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A POSTCOLONIAL READING OF EU CITIZENSHIP OF ROMA

Fien Van Hauwermeiren

Case Study of Roma as Abject EU Citizens in Flanders

Master International Politics – Ghent University

Dissertation promotor: Prof. dr. Hendrik Vos

“...maar alleen in deze gemeenschappelijke strijd kunnen nieuwe ideeën ontstaan. Daarbij is het telkens weer zaak om te voorkomen dat sociale relaties tot hiërarchieën verkalken. Materiële welvaart of eloquentie en assertiviteit mogen in die context nooit gelijkgeschakeld worden met legitimiteit van macht, mogen nooit betekenen dat je het recht hebt om te bepalen hoe andere mensen moeten leven, wat ze moeten doen, hoe ze zich moeten organiseren.”¹

"While the continental union means greater mobility for some, for others the border now is everywhere," argues Fatima El-Tayeb.² Even though EU citizenship protects specific privileges, Roma³ seem to be able to claim them to a lesser extent.

Often Roma are part of the poorest populations in Europe and face segregation and discrimination.⁴ The expulsions of Roma on discriminatory grounds in France in 2010 were strong violations of the Social Charter of Europe according to the European Committee of Social Rights. The Czech Republic is known for the forced sterilization of women, which happened until 2007⁵: a clear form of state violence against Roma. Many Roma in Belgium live in poverty and face social exclusion.⁶ The fierce discrimination of Roma goes against

rights provided for in the EU citizenship.⁷ People sent back to their home country from France is an example of a limitation of EU citizenship of people and raises questions about gradations of EU citizenship.⁸

The hypotheses of this thesis draw on (post)colonial theoretical processes *racialization* and *securitisation*. Centring these processes, I explore whether they block Roma from fully accessing their EU-citizenship rights. This paper seeks to answer the following research question: *are Roma in Flanders disconnected from EU-citizenship rights?*

The first chapter of this paper consists of a review of postcolonial literature, resulting in an

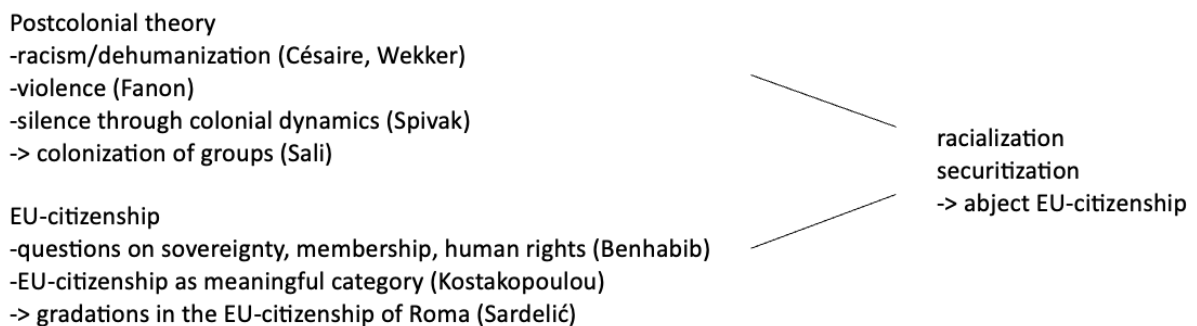
analytical framework which is used to study EU-citizenship rights of Roma in Flanders. The second chapter aims to present the methodology: a case study. The analytical framework is filled in with empirical material to answer the research question. The unit of analysis of the case study is the Roma population in Flanders. The empirical analysis includes a review of Belgian National Roma Integration Strategies, the Flemish MOE-(Roma) Action Plan (2012) and the FRA (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights) survey on Roma and Travellers in Belgium (2019).⁹ An online seminar organised by Caritas was attended, and six interviews and a field visit to the Lübeck site were carried out. The final section presents the conclusions. Even though the National Roma Integration Strategy 2020-2030 recognises antigypsyism, it is

concluded that EU-citizenship rights (right to non-discrimination and right to residence) is subject for Roma in Flanders.

Postcolonial theory

The following review aims to connect postcolonial theory with the literature on EU-citizenship. Figure 1 gives an overview of some of the concepts within postcolonial theory, such as racism/dehumanisation, violence, and silence through colonial dynamics that are touched on together with concrete questions surrounding EU-citizenship. The colonisation of groups, connected with the gradations in the EU-citizenship of Roma thus lead to the main concept of abject EU-citizenship, based on processes of racialisation and securitisation.

Figure 1: Synopsis of strands of literature that led to central concepts



Modern colonialism is understood as a kind of colonialism in which imperialist countries violently implemented far-reaching economic distortions of colonised territories and pushed colonised territories in a structurally subordinate economic position. This economic asymmetry was a necessary condition for the expansion of European economies.¹⁰ Ania Loomba explores the dynamics

of postcolonial theory and questions where *post-coloniality* begins and more importantly, "*where is postcoloniality to be found?*".¹¹ Colonisation created an unequal distribution of power, as well as certain conceptions, racism and exclusion that still exist in this world.¹²

Like Karl Marx who argued that capitalism dehumanises, Aimé Césaire proved how colonialism dehumanises through *thingnification*.¹³ Césaire showed the consequences of colonialism and how tools such as racism and violence led to the dehumanisation of the coloniser fuelling the *immoralisation* of Europe.¹⁴ Césaire negates the idea that colonization would be about civilization: "they talk to me about civilization, I talk about proletarianization and mystification".¹⁵ Colonial ideology is an "ideology of racial and cultural hierarchy".¹⁶

In addition, Fanon demonstrated amongst others economic and social consequences of colonialism.¹⁷ Exploring the workings of colonisation and violence, Fanon followed Césaire's *thingnification* and argued that racism turns people into objects, a violent *coloniality of being*.¹⁸ According to Ding both Césaire and Fanon prove the different faces of *ethnic identity* and *national culture*.¹⁹ Césaire and Fanon do not analyse colonial powers and their colonies as two separate places: they see it as one. Knowledge production is seen in a network that spans both.²⁰ But first, when understanding "race" we have to start from Fanon's notion that a person of colour only becomes a person of colour *in relation to* the white person.²¹

Spivak shows that through patriarchal and colonial domination silence is created.²² The subaltern (women) cannot be heard: they are silenced.²³ They do not have the means to establish a production of knowledge outside the dominant one.²⁴ Their vocabulary, space, resources are the

same: "there is no space from which the sexed subaltern subject can speak".²⁵ If the subaltern is continuously shaped by dominant discourse, knowledge and academic discourse must be seen in this light as well. Furthermore, if it is true that the subaltern is a product of dominant discourse, academic work is an instrument of this colonial discourse, part of hegemony of states. Both arguments show epistemic violence and refer to colonial practices of knowledge in which colonial subjects are shown as "the other".²⁶

Thus, the subaltern cannot speak according to Spivak. The subaltern is excluded from *true (self-) representation*.²⁷ As Spivak implies an intense form of violence, Fanon wrote: "what in fact constitutes this violence? As we have seen, the colonized masses intuitively believe that their liberation must be achieved and can only be achieved by force".²⁸ Wekker argues that colonisation serves elements of knowledge production that still exist. She draws on Said's cultural archive and racial hierarchy.²⁹ As Wekker's analysis was based on The Netherlands, questions about similar processes in Belgium can be raised.

Connecting Césaire, Fanon and Spivak, as well as Trehan & Kóczé, these scholars are not talking about a certain form of violence but remind us of a colonisation of people which includes *different forms of violence*. Each of these postcolonial scholars point out that colonialism goes beyond colonisation of territories, but is about a dehumanisation, both epistemic (Spivak) and psychological (Fanon) and connects to what Sali

describes as *colonisation of groups*.³⁰ "Does it not show enormous privilege and a very limited perspective when you do not see that the present world is already extremely violent?".³¹

Coming from the idea that colonialism goes beyond the territorial expansion of European states, political-economic reasons point to colonial dynamics towards the subaltern. This way, material aspects and categories in modern societies can be seen in a different light. This can be exemplified by the work of Boyce Davies, who uses the life and work of Claudia Jones to show how issues of borders, citizenship and having a passport take on a different meaning when put in a (post)colonial perspective³². Postcolonial analysis offers insights into how power of European states towards subaltern groups persists.³³ Roma continue to be seen as "inferior", which can be partly attributed to unequal power distribution in European politics.³⁴ Sali, based on Said's *Orientalism*, argues that Roma are being racialised and are seen by non-Roma as "*exotic subjects representing the Orient*".³⁵ Racist practices can be seen as colonial practices, a colonial objectification toward Roma.

Abject citizenship through racialisation and securitisation

Roma as abject EU-citizens

Academic debates on EU citizenship are often placed in a broader framework dealing with citizenship and tensions surrounding who is a member of the state and who is not. Economic globalisation comes with a certain disintegration of states: a "*resurgence of ethnic, nationalistic,*

religious and linguistic separatism".³⁶ Claims of human rights on the one hand and the fact that states are sovereign on the other leads to conflict. According to Benhabib there has always been an "*us-versus-them*" dynamic arising from ideas of sovereignty.³⁷ Almost never does the identity of the dominant group that has sovereignty coincide with that of groups that reside and over which the former has a position of power. Criticising ideas of a cosmopolitan Europe, Bhambra shows that European states deny their colonial past.³⁸ There is no place for those who are being understood as *the other*. This tension is inherent to political dynamics that exclude minorities. With their citizenship, states (and in this case the European Union) thus hold an instrument of exclusion.

The tension between the nation-state and the failure to respect equality before the law is central to Hannah Arendt's thinking about citizenship. When a situation is created in which rights are not equal for all, the state becomes a place of *over- and underprivileged individuals*.³⁹ Arendt connects this to the *right to have rights* which she believes is the most essential right: the right to belong to a political community.⁴⁰

According to Ferreira and Kostakopoulou Roma with EU citizenship are held back from exercising their right to free movement.⁴¹ Sardelić argues that the dominant image of the "*poor Roma migrant*" is deployed to indicate limitations of EU citizenship.⁴² Additionally, scholars have identified different *classes of citizenship*, in academic debate referred to as *edges of citizenship* to talk

about less privileged groups, including Roma.⁴³ Some minority groups continue to be constructed as “foreigners”, indicating limits to their EU citizenship.⁴⁴ Yıldız and De Genova link EU citizenship with racialization, marginalization, securitisation and criminalization of Roma.⁴⁵ Roma are always presented as “non-European” despite being EU citizens. Their exercise of their rights as European citizens is made more difficult and invisibility becomes a tool against state violence.⁴⁶

This flawed (EU)-citizenship is described as *abject citizenship* by Hepworth.⁴⁷ *Abject* is borrowed from Julia Kristeva and Judith Butler.⁴⁸ Scholars define *abject* as “cast off, away or out” as well as “without hope”.⁴⁹ “In postcolonial studies, the concept of abjection is frequently used to describe the discomfort that informs the making of the racialized subjects”⁵⁰ and can be linked to Césaire’s understanding of colonisation, more specifically his concept of *thingnification*. As abject citizenship is about dehumanisation, invisibility, and violence.⁵¹

For Toivanen, abject shows how the non-abject constructed its identity using *exclusion* from its *abject counterparts*.⁵² “Abjection is the process which a part of the construction of the subjectivity of the white, class privileged person: allowing us to see abjection as an element that also marks the ‘non-abject’ societies and mobilities as their identity is built on the impartial exclusion of their abject counterparts”. Abject citizenship then refers to the fact that individuals can be seen as having certain privileges but are always understood as

“inferior”. Hepworth shows that the regulation of residency in Italy led to abject EU citizenship.⁵³ Roma were categorised as “nomads” in the discourse, placed in abject spaces and linked to “the condition of deportability”.

Racialization and the right to non-discrimination

There is racism against Roma and scholars agree that Roma are a racialized minority.⁵⁴ This way, boundaries are set up to maintain an unequal distribution of power.⁵⁵ Irregularization of mobility, as well as the so-called “identity” of Roma are accompanied by prejudices such as “welfare tourists”.⁵⁶ In some cases, Roma are dehumanised, partly because of neoliberal policy constructing them as illegal.⁵⁷ Regardless of whether differences between Roma and non-Roma are framed as “cultural” or “ethnic” they can be understood as part of a broader *racial subordination*.⁵⁸

Migration and unemployment are being racialised.⁵⁹ But the other part of racialisation of Roma lays in the appalling division that is made based on skin colour. Yuval-Davis, Wemyss and Cassidy refer to Stuart Hall’s famous statement “class is the modality in which race is lived”.⁶⁰ The racialisation of Roma has also been linked to projects of integration in which Roma are repeatedly presented as *the other*.⁶¹ It is therefore questioned whether a universal citizenship regime that includes Roma even exists. Given the expulsions of Roma with EU citizenship in the EU, the link to unequal relations between group based on “race” or class can be made. The first hypothesis derived

from postcolonial thought is therefore the following: *Roma in Flanders are restricted in their right to non-racism.*

Securitisation and the right to stay

Securitisation of Roma is about presenting people as "a threat" to among others social security systems and allow governments to apply measures such as expulsions. This comes with the exclusion of people by irregularising their mobility and denying Roma a voice. Another aspect related to securitisation is criminalisation of people.⁶² Like van Baar, Kózcé argues that Roma are seen as "*irregular*" and as "*security threats*".⁶³ More so, people with EU citizenship are sent back to their home country solely based on their ethnicity, argues Kostka.⁶⁴ Indeed, Roma are not "real" citizens as their EU citizenship does not protect them from police violence.⁶⁵

Securitisation happens in Italian public spaces, where people are presented as a "security risk".⁶⁶ Equally problematic is that: "*the extremely bad housing and health situations in the camps- which are primarily the effects of how the system has been developed - tend to be naturalized as the normal, yet substandard, way in which the Roma live*".⁶⁷ For Yıldız and De Genova there is no right to mobility within EU citizenship for Roma.⁶⁸ According to these scholars, there is a securitisation of Roma that restricts their right to free movement and blocks social security rights.

In addition, segregation is a form of "*social rights deprivation*". It maintains a hierarchy and creates

fewer employment opportunities for some groups.⁶⁹ Segregation limits political representation and this way limits citizenship rights. A static, vicious circle of disengagement is created: it is believed that marginalisation of Roma is a result of a certain "disinterest" in politics, but it is precisely segregation that prevents this.

Ybarra argues that the construction of deportability through a repeated narrative of illegality and criminalisation leads to the construction of immigrants as illegal people as well as a racialisation of migrants.⁷⁰ This resembles the securitisation of Roma in Europe and their deportability.⁷¹ On the one hand, deportability of Roma leads to forced mobility. On the other hand, ghettoization, and segregation force immobility upon Roma. According to van Baar all this fits in the broader picture of *securitisation* making people "*criminal*" and "*inferior*".⁷² Through this vocabulary, racialising measures against Roma are normalised, including deportation and sharpened state surveillance. Indeed, dehumanisation is described within processes of antigypsyism and racialisation.⁷³ Fejzula addresses racialisation and dehumanisation of Roma and draws a parallel between Fanon's colonial analysis and Roma in Europe.⁷⁴ In both, an unequal, racialised power relationship toward "the other" is recognised. In this specific case, antigypsyism allows for the construction of Roma as a "*threat to the state*". The

second hypothesis in this paper is therefore concentrated on the securitisation of Roma: *Roma in Flanders are restricted in their right to stay/residence.*

Conclusion

In this review, first, the postcolonial theoretical framework was highlighted to get to an understanding of the Roma subaltern. Postcolonial processes, *racialisation* and *securitisation* were described. Racism (and its real consequences) against Roma remains unchallenged. Securitisation is about the construction of Roma as a “threat” which allows governments to apply a dynamic of deportability in their right to stay. Fejzula⁷⁵ indicated that there is a delicate but ever-present form of control over Roma in current societies. Second, drawing on Benhabib's thinking, among others, the literature on EU citizenship was presented, in the light of (EU) citizenship in a globalised world. EU citizenship fits within the broader debate on globalisation and shifts that involve “*us-versus-them*”-thinking. States (and in this case the European Union) thus hold an instrument of exclusion with their citizenship dynamics. Semi-citizenship and edges of citizenship go against the idea that the EU-citizenship protects people. One specific reading of gradations in citizenship is Hepworth's (2012) abject (EU) citizenship allowing to see how regulation, camps and

discourse constructed Roma in Italy as abject (EU) citizens.

Research design: case study

The case study carried out is a holistic, single case of Roma in Flanders.⁷⁶ In part, the research was inspired by discourse analysis theory as outlined by Laclau and Mouffe.⁷⁷ Following Spivak's analysis as closely as possible, this research does not attempt to fall into (new forms of) epistemic violence. Building on the fact that it is not possible to hear a voice of the subaltern, as Spivak argued, this paper cannot make Roma voices heard. The first part of the case study analysed policy documents related to Roma integration: the National Roma Integration Strategies, the MOE(Roma) Action Plan (2012) as well as the FRA survey on Roma and Travellers in Belgium (2019).⁷⁸ The second part of the research consisted of interviews.⁷⁹ The third part was an online seminar organised by Caritas. Finally, the research included a field visit to the Lübeck site in Ghent.

The specific hypotheses formulated are primarily based on the work of Bhabha who argues that the benefits of EU citizenship are mobility privileges and non-discrimination privileges, but EU citizenship rights for Roma are limited.⁸⁰ I placed the rights within a framework of racialisation and securitisation (inspired by among others Yıldız and De Genova).⁸¹ To reiterate, the two hypotheses

are as follows: (1) Roma in Flanders are restricted in their right to non-racism and (2) Roma in Flanders are restricted in their right to residence/stay.

An analytical framework (figure 2) was constructed. Racialisation and securitisation served as criteria to test whether Roma have an *abject* form of EU-citizenship in Flanders. First, processes of securitisation are interpreted in the research as shortcomings in the right of residence/right to stay. Shortcomings of the right to stay were noticed throughout the interviews or in the texts when processes of securitisation were recognised. Securitisation is about the construction of Roma as a *“threat”* which allows governments to apply a dynamic of deportability in their right to stay. Fejzula indicated that there is a delicate but ever-present form of control over Roma in current societies, a colonial process.⁸² This results in evictions and state surveillance.⁸³ Another aspect related to securitisation of Roma mobility is criminalisation of Roma.⁸⁴ Kózcé argues that

Roma are seen as *“irregular”* and *“security threats”*, people are presented as a *“security problem”*.⁸⁵

The right to non-racism was tested in the same way. To research a full or abject form of the right to non-racism, processes of racialisation, incidents of violations of right, homogenisation as well as assuming 'natural' differences, such as: Roma are *“unproductive”*, Roma are *“criminal”* or an exaggerated *“nomad-sedentary”* divide was interpreted as racialisation. If Roma were constructed as a *“threat to the state”*, there was extra state supervision, or criminalisation, segregation, or deportations were recognised/heard. Kózcé wrote about Roma as *“the other”* being racialised.⁸⁶ Differences are presented based on skin colour, but also *“culture”*, there is a *racial subordination*.⁸⁷ Racialisation of Roma is a consensus shared by several scholars.⁸⁸ There are processes of racialised othering.⁸⁹

Figure 2: Analytical Framework for the case study

EU-citizenship	Abject EU-citizenship is characterised by:	Material from conversations, online seminar, field visit or document analysis:
Right to stay	<i>Securitisation</i> Criteria example: sharpened state supervision	example: employee of the Lübeck site points to police camera surveillance on the Lübeck site example: ethnic profiling by the police (employee Lübeck site)
Right to non-racism	<i>Racialisation</i> Criteria example: stereotyping	example: <i>“they are very much aware that they are treated differently”</i> (quote social worker) example: <i>“it’s how they talk to you, with a distance and as quickly as possible and “leave me alone” and you feel that stereotypes remain”</i> (quote Lübeck site)

Analysis and results

Figure 3: Visualisation of hypotheses understood as confirmed

Hypotheses	Abject EU-citizenship	Confirmed?	Abject EU-citizenship	Confirmed?
<i>Hypothesis 1: right to stay limited</i>	<i>Through securitisation</i>	V	<i>Examples of violation of right of residence</i>	v
<i>Hypothesis 2: right to non-racism limited</i>	<i>Through racialisation</i>	V	<i>Examples of racism</i>	V

Where the research initially looked for indications of processes of racialisation and securitisation, evidence of actual violations of the two EU citizenship rights was found and included in the analysis. This led to the addition of another column to the framework, representing these examples (see figure 3). The research question: *are Roma in Flanders disconnected from rights provided by EU citizenship?* Is answered as followed: Roma have an abject form of EU citizenship in Flanders when it comes to their right to non-discrimination/non-racism and when it comes to their right of residence/stay. The sense of silence which exists in academic work on racism and violence against Roma in Flanders is reminding of the thought of Gloria Wekker.⁹⁰ This paper offers a foundation to criticise the interpretation of EU citizenship of Roma in Flanders, more specifically from a postcolonial *colonisation of groups' perspective*.⁹¹

Abject EU-citizenship right to stay

In the document analysis, the Flemish MOE- (Roma) Action Plan (2012) showed securitisation as Roma are constructed as a "threat" to social security:

“zonder activering blijven Roma ook gevangen in een afhankelijkheidsspiraal en kan ons sociaal zekerheidssysteem onder druk komen te staan”

“het draagvlak van een aantal steden en de capaciteit van de sociale zekerheid komt onder druk te staan door deze nieuwe migratievorm”

The economic marginalisation of people must be countered because otherwise they will be an economic “burden”. Understanding people in terms of economic integration is reminiscent of the idea “*benefit tourists*”: a harmful, yet dominant image. This is related to the prejudice assuming that people can be “*unproductive*,” previously described by Hepworth.⁹² Violations of the right to reside in the form of evictions were questioned in the FRA survey on Roma and Travellers in Belgium.⁹³ 10% of the Travellers were evicted from their homes in the previous 5 years (before 2019). For Roma this was 5%.

The main issue brought forward in the online seminar was the structural shortage of places to stay for Travellers and is described as a “*humanitarian crisis*”, because of the precariousness of people’s living situation. The Flemish government admitted years ago that there are not enough places. Yet the promise to create about 500 additional places “*never happened,*” emphasized Reusen.⁹⁴ Sometimes sites are closed without providing a living solution for people, even though this is illegal. In addition, some families have difficulty registering, there is excessive control or a threat of expulsion. Numerous examples of intrusive state surveillance were found in the research. For example, a policy officer (1) explained how travellers had to take a photo every day of bills from the shops where they went to prove their travel.⁹⁵ A parallel can be drawn with the research by De Genova and Hepworth, who describe an expression of extra state supervision as an action with a securitising effect.⁹⁶

The interviews (1/2) showed how the right to stay for people in Puurs-Sint-Amands is largely respected, however, stands in stark contrast to attempts to restrict it in other places in Flanders.⁹⁷ A policy officer (1) explained how, a few years back, the Antwerp city council tried to close the transit site in Deurne.⁹⁸ There has also been the temporary closure of the transit area in Kortrijk among other examples of municipalities trying to

evict Roma residents even though they have been living there for decades. The policy officer also confirmed that evictions take place in Flanders.

The structural shortage of places to live for travellers and racism on the housing market in Flanders, are (implicit) forms of violation of the right of stay: “*the shortage of housing pushes people with the right to stay away*”, stressed a policy officer (1)⁹⁹ when talking about Travellers. This resonates with the insight of De Coninck who problematises the shortage of social housing.¹⁰⁰ Local authorities often show exaggerated, violence-triggering reactions towards Roma living in their municipality, such as the temporary closure of the camp in Kortrijk.

The conversations proved that there are evictions of Roma, which is a clear violation of the right to stay and shows an abject form of EU citizenship. Most of the criteria outlined for securitisation were met. First, the seminar and the field visit showed that extra state supervision or control is a reality for Roma. The far-reaching control of travellers and the camera surveillance on the Lübeck site confirm Fejzula's point that a firm state control is a reality for Roma.¹⁰¹ The interviews and the online seminar also revealed criminalisation of Roma, allowing me to confirm earlier research by van Baar, who stated that criminalizing Roma is an instrument for securitising Roma.¹⁰² This is supported by evidence of ethnic profiling by police.¹⁰³

Following the conclusion of Hepworth, the Lübeck site is an abject space with a phasing out of the rights of Roma by the state, Roma's "*existence is rendered invisible and inaudible through abject spaces*".¹⁰⁴ The Lübeck site demonstrates a form of segregation in which the dynamics of abject citizenship became visible, where surveillance, marginalisation, racism and the threat of expulsion continue to exist, confirming Szalai's conclusion that segregation of Roma hinders citizenship rights.¹⁰⁵

Abject EU-citizenship right to non-racism

*"There is no restraint on judgements when it comes to Travellers and Roma"*¹⁰⁶

The National Strategy for Roma Inclusion 2012-2020 names discrimination as a problem, however, the word *racism* is not mentioned once throughout the strategy. The older texts show a silence about racism that is indicative of colour blindness, as discussed in the study of El-Tayeb.¹⁰⁷ Yet, "hate-motivated harassment" was experienced by 16% of Roma, showing expressions of racism and demonstrating an abject form of EU citizenship.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, there is always underreporting of discrimination, especially by Roma.¹⁰⁹

In the interviews, examples of racialisation were discussed: stigmatization, criminalization, as well as explicit acts of racism. "*Our residents of Lübeck are being discriminated against twice: first because we are Roma, but that second what do you think? Because they*

are from Romania".¹¹⁰ For example, a policy officer (1) quoted a mayor who tried to close a site in a municipality because "*there should be no extra Roma*".¹¹¹ For the policy officer, this is an example of how "*discrimination against Roma is the last accepted form of racism*". Policy officer: "*There is so much racism against Roma*".¹¹² The social workers (1/2) in Puurs-Sint-Amunds also indicate that Roma fear racism in schools in Flanders.¹¹³

Employee Lübeck site (2): "*We have examples of people who went to open houses, and if they see that there are candidates who are "Flemish", they no longer want to try renting the house, just because they know they don't stand a chance*".¹¹⁴ A policy officer (1) also refers to strong antigypsyism when it comes to discrimination against Roma. According to an employee (1) on the Lübeck site, prejudices towards Roma are "*huge*".¹¹⁵ "*I think they really realize that they are treated very differently... They are being discriminated in Belgium*".¹¹⁶ Another employee (1) on the Lübeck site confirmed: "*people feel racism, but they don't always experience this as racism, they don't always understand*".¹¹⁷ "*It's how they talk to you, with a certain distance and very hasty and "leave me alone", you feel that those stereotypes remain*".¹¹⁸

In line with Fejzula¹¹⁹, Roma in Flanders are the racialised other. This is proven by several

racist incidents linked to the Lübeck site. First, there are examples of incidents involving ethnic profiling by the police. The latter immediately assumed that Roma were “criminals”, took them to the police office or checked the people. The employee (1) emphasized that Roma are also being checked on because of the colour of their skin.¹²⁰

One of the prejudices is that people are “criminal” emphasizes (1) an employee on the Lübeck site.¹²¹ Second, two families were recently threatened and physically attacked, a policy officer (1) described. But the racialisation of Roma is also reflected in actions such as the incident in which the administrator-general or the federal government agency for pensions (FOD pensioenen) decided this year that income guarantees for people who have a reference address would be ended. This is a clear attempt to restrict rights.¹²²

All interviews cited acts of racism as well as elements of racialisation and securitisation. The threats made by governments of Kortrijk and Deurne to restrict the right of residence show securitisation.¹²³ The interviews showed that Roma have an abject form of the right to non-racism. (Personal) experiences with racism were brought up during the interviews.¹²⁴ Violence towards Roma was also discussed. Given that racism on the housing market prevents people from renting, an

abject form of citizenship also became apparent at the crossroads of the right to non-racism and the right to non-discrimination.

The field visit to the Lübeck site in Ghent proved an abject form of citizenship as well. The Lübeck project is illustrative of the mixed picture of the right to stay researched in the case study. At first sight, the Lübeck site is an exercise of EU rights. For example, the housing units are people's domicile address. Yet, the location is reminiscent of the segregation referred to by Hepworth.¹²⁵ Employee (2): *“this is not an inclusive or integration project, because you almost segregate people in a site, remote from the city, where no one sees them. Is that integration? Roma are still segregated”*. There is also camera surveillance, criminalisation of Roma and the residents are faced with a lot of racism.¹²⁶

Concluding, racialisation was found in the interviews/field visit and the online seminar. Processes of racialisation such as the assumption of “unproductiveness” were recognised in policy texts. Hepworth built her argument around the fact that people in Italy were repeatedly labelled “nomads”.¹²⁷ In Flanders, Roma are placed in an economic framework, with the result that they are constructed as an “economic burden”. Racialisation in Flanders is not so much based on a “nomadic-sedentary” dichotomy, rather a “productive and non-productive” stereotype. This research confirms Sardelić's conclusion that the much-

repeated prejudice of the “poor Roma migrant” demonstrates limits of EU citizenship adding to the racialisation of Roma based on the fierce prejudice that Roma are a “burden”.¹²⁸ The research also proved strong racialisation of Roma based on skin colour of people.¹²⁹

Conclusions

*"Roma, we are the same as everyone else. Nothing more, nothing less"*¹³⁰

Drawing from the thinking of Césaire, Fanon, Spivak and Wekker, among others, I focused on racism/dehumanisation and violence, as well as the impossibility of hearing the Roma subaltern in current structures. I connected postcolonial theory and the literature on gradations in EU citizenship to get to *abject (EU) citizenship*. I built on the research of Hepworth, who showed how regulation, living conditions and discourse constructed Roma in Italy as abject citizens. Hepworth understands Roma camps in Italy as abject spaces with *"some form of conditional freedom and surveillance"*.¹³¹

I argue that the case study developed in this paper provides ground to critique from a postcolonial framework the interpretation of EU citizenship of Roma in Flanders. I recognised colonial dynamics such as racialisation and securitisation limiting the EU citizenship

rights of Roma in Flanders, making their EU citizenship abject.

The postcolonial theoretical framework of Kelley among others proved insightful.¹³² The fierce racism and violence against Roma in Flanders resonates with Kanobana's point that there is much violence in contemporary society.¹³³

The criteria of securitisation were met in the interviews, field visit, seminar and policy texts. The seminar and field visit showed that often state supervision or excessive control is a reality. The extensive control of Travellers and camera surveillance at the Lübeck site confirm Fejzula's statement that there is continuous state control of Roma.¹³⁴ The interviews and online seminar also revealed criminalisation of Roma. Thus, I confirm earlier research by van Baar who argued that criminalising people is an instrument of securitisation, as ethnic profiling happens in Flanders.¹³⁵

Both racism on the housing market in Flanders and the structural shortage of places for Travellers are (implicit) forms of violation on the right to stay. Some actions of governments such as the temporary closure of the transit site in Kortrijk give a wry impression. Furthermore, the Lübeck site is an abject space. The people's *"existence is rendered invisible and inaudible through abject*

spaces".¹³⁶ In this research, the Lübeck site is interpreted as a form of segregation where dynamics of abject citizenship became visible in for example the precarious housing situation, camera surveillance, ethnic profiling, racism and dynamics of deportability.

When it comes to the right to non-racism Roma also have an abject form of EU citizenship. Processes of racialisation such as assuming "unproductivity" was recognised in policy texts. First, racialisation in Flanders is partly based on the opposition of "productive and non-productive". Hepworth¹³⁷ built her argument on the fact that Roma in Italy were labelled "nomads", yet in Flanders, it is an economic framework in which Roma are placed, with the result that they are constructed as a

"burden". Second, Roma are racialised based on skin colour. The study found fierce evidence of racism and violence, such as hate crimes and ethnic profiling of people in Flanders.¹³⁸

By examining mainly material forms of racialisation and securitisation to fill out the empirical framework, this case study searched for whether there *is* racialisation and securitisation of Roma in Flanders. Now, the results of this research prove fierce (material) racialisation and securitisation and thus provide a basis for further analysis of these processes. Fanon's work on *not seeing* and *making the racialised person into an object* could be elements of further research.

¹ Sibon Kanobana, "Ode aan de chaos" in *In het spoor van Fanon. Orde, wanorde, dekolonisering*, Koen Bogaert (Berchem: EPO, 2023), 293-312.

² Fatima El-Tayeb, *European Others: Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe* (University Minnesota Press, 2011), p. xxxii.

³ In this research, the word "Roma" is used to refer to very heterogeneous groups of people, a "transnational, multilingual, multireligious community". By Roma, the European Union designates "Roma, Sinti, Kale, Romanichels, Boyash/Rudari, Ashkali, 'Egyptians', Yenish, Dom, Lom, Rom, Abdal" as well as Traveller populations.

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⁵ Tine Danckaers "Europa lust zijn Roma niet", *MO**, 2-4-2012, accessed March, 2023 <https://www.mo.be/analyse/romarechten-op-een-hoopje>

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⁷ Heide Castañeda "European Mobilities or Poverty Migration? Discourses on Roma in Germany", *International Migration*, volume 53 no. 3, (2015), 87-99, <https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.12166>; Dena Ringold, *Roma and the Transition in Central and Eastern Europe: Trends and Challenges* (World Bank Publications, 2000), <https://doi.org/10.1596/0-8213-4801-9>

⁸ Huub van Baar, Ana Ivasiuc and Regina Kreide, "The European Roma and Their Securitization: Contexts, Junctions, Challenges" in *The Securitization of the Roma in Europe* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 1-25,

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