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Chapter 14

“They live like Animals”: Migrants, Roma and Nationalist Populism

Eva Kourova and Stephen A. Webb

How do social workers negotiate the difficult terrain of an emergent nationalist populism and how do they unravel the ethical and often deeply politicised dilemmas this poses in the face of insurgent far-right movements? The tensions and dilemmas are particularly acute when case working with migrants, refugees and Roma people. Here social workers are often involved in “bordering practices” and as gatekeepers faced with stark ethical dilemmas and politically nuanced tensions. Immigration raises cultural and security concerns as well as fears of economic displacement, and it weakens the legitimacy of transnational institutions. This chapter shows how much of the populist hatred and violence towards Roma and migrants - a dehumanising strategy - is conveyed through visceral representations of disgust, filth and dirt. Moreover, social work as a form of negative protection is increasingly securitised and entangled with populist drives for ‘useful’ and ‘economically active’ citizenship which is prejudicially juxtaposed against images of dirty and lazy people.

Derogatory talk which likens humans to animals is common place in elitist discourse. Rachel Johnson, the sister of Tory Party leadership contender, Boris, went on a “poverty safari” for the posh magazine *The Lady* and reported to the *Radio Times* about the poverty-stricken working classes, saying “There’s this terrible sense of human waste. They’re existing, rather than living, like battery hens. Apart from the telly and the cigarettes, they are living like animals” (The Independent, 5th March 2018). In 2013 describing a New Year's Eve bar brawl in which several people were seriously injured and some of the attackers were reportedly Roma, Hungarian journalist and founding member of the ruling Fidesz party, Bayer said "a significant part of the Roma are unfit for co-existence. They are not fit to live among people. These Roma are animals and they behave like animals." He went on to say “They are incapable of human communication. Inarticulate sounds pour out of their bestial skulls” (Guardian 2013). In 2016 Bayer, sparked further outrage in Hungary for comparing Roma to

animals and saying they "shouldn't be allowed to exist." (Guardian, 23rd August 2016)

Similarly, Nigel Farage on visiting a Roma camp outside Sofia in 2013 said "The whole thing was truly shocking, I mean living like animals." Zsolt Bayer was talking about the Roma, who are the largest and, arguably, most discriminated minority in Europe. Roma are Hungary's largest minority group with 600,000 to 700,000 members. In July, 2013, Jean-Marie Le Pen, member of the European Parliament and president of the Front National Party, said "I'll give you a prognosis: you have some concerns, it appears, with a few hundred Roma who have a stinging, let's say stinking, presence in the city ... that's just the tip of the iceberg. I announce that within 2014 around 50,000 Roma will arrive in Nice." Following which the European Roma and Travellers Forum (Ertf), SOS Racisme and the French Union of Travellers Association joined to launch legal proceedings against Le Pen (International Business Times, 2013).

In November 2013 Labour Party MP and former UK Home Secretary, David Blunkett warned that British cities could face race riots as an influx of Roma migrants creates "frictions" with local people. Anti-social behaviour by Roma people in his Sheffield constituency resulted in "understandable tensions" among the indigenous community that must be addressed to avert disorder. Mr Blunkett went on to say, "Roma migrants from Slovakia must change their culture" and send their children to school, stop dumping rubbish and loitering in the streets in order to soothe tensions". Farage later applauded Blunkett on his courage for speaking out and invited him to join UKIP.

The rise of nationalist populism

Cas Mudde (2007) suggests that populist politics is a loose set of ideas that share three core features: *anti-establishment*, *authoritarianism*, and *nativism*. Firstly, populism is understood

as a politics that emphasizes faith in the wisdom and virtue of ordinary people (the silent majority) over the ‘corrupt’ establishment, who during BREXIT were often referred to as “self-serving liars destroying our Nation”. Secondly, populists also characteristically “display authoritarian leanings, favouring personal power exerted by strong and charismatic leadership which is thought to reflect the will of the people” (Inglehart & Norris, 2016: 6). Thirdly, populism typically emphasises “nativism or xenophobic nationalism, which assumes that the ‘people’ are a uniform whole, and that states should exclude people from other countries and cultures” (ibid: 7). Populism favours racial homogeneity over multiculturalism, national self-interest over development aid, closed borders over the free flow of peoples (ibid: 7). It feeds into insecurities by promoting a hostile approach towards “outsiders” such as immigrants. As Goodwin (2018) states in reviewing the literature the “majority of academic studies over the past three decades have found that objective economic indicators such as income have only a weak effect or none at all when it comes to explaining the appeal of national populism”. Inglehart & Norris (2016) maintain that it is largely grievances against rapid cultural change that explains the rise of authoritarian populism. In a later study using large data sets, they show how “This triggers an authoritarian reflex – emphasizing the importance of maintaining collective security by enforcing conformity with traditional mores, a united front against outsiders, and loyalty to strong leaders” (2018: 13).

Fear, threat and danger can work effectively in favour of far-right populist propaganda. The ethnic groups they target is heavily affected by poverty, precarity and social exclusion. Most vulnerable are unemployed youth, destitute women and children. Far-right politicians have cultivated stereotypes by spreading fear for an imminent and catastrophic threat represented by migrants, Muslims, Jews, Africans, Turks and Roma among others. In this sense we can

understand far-right populist racism towards Roma as a type of cultural backlash cast as moral exclusion and sentiments of loathing.

According to the European Commission (2012: 12), there are six million Roma in the European Union, the majority living in Eastern Europe. Amnesty International (2012) estimates that with 1.85 million Romani, Romania is home to the largest Romani population in Eastern Europe, followed by Bulgaria (750,000), Hungary (700,000) and Macedonia (197,750). Historically, Roma have shunned the moral economy, the proprietorialism and material values of Western capitalism. Describing the Romani's continued resistance in the 1980s and 90s to both sedentary forms wage of labour as well as "proletarianisation", Robbie McVeigh felt that "In a period of Thatcherite/Blairite hegemony they represent the continued possibility of alternatives; indeed, the continued possibility of resistance" (1997: 25).

Across Europe it is relatively straightforward to find examples of far-right populist violence, intimidation and demonstrations against Roma people. Moreover, some government policy explicitly discriminates against Roma with the radical right increasingly framing social policy in Hungary, Italy, Austria, Denmark, Switzerland and Ukraine. *The Independent* newspaper reported that Roma gypsies have been warned about the risk of deportation after Brexit if they fail to possess the correct paperwork, amid fears of a Windrush-style crackdown by the UK Home Office. They will be forced to prove they have lived in the UK for more than five years. Immigration lawyer Christopher Desira warned that "travellers should start gathering paperwork such as tax documents, education certificates, bank statements or employment contracts if they do not have a passport" (Independent, 1st November 2018). In the authors home city of Glasgow, Roma people in habitually carry around their employment contracts in fear of deportation. There are an estimated 300,000 Roma living in the UK. In this context,

the opposition against Roma is compounded by that against Romanians and Bulgarians. An Institute of Race Relations (2013) report on racial violence states that: “political parties have vied with each other to prove to be ‘tougher’ on issues relating to ‘race’, immigration and asylum, in part as a strategy to ensure that voters do not turn to far-right groups. Arguably though, the opposite has happened, with far-right groups benefiting from having their core messages legitimized” (Burnett, 2013: 4). UKIP’s leader Nigel Farage makes extensive use of anti-Roma discourses to gather political support (Riley-Smith, 2014). In Italy, the far-right interior minister, Matteo Salvini, said Roma should be counted and classified, and if they are foreign, expelled. Salvini has consistently taken aim at Italy’s Roma, repeatedly calling for their nomad camps to be bulldozed because he says they are hotbeds of crime. He called for “a mass cleansing, street by street, piazza by piazza, neighbourhood by neighbourhood” and said “We need to be tough because there are entire parts of our cities, entire parts of Italy, that are out of control.” (Reuters World News, June 29, 2018, <https://af.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idAFKBN1JP1T3>). Reporting on the nomad camps in Italy, Sigona (2013) argues the Roma have been portrayed, by the likes of Salvini, as the ‘inner enemy’ and a ‘threatening internal other’ against whom non-Roma groups must build communities of identity and a sense of unity. She claims the rhetoric of urban decay merges with prejudice against the Roma to construct the ‘Nomad Camps’ as securitised spaces of pollution threatening populations (Clough, Marinaro and Sigona, 2011). The Romani scholar Ian Hancock observed that “The idea of a register, which is not limited to Italy, smacks of neo-Nazism” and goes on to say this “simply reinforces the notion that this is a population nobody wants” (Aljezeera, 9 July 2018). Hepworth (2012) notes that Romani camps are to be found all over Italy and host around 40,000 residents. They are known as ‘nomad camps’, implying that their inhabitants are vagrants who do not settle in one place. She investigates how cultural concepts such as nomadism are employed in Italy to legitimise segregation

policy. The Konik refugee camp operating in Montenegro since 1994 was mostly comprised of Roma and Balkan Egyptian inhabitants live in appalling conditions and forgotten by nearly everyone in Europe (Bass, 2017). It was officially closed in December 2018. In Greece hostility to Roma and a reasserted Orthodox identity were the key ingredients to the success of LAOS (the ‘Popular Orthodox Rally’). In April 2018 in the Ukraine a Romany camp at Kyiv's Lysa Hora nature reserve was attacked after dark by more than a dozen members of the far-right nationalist group C14. Serhiy Mazur, a prominent C14 member, boasted the attack was a celebration of Hitler’s birthday in a widely shared Facebook post that included a photograph of a man dressed in a C14 jacket standing beside a burning tent (see image below; Radio Free Europe, April 26th, 2018). The Roma inhabitants were sprayed with tear gas by right-wing C14 gang members. Roma communities were attacked again in Lviv, Ukraine on 10th May and 23rd June 2018. The C14 leaders have boasted that they are “cleaning up Ukraine’s cities”. (New York Times, 21st July 2018). In March 2013, a small far-right group in western Romania proposed paying €300 (£254) to any Roma woman who came forward to be sterilised. The head of the National Liberal Party's youth wing, Rares Buglea, voiced his support for the idea on Facebook (Independent, 11th February 2013). The notion of cleansing as it relates to a racist trope of abjection is discussed in the next section (see Kourova, 2019)



Image courtesy of Radio Free Europe, April 26th, 2018

Abject Citizens and Racialised Cleansing

Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror* (1982) dramatically illustrates how abjection occurs in acts of repulsion, loathing and rejection through a perpetual process or series of acts through which the indigenous subject comes to constitute itself through the expulsion of that which it is not. The abject threatens the subject with contamination and defilement, inducing violent reactions, repulsions and convulsions; those ‘dark revolts of being’ (1982: 1). Judith Butler (1993) further comments on the concept of the abject as threatening the boundaries of the self: -

This exclusionary matrix by which subjects are formed thus requires the simultaneous production of a domain of abject beings, those who are not yet ‘subjects’, but who form the constitutive outside to the domain of the subject. The abject designates here precisely those ‘unliveable’ and ‘uninhabitable’ zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject (1993: 3).

Abjection bears similarities to the affective dimension of disgust in that both involve aversion to and rejection of a source that gives rise to feelings of repulsion. Disgust and contamination by association figures powerfully in the sentiment that the abject conjures between the “insider” and “outsider” (Manning, 2010).

Roma gypsies are often represented in far-right populist literature as abject and a plight on a “civilised Europe”. To give a feel for this an *AskReddit* (2014) discussion post - which generated 1,500 responses - asked “What makes Europeans hate Gypsies so much? Are they really that bad?” the responses - which assign a precise meaning and demonstrable content - are entirely negative and hateful in localising the Roma as contagion as: killing and eating swans; fat ginger pikeys; stealing lead pipes; refusing work or turning up late; kidnapping white babies; leaving trash on the streets; having no concept of a future; breeding aggressive dogs; thieving car wheel hubs; parasiting host cultures; refusing to pay taxes; wearing the skimpiest of clothing; leeching social security payments; superstitious about frogs; partaking in child prostitution; selling and eating horses; shitting on sidewalks and pissing against trees; begging for money; nicking roof tiles and garden tools; raping lonely white women; having no fixed address; slum dwelling in dirty caravans; manipulating and lazy scumbags; refusing to integrate; robbing old women; trading metal for cash; swimming in dirty pools; selling lavender heather flowers; flamenco dancing; using kids to rob pedestrians; school refusal;

cursing innocent people; selling children for adoption; and increasing knife crime. There is no common ground here. One anonymous commentator graphically reported that: -

Also a few years back a friend of mine heard this really weird creepy howling coming from the petrol station which their house backed onto. *Definitely human but animalistic* (italics added). It turned out later that was the sounds the gypsies were making when they were kicking the solo petrol station attendant there to death.

Another expressing far-right sentiment towards the Roma said: -

Think of it this way:

If Adolf Hitler had focused entirely on the Gypsies, and ignored everyone else like Jews or homosexuals, all of Europe, from the Normandy Coast of France to the gates of Moscow even, would be happy, goose-stepping, nuclear-armed Nazis today.

https://www.reddit.com/r/AskReddit/comments/1f3bok/what_makes_europeans_hate_gypsies_so_much_are/ (accessed 25th March 2019)

In reply another respondent asked, “So the Nazis had the right idea against the gypsies?” At the time of writing this chapter *France 24* reported on a group representing ethnic Roma calling on French authorities for protection after several communities were targeted by vigilante attacks sparked by false rumours of attempted child kidnappings. They proclaimed:-

We are calling today on the interior ministry [...] for immediate protection by way of round-the-clock police presence, Anina Ciuciu, a lawyer and spokesperson for *The Voice of Roma* group, told French media. She blamed the rumours on “a revival of the medieval stereotype” of Roma in which “gypsies are likened to thieves and child-catchers (25th March 2019, *The World and all its Voices*)

<http://en.rfi.fr/france/20190327-roma-call-protection-after-false-rumours-spark-attacks>

Roma as dirt, filth and loathing¹

In a report commissioned by Stonewall (2004) Roma people were criticised in cultural terms for not belonging to a community and allegedly having a negative impact on the local environment. They are described as unsightly, dirty or unhygienic (12) with hard distinctions drawn between the racially homogenised tribe and the Romani “aliens”. In this section we show how categories of dirt and filth are particularly useful tools to access racial prejudices against Roma. As Newell (2012) states highly charged discourses of “racism, ethnocentrism, and homophobia stem from a history of (re)iterations of cultural difference through the supposedly empirical category of dirt” (12).

For the European radical right ethnicity is not so much part of the populist distinction between the people and the elite, who are part of the same ethnic group, but rather of the cultural distinction between ‘natives’ and ‘aliens,’ in which the latter are considered to be part of neither the people nor the elite (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). Populism involves a predominantly ‘moralistic imagination’ which characterises different forms of life by opposing a small minority of people who are put outside the “authentic people” or else reluctantly accepted as “strangers within” but do not share the authentic racial culture. It is evident that authenticity is a historically contingent concept and ideologically motivated category of racial value. According to Opatow “moral exclusion occurs when individuals or

¹ Throughout this chapter, the term “Roma” is used to “refer to the many different sub-groups of Roma, belying the common assumption that the Roma are a single homogenous minority” (Amnesty International, 2012). Romani is used as the adjective form of Roma. See RADOC archives <http://www.radoc.net/>

groups are perceived as outside the boundary in which moral values, rules and considerations of fairness apply' (1990: 1). The term 'delegitimization' is relevant here because it involves a social psychological process that permits moral exclusion. For Bar-Tal, delegitimization constitutes the extreme case of stereotyping and prejudice (1989). So, the stakes are high because valuations of morality and worth, that is the way that people live, are brought into question. This does not mean that Roma is outside society. Romani are assimilated as an element within society (just as the outlaw is always 'in the law') and a type of inclusive exclusion takes place whereby the inside is already marked by what it wants to exclude. With liberal discourse, on the other hand, there is a "colour blind" approach involving a coupling of humanitarian and liberal values; that is, asking the authentic people to see Roma as individuals with humanity, assuring 'us' (the hosts) that 'they' are really just like 'us.' The "civilising role" of the normative indigenous white community is to make Roma more like them and turn them from "idle loafers into real workers". However, in the more extreme national populist imagination the aliens do not belong and have appropriated citizenship and rights under false pretences. They are stereotyped as fake neighbours with no community. Moreover, as Tileaga (2007) explains this kind of extreme prejudice and difference is also marked by an absence: "Romanies have no homeland like other nations. As such, extreme prejudice contains or implies the 'differentiating power' of the absence of a national space" (733).

Research consistently shows the Roma are often portrayed as the 'inner enemy' against which the indigenous non-Roma groups must build communities of identity and sense of unity to fend off (Sigona, 2003). According to the right-wing populist we must somehow immunise ourselves against this threat and be rid of conspiracies to undermine "white democracies". It doesn't take a big stretch of the imagination to see how the Nazi slogans about the racial purity of the people emanate from this notion of authenticity. In this section

we want to illustrate how dirt and filth are the mediating categories for the intercultural encounter between different forms of life - the European 'natives' and so-called Roma 'aliens'.

In 1899 a conference in Munich called "The Gypsy Filth" was held and the Central Office for Fighting the Gypsy Nuisance was created. The plan was to round up Roma and a system was proposed whereby bells would be rung in village halls as a means of signalling their presence (Hancock, 1987). Accordingly, Roma people were variously described as vermin, filth and dirt. As Newell comments the category of dirt puts matter firmly into place, it "fixes it in an interpretive hierarchy that relates to the sight and behavior of people and draws what is hidden into view" (2015: 8). Similarly, Mary Douglas's claim that dirt marks the limits of a society's understanding of itself and signifies people's need to withdraw from any habitus that is perceived to be dirty, and, in reaction, to re-assert their own interpretive boundaries (1966: 117-140). For Douglas, as ideas of impurity and danger hold members of a society to account to one another, and they do so with a character and visceral intensity that stems from and rebounds back upon that particular form of society. This is why for Douglas the ordering of dirt and filth is intimately tied to power structures that prescribe "schemes of classification" around any threats. Fear of pollution and loathing of the "dirty native" is a matter of moral classification. As Kourova states with regard to racial purity and pollution "The question to ask is when and how does one become dirty and when and how does one become clean?" (2019: 2). With dirt and cleanliness, the body in-forms. Newell (2015) further reminds us that the figure of the "dirty native" helped legitimize European cultural expansion into the most intimate corners of Africans' daily lives. In the eyes of imperial commentators, "dirty natives" were far more dangerous than objects discarded by the wayside, or urban trash, and their ubiquitous presence in colonial cities caused colonial governments to enforce regimes of sanitation and urban racial segregation. If cleanliness is

constitutive of a civilised society, dirt is indicative of the loathing of heathen and barbarian society. Roma are often described in racist literature in terms of smells, odours and putridity. The *Daily Express* reporting on a “migrant Roma camp” in the French town of Nanterre crafted a sensationalist headline “Smell from migrants’ centre is making locals’ lives ‘a living hell’ (September 13th, 2016). A racist olfactory with specific tropes of hygiene and cleanliness locate Roma on a grid of threat and value. As Connor (2011) describes: -

Cleanness withdraws; dirt advances or invades. Cleanness encloses; dirt exposes. This is why alien peoples are so often characterised as themselves a kind of dirt. They embody the admixtures and corruptions of time. When we loathe or are revolted by the dirty other person or people, we are recoiling from the invasive or erosive temporality they embody (9).

In connecting this to “states of exception” Agamben (2005) explains the concentration camp creates dirt by reducing space, and thereby turns its very occupants into a kind of dirt. In his analysis of the violence of the state of exception he traces the connection between racism, colonialism, biopolitics and the camp ².

To describe Roma people as “living like animals” is not only indicative of racist language, but also representative of a form of speciesism, based on assumptions about human exceptionalism. ‘Speciesism’ was coined by Richard Ryder in 1970 to describe the anthropocentric practice of regarding different species as having unequal moral value, with humans being most valuable of all. The net effect of speciesist populist discourse is to dehumanise the Romani by invoking and building a socio-moral order linked to notions of

² In drawing attention to the affective dimensions of racism, Patricia Clough (2010) refers to this as the “biomediated body,” a definition of the body in terms of “what it can do – its affect”. When considering fear or loathing this points to the potentiality for affectivity to characterize and to inform the operability of *matter itself* (206-207)

lesser humanity or in this case non-humanity and abjection. Bar-Tal (1989) suggests that dehumanization is a form of delegitimization which serves to exclude certain ethnic groups from the realm of acceptable norms and values. Moreover, it is used to legitimize their inhumane treatment. Dehumanization is seen as a form of moral exclusion, i.e. placing individuals or groups ‘outside the boundary in which moral values, rules and considerations of fairness apply. Those who are morally excluded are perceived as nonentities, expendable, or undeserving’ (Opatow, 1990:1). Given the ideological aspects of speciesism - whereby pests and bugs are the most excluded animals from the scope of justice - it can also be argued that dehumanization, too, serves to justify the system and to legitimize the social exclusion of certain ethnic groups, such as the Romani.³

Social work, bordering practices and racism

In the UK it is evident that frontline social work takes place in a “hostile environment” in relation to migrants and Roma people. Farmer (2017) shows that destitute migrant women are at significant risk of having their children taken into care and threatened with legal sanctions by social workers when it comes to no resource to public funding issues. She demonstrates how the hostile environment creates tensions between immigration legislation and social services' statutory duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of destitute families with children. The Home Office (2014) hostile environment policy is a set of administrative and legislative measures deliberately designed to make staying in the United Kingdom as difficult

³ In *When Species Meet*, (2007) Donna Haraway frequently rails against the doctrines of human exceptionalism in both its religious and secular forms. Her trope of “companion species” deconstructs the boundaries between human and animal, self and other. She argues that humans and domesticated animals are coevolved, significant others to each other in complex and asymmetrical ways. The dogmas of human exceptionalism show our significant and troubled relationships with animals as one-dimensional, and deceptively simplistic.

as possible for people without leave to remain, in the hope that they may "voluntarily leave. (Kirkup & Winnett, 2012). Under the hostile environment, fear and penury are systematically imposed on undocumented migrants (Broomfield, 2017). It is also apparent that an extreme right-wing populism is increasingly evident in the national media and mainstream politicians are increasingly using populist rhetoric (Inglehart & Norris, 2018). The implications for the way this impact on coal face judgements, decisions and interventions in social work is unclear. The extent to which far-right populist assumptions are smuggled into front-line practice is uncertain. We don't properly understand if there is a logic of transmission and amplification of popularist influenced discrimination, on Roma people in front-line practice. Without empirical research it's not possible to discern the extent to which social work is permeable to the risks of populist rhetoric. It thus remains an open question, since we have no supporting evidence or empirical findings to make any strong claims in this respect. We are able, however, to report anecdotally and with reference to media stories and representations as well as research on social work with Roma about the potential consequences of far-right populist extremism on social work.

In 2012 Greek and Irish social services departments did something truly ironic. In three separate incidents, they took blond, blue-eyed children away from their Roma families and put them in state care. Why? They saw their light skin and assumed the children must have been stolen from their families (Global Post, 2013). Allen and Riding (2018) have recently reported that Romani children in England are much more likely to be taken into state care than the majority population, and the numbers are rising. This research uses UK Department for Education (DfE) figures. Between 2009 and 2016 the number of Irish Travellers in care has risen by 400% and the number of Romani children has risen 933% (2015 & 2018). They conclude that social workers "appear reticent to challenge their own presuppositions and

assumptions toward the conceptual ‘Gypsy’. For this reason, they fail to recognise and understand the context in which their own automatic prejudice emerges and endures” (2018: 7). Gaba Smolinska-Poffley, an experienced specialist family case worker for the Roma Support Group, confirmed “We have definitely seen an increasing number of enquiries and we hear more often from community members telling us there are more people being involved in child protection cases” (July 2017, see *Traveller Times* website). Using legal powers of statutory Care Proceedings (Section 20c in England & Wales), usually held in a Family Court, abuse and neglect are most frequently cited when social workers remove Roma children from their families. Allen and Riding conclude that child protection social workers are increasingly risk averse and “overemphasise deficits and failures”, based on anti Gypsy stereotypes, when it comes to working with Roma families (2018: 29-31). Child protection professionals have distorted perceptions of ‘family culture’, which is attributed to a ‘close knit community’, and these are given as the main reasons why Romani and Traveller children are at more risk of harm than any other child (ibid: 41). While most of the Roma children taken into state care are accommodated in foster care placements there is a history of placing them in residential secure units often resulting in high rates of absconding.⁴

It is likely social work will increasingly be involved in “bordering practices”, as evident in the UK PREVENT strategy which attempts to control the mobility, security and radicalisation of people (Vaughan-Williams & Pisani, 2018). Social workers can be powerful gatekeepers in relation to everyday bordering practices. These are administrative and street-level practices implemented by various state and non-state actors which regulate Roma residence permits and their access to health care, schooling, accommodation and welfare

⁴ One author recalls how when working in a children’s residential secure unit in Derbyshire, England, the Unit Manager wryly remarked on the reception of two Roma children into the unit “They won’t be here long. These kids have an uncanny ability to escape from these types of secure accommodation”. Sure, enough they had absconded within a week.

benefits. Health and social care practitioners also frequently refer Roma to immigration authorities such as the UK Home Office (e.g. *NHS Digital* and *NRPF Connect* database which allows the sharing of intelligence regarding cases supported, identify potential fraud and joint resolution of cases). ‘Deportability’ is at the heart of the unequal power relations associated with bordering practices of state and non-state gatekeepers. Social workers are charged with upholding the internal boundaries of the nation state by enforcing policies that are often expressly designed to avoid creating ‘incentives’ for unwanted Roma populations in what was described above as a hostile environment in the UK. Walsh (2018) argues that social workers conceptualise Roma and migrant family members in terms of their immigration status and their subsequent entitlements often at the expense of considerations about the welfare of children. In doing so they reify government policy in their decision-making processes. This can be described as ‘everyday bordering’; processes by which state bordering practices extend into everyday life (Tervonen, Pellander & Yuval-Davis, 2018). From an ethical perspective social work needs to be vigilant about how “darker” care(less) encounters - such as biased disguised compliance claims, counter terrorism officers dictating safeguarding, threshold indicators as the sole justification for intervention and threats to remove children to state care - can reinforce the fears Roma people have about bordering practices.

Far-right and populist parties could win as many as a third of MEPs in the coming European Parliament elections. It’s clear that the cruel machinations of authoritarian populism - and its politics of exception - have to be actively challenged. But before that can be done, it must be recognised and understood by professions such as social work. The racist treatment of the Roma is an acute and visible paradigm of the political space of contemporary Europe which constantly disguises itself in often erratic ways. It is necessary that we learn to recognise its changing shape and content. Operation Libero.

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