialized identity.

Territory is the central topic of the second chapter. This is, first of all, because of the stigmatization of nomadism as an inner characteristic of the Roma and as a sign of their de-territorialization, and second, because of the relevance of territorial stigmatization—the process through which the Roma are identified with liminal spaces, reproducing and justifying policies of exclusion. The stigmatization of nomadism is pointed to as a central element: 'Romaphobia finds fertile ground to flourish due to the perception of Roma as rootless nomads who do not

have ties to any one nation or state' (p. 48). The author uses works of political theorists and geographers such as Foucault, Raffestin, Massey and Sack to argue that the root of *Romaphobia* lies in the conflation between belonging and a bounded territory: the objective of the state, whose power is based on territory, is to control a population, which has to be legible and loyal. For this reason, identity and belonging are manipulated in order to be territorially based (pp. 49-57). Consequently, the Roma are stigmatized as nomads without territory and not belonging anywhere. In addition, the stigmatization of Roma results in their physical marginalization in liminal spaces, which, besides obstructing their inclusion, it also reinforces the prejudice of the Roma not belonging to the mainstream society.

In the third chapter the author analyses the Roma identity. McGarry emphasizes the fact that it would be more correct to talk about Roma "identities", as the common understanding of a Roma identity, bounded and homogeneous, is a construction by the non-Roma. Indeed, 'Romaphobia means that the voice of Roma is stifled and non-Roma are able to shape public understandings of Roma identity' (p. 86). Furthermore, this understanding of Roma identity informs and shapes the representation and policies targeting this group. In his analysis, McGarry refers to Brubaker and the concept of "groupism", which identifies 'the tendency to take discrete, sharply differentiated, internally homogeneous and externally bounded groups as basic constituents of social life' (Brubaker, 2002, quoted on p. 104). This tendency determines the systemic denial of the individual agency and reinforces the process of "othering". The author finally analyses the emergent idea of a "Roma nation", which was promoted by the International Romani Union through a reporting of the academic debate over its potential and critical points. The issue is indeed still unsolved: on the one side, the promotion of a Roma nation or Roma identity by Roma themselves can be a powerful means for political mobilization; on the other side, it can reinforce the us/them division and the idea that the Roma do not belong to the respective national territories.

The fourth chapter is dedicated to the analysis of two different cases in which the Roma community lives in spatially segregated areas as a result of Romaphobia: the municipality of Šuto Orizari in Skopje, FYROM, and the Lunik IX district in Košice, Slovakia. Both neighbourhoods have been created by the local authorities in order to move the Roma inhabitants living in the city centres to a segregated area. Nevertheless, as the author notices, the two cases disclose important differences between each other. 'Unlike Lunik IX, Šuto Orizari is a vibrant community with services, activities and opportunities and where people feel invested in their community' (p. 169). Although serious problems of high unemployment and

a lack of infrastructure also exist in Šuto Orizari, the area is connected to the rest of Skopje, interactions between Roma and non-Roma are significant and, most importantly, its population is engaged at the political level and its administration is controlled by Roma. On the contrary, Lunik IX is completely abandoned by the authorities, the housing conditions are deplorable and its inhabitants live in a state of resignation, as they just want to go away from there, but do not have the possibility to escape.

The last two chapters present two examples of how Roma agency can help to challenge stereotypes and claim its space within public discourses. The first example concerns the organization of the annual Roma Pride, which the author analyses by reporting the voices of the activists who participated in the events in Prague (2014) and Budapest (2015). Although some questions remain over the organization, effectiveness and objectives of such initiatives, McGarry presents them as a potential way to affirm the voice of the Roma, but also to challenge the representation of Roma by non-Roma. The second example considers a number of protests organized in response to the expulsion of Roma migrants from western European countries, in particular, France and Italy. In this case, the analysis is conducted through a reflection on the relationship between citizenship and migration in the EU context. The author indeed claims that such manifestations can be interpreted as acts of citizenship.

*Romaphobia* represents an interesting and valuable contribution to the academic debate on the marginalization of Roma, especially as it provides a new perspective, which, rather than looking to the oppressed (the Roma), looks to the oppressor (the non-Roma). As such, this perspective makes an important contribution to Romani Studies, in which an increasing number of Roma scholars call for a decolonization of the knowledge production (Matache 2016; Mirga-Kruszelnicka, 2015). However, while the author touches upon some important issues related to the topic, which are also crucial for further developments in this area of study, his arguments are not always sufficiently developed. One such example is to be found in the author's attempt to address the role of the EU in relation to the issue of the Roma. While the author presents the Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies as a hope for the empowerment of this community (p. 9), his argument does not consider the numerous criticisms directed at this text because of its reproduction of stereotypes and its inability to acknowledge properly the diversity within the Roma group (Marushiakova and Popov, 2015; Rostas, Rovid, and Szilvasi, 2015). Although other sections do recognize some shortcomings of the EU's approach to Roma, this issue is not developed further and the question on potential ways forward in this context is left unanswered. It would most probably be useful to investigate the colonial legacy of Europe and

how this is reproduced within the policies towards Roma. Such a lens of analysis could have helped the author to engage more critically in the analyses of the role of the non-Roma NGOs in promoting Roma rights and in catalysing the Roma movement. Although some scholars, such as Trehan and Kóczé, have highlighted the limits of the engagement of non-Roma NGOs professionals in the promotion of Roma rights and the risks of an *NGOization* of the Roma movement (Trehan, 2009; Trehan and Kóczé, 2009), McGarry does not fully consider these aspects. In the case of the Roma Pride, the author just mentions the controversy on the role of a non-Roma NGO in initiating the manifestation, but does not investigate further the implications of such an involvement (p. 184).

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