



UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

Care-full failure: how auxiliary assistance to poor Roma migrant women in Spain compounds marginalization

Vrăbiescu, I.; Kalir, B.

DOI

[10.1080/13504630.2017.1335833](https://doi.org/10.1080/13504630.2017.1335833)

Publication date

2018

Document Version

Final published version

Published in

Social Identities

License

CC BY-NC-ND

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Vrăbiescu, I., & Kalir, B. (2018). Care-full failure: how auxiliary assistance to poor Roma migrant women in Spain compounds marginalization. *Social Identities*, 24(4), 520-532. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504630.2017.1335833>

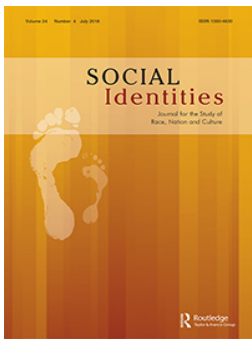
General rights

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations

If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: <https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact>, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

UvA-DARE is a service provided by the library of the University of Amsterdam (<https://dare.uva.nl>)



Social Identities

Journal for the Study of Race, Nation and Culture

ISSN: 1350-4630 (Print) 1363-0296 (Online) Journal homepage: <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/csid20>

Care-full failure: how auxiliary assistance to poor Roma migrant women in Spain compounds marginalization

Ioana Vrăbiescu & Barak Kalir

To cite this article: Ioana Vrăbiescu & Barak Kalir (2018) Care-full failure: how auxiliary assistance to poor Roma migrant women in Spain compounds marginalization, *Social Identities*, 24:4, 520-532, DOI: [10.1080/13504630.2017.1335833](https://doi.org/10.1080/13504630.2017.1335833)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504630.2017.1335833>



© 2017 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 08 Jun 2017.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 605



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Citing articles: 2 View citing articles [↗](#)

Care-full failure: how auxiliary assistance to poor Roma migrant women in Spain compounds marginalization

Ioana Vrăbiescu and Barak Kalir

Department of Anthropology, University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, Netherlands

ABSTRACT

In Spain, the national and local authorities boast in recent years about their progressive programs for the integration of Roma migrants from Romania. Many state efforts to work with Roma on their integration are specifically directed at women. Economic integration into the waged labor market is considered a major goal as it, supposedly, leads to the empowerment of Roma migrant women while also securing decent standards of living for entire families. This article argues that integration programs adversely result in the further discrimination and exclusion of those they pretend to relief. This adverse result is produced through a two-tier intervention in the lives of Roma families. The caring state works with a general category of ‘vulnerability’ for targeting populations, in which Roma migrant women are specifically incorporated through designated social programs. The performance of Roma as the subject–object of these programs is carefully evaluated. According to these evaluations, Roma women often fail to meet the normative standards of ‘good mothers’, ‘decent wives’, and ‘diligent workers’. Subsequently, to deal with ‘failing subjects’, the disciplining state, a-la Foucault, inflicts an array of penalties on Roma women and their families: cut-offs of social benefits, evictions from poor dwellings, withdrawal of children’s custody, and forced removals to Romania. We thus argue that initiatives by the caring state (and civil society) often prescribe or go hand-in-hand with repression from the correcting state. In welfare states, social programs can thus conclusively ‘evidence’ existing stereotypes about marginalized Roma families and about women in particular.

ARTICLE HISTORY


Received 3 March 2017
Accepted 12 May 2017

KEYWORDS

Roma; gender; exclusion; vulnerability; NGOs; Spain

Introduction

Exploring the views and practices of civil servants and civil-society actors who deal with ‘vulnerable migrants’, this article exposes how gendered social perceptions and welfare state practices in Spain compound the marginalization of female Roma migrants.¹ The article traces the ways in which the state authorities and NGOs assess and govern the integration of migrant women, who apply for social benefits and other assistance. We argue that a *caring move* by the left hand of the state and civil society often goes hand-in-hand

CONTACT Ioana Vrăbiescu  i.vrabiescu@uva.nl

© 2017 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

with a *repressive move* by the right hand of the state, resulting in the further marginalization and exclusion of Roma migrants in general, and of Roma women in particular (cf. Clark, 2008). To be sure, we interrogate here a particular pattern of exclusion and marginalization that is applied to Roma migrant women, but we are well aware of the possibility that this same pattern is also applied to other vulnerable and racially marginalized migrant women, for example, undocumented migrants from Africa (Rogozen-Soltar, 2012).

We draw on feminist debates on social work and the patriarchal structuring of welfare state (Alber & Drotbohm, 2015; Halberstam, 2011; Hochschild, 1979) and on the critics of street-level bureaucratic practices towards the racially marginalized poor (Clark, 1999; Wacquant, 2009). The vast literature on social work has shed important light on the 'commodification of emotions' and 'deprofessionalization' emphasizing that the motivations of caregivers cannot only result from personal and ideological convictions about doing good and/or financial incentives (Dominelli, 2002). Among other things, critics have unveiled the wavering notion of 'vulnerability' as a working category (Brown, 2016) and have problematized the feminization of care for vulnerable subjects (Dominelli & Hoogvelt, 1996). Dominelli (2002, p. 10) convincingly argues that in much of social work 'women, as the majority of basic grade workers, [are] controlling other women in their homemaking, child nurturing and elder caring capacities whilst holding out the carrot of retraining for an elusive job'. Viewed from an intersectional perspective, the intricacies of patriarchy lead certain women to inflict violence on other women. In Spain, the vast majority of social workers, NGO workers, trainers, and officials who are in charge of carrying out interventions with 'vulnerable' migrants are females (Alonso-Villar & Del Río, 2008; Carrasco & Recio, 2001). Highlighting the negative effects of EU policies towards Roma, critics have pointed out how implementation of European strategies and recommendations to alleviate the poverty of Roma imposes at the same time multiple vulnerabilities on the target group (Fekete, 2014; Vermeersch, 2012).

Empirical research on social workers as street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky, 1980) revealed their ability to maneuver between 'professional decisions' – predicated on having access to the intimate lives of people – and 'discretionary power', which, building on trust-relationship, leaves the door open for unaccountable decisions (Evans & Harris, 2004; Prendergast, 2007). Even when social workers are trained for non-discriminatory and non-offensive attitudes (Ellis, 2011; Fook, 2016), in their daily interactions with clients, 'culture has been used as a cover to justify racist policies and procedures' (Lavalette & Penketh, 2014, p. 14; see also Kalir & Wissink, 2016). The so-called cultural competences of social workers are pertinent for an analysis of welfare policies and practices towards Roma migrants in Spain.

Our argument builds on the notion of the 'failed' subject of integration policies (Paulle & Kalir, 2014) in leading state authorities to withdraw their protection to migrants and even inflict penalties on those who prove to be undeserving or non-integrating. The penalizing of 'failure' mirrors the state's need of 'good' subjects who fit with neoliberal-infused measurements and business-like models of efficiency and profitability.

The Spanish authorities and civil-society actors work with a particular idea of vulnerability that is largely predicated on the condition of women in society: vulnerability to gender-based violence and precarious living circumstances. This caring state² appears to have incorporated feminist critique about the double marginalization of migrant women (Yuval-Davis, 2006). In Spain, social interventions are initially welcomed by

Roma families who struggle to make ends meet. In soliciting assistance, Roma women regularly express their perceived vulnerabilities to social workers: illiteracy, demanding household duties, and the impossibility of finding jobs. This input from Roma women is, however, often assessed differently by the social workers. As we show, there are two situations in which Roma migrant women come into contact with the social services. First, in order to obtain social provisions, women approach the territorial social services according to their place of residence. Second, social services are propelled by the right hand of the state or their own ideological convictions to intervene in the life of the families and to correct what they consider to be deviant behavior.

Social workers habitually reach out to Roma women by attending to their role as *mothers*. Given the hegemonic patriarchal idea of the household, it is women who are considered responsible for bringing up children. Social programs are on offer for both parents who are approached by social workers when dealing with migrant families. However, men are often present only in the first meeting, after which they either decide that this is 'women's business', or prefer to stay away from state surveillance. The ease with which the 'disappearance' of men from social programs is accommodated, or explained away, by both spouses and state/NGO actors is itself a manifestation of widely entrenched gendered perceptions regarding the position and role of women (and men) in the household.

Once the connection between the caring state and Roma families is established, other types of interventions and programs become available specifically for women: language courses, sexual and reproductive education, labor market accession, etc. An integral part of all social interventions is a systematic monitoring and careful evaluation of the progress made by those serviced (Humphris, 2016). It is here, we argue, that the caring state is transformed into a mechanism for surveillance and control over the lives of women and their families. Care workers become part of the lives of Roma families, analyzing, and monitoring continuously their living conditions, normative behavior, achievements in the labor market, and so forth. In the eventuality of a negative assessment by care workers, there is likely to be a subsequent move to penalize the family. Among the punishments that can be inflicted in case of an assessed 'failure' are: discontinuation of social benefits and housing, child abduction to state custody (Vrăbiescu, 2016), intrusive surveillance of family life and so-called voluntary return programs to one's country of origin (Kalir, 2017). In this sense, gendered boundaries and predicaments are transformed in the re-making of the nation-and-state's borders that justify the exclusion and potential removal of 'failed' and 'revolting' subjects (Tyler, 2013).

Methodology

Throughout Spain, social services have been privatized and decentralized since the 1980s, transforming the ancient administrative structures that were under the direct tutelage of the central Spanish government into territorial services managed by regional and local institutions. This post-Franco shift furnished a modality of reforming the state in line with hegemonic neoliberal ideas. In the 1990s, regional authorities obtained the full control over implementation procedures and institutions representing the left hand of the state: education, healthcare, and social protection. This decentralization has allowed institutions to transform departments into independent programs run through public-private collaborations. Thus, entire departments at the regional and local levels have

been privatized leading to a conglomerate of programs managed by NGOs and private companies under the coordination of a small number of civil servants. For example, in Barcelona, only five civil servants are employed in the social services of the local authority and they coordinate around 40 projects involving several NGOs and private companies.

The article builds on non-consecutive fieldwork conducted in the years 2013–2016 mostly among those working on the implementation of programs dedicated to Romanian Roma living in the areas *El Gallinero*, *Cañada Real*, and *Delicias* in the Madrid region, and in different locations throughout the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona. We conducted 30 in-depth semi-structured interviews mostly with civil servants, officials in the regional government, and social workers employed either in NGOs or in private companies. In discussions with interlocutors, there was ample room for them to express their vision of the system for which they worked. In addition, we interviewed several Roma women who participated in social programs.

In the following section, we discuss the social dynamics and institutional configurations that frame social interventions, which end up certifying the non-integration or ‘failure’ of Roma migrants and, thus, legitimize in the eyes of the Spanish authorities punitive measures. We then move on to present several case studies that illustrate two different ways in which the ‘exclusion through inclusion’ (De Genova, 2013) of impoverished Roma women is produced by the caring state. Although different from one another, the promotion of wage labor for poor women and the criminalization of the Roma migrants, both reflect a double burden that is put on the shoulders of Roma migrant women: not only is their productive work discounted and reproductive work stigmatized, but they regularly run the risk of being subjected to penalties from the sanctioning state (Gandhi, 2017).

From vulnerable migrants to *failed* subjects of integration

Scholars have pointed out the widespread inability of vulnerable people to surmount existing institutional barriers that stand between them and social benefits (FitzGerald, 2016; Heaslip, 2015), stressing the difficulties of the poor in presenting themselves as ‘victims’ or in demanding assistance from state agencies (Helms, 2013). Following Fineman (2010), we highlight the gap and tension between *vulnerability* as lived reality and as defined for the purposes of state interventions (with the latter also determining what is an adequate assistance). People might feel vulnerable and fight against vulnerability or they might not be in a position to understand the complexity of social and structural constraints that lead to their marginalization. State policies, on the other hand, are guided by a humanitarian logic towards those categorized as vulnerable (Mackenzie, Rogers, & Dodds, 2014). Although it should be considered a continuous process of state learning regarding who is vulnerable and how to adapt assistance accordingly, bureaucratic inertia fixates the definition and thus not allow for new groups to be included. In practice, the caring state fails to address the specific position of migrants and vulnerability remains a point of continuous negotiation between excluded people and those in charge of managing social interventions (Jovanović, 2015).

From a state perspective, preponderantly migrant women, and especially Roma, fit in to the existing category of vulnerable group.³ In a succession of vulnerable identities: migrant, woman, Roma, and poor, social services construct a methodological working

category. Increasingly, migrants play the role of the tolerated Others who receives state aid only when able to prove their bodily marks of violence (Fassin, 2011). The state, through gender mainstreaming, attends to women as a vulnerable group by mostly providing quotas in politics, engaging in positive discrimination and sponsoring shelters for victims of domestic violence (Jaggar, 2002). EU and national policies recurrently consolidate Roma as a vulnerable group through the work of expert classifiers (Surdu, 2015).

Paradoxically, the condition of possibility that allows a state to refrain from providing basic needs to marginalized and excluded people is the vulnerability dimension (Abramovitz, 1996). Vulnerability becomes the condition for the state to exercise benevolent interventions manifested in offering provisions and protection. Concomitantly, by allegedly addressing 'vulnerable groups' generously, the authorities prepare the ground for a potential punitive exclusion. The threshold is 'documented evidence' that ostensibly proves migrants' inability to integrate, transforming the figure of the vulnerable migrant into the failed subject of inclusion.

Within this state framework, social workers in the third sector mold their actions and programs. In Madrid, in a slum neighborhood where a few hundred Roma migrants live, civil servants, NGO workers, and church representatives are all offering services to poor migrants. As Roma migrant women are often targeted as the main subjects for integrative policies and charity programs, various types of interventions are offered to them. An example of how the participation of Roma women in social programs is assessed was given by Javier, a priest leading an activist church in Madrid:

Another NGO sets-up training classes for young women because there is a problem. A reality that they see as a problem, namely, the age [of mothers]. At their first pregnancy the mothers are 14–16 years old. Well, this is cruelty. I don't know if this is good or bad, but for the health ... They then set a project that theoretically is fantastic: to train these young women ... then the husbands know how to use contraceptives. However, in practice, these people [NGO workers] set-up the training some 3 km away. So then they organized a bus. Great, but now the problem is that these are women ... children in general and babies are dependent on women. We can argue whether this is macho attitude, but changing it is really hard, especially in a community where the cultural features are very strong. In the bus they didn't allow mothers with babies, because there were no facilities, or it was not planned ... Then the women [did not attend and] failed the training. The assessment then was to suspend the training because the women were not interested in participating. This circus, according to my experience with excluded people, happens frequently. We do things for people without looking at their reality. Logically, people then 'fail', and the guilty one is the other.

Coupled with a challenging economic background, the legal framework in Spain leads to the exclusion of numerous migrants from basic social provisions such as education, health, and training for the job market (Garcés-Mascreñas, 2013). Without the support of a professional team, consisting of civil servants and social workers, migrant women often cannot obtain basic social services and access formal employment. Gatekeeping access to basic state provisions, NGO workers customarily select and determine those who qualify to take part as 'clients' in the mediated process of integration (Rogozen-Soltar, 2012). In the case of Roma migrants, this is usually done by involving 'cultural mediators' who are supposedly expert in transmitting mainstream norms and values to clients. This constellation produces the dependency of poor migrants on their positive interactions with social workers. Although we did not conduct a comparative research

with other marginalized groups in Spain, it stands to reason that the approach of social workers towards Romanian Roma is predicated on an entrenched pattern of engaging racially marginalized groups like *Gitanos* in Spain (Lago Ávila, 2014; Vallhonrat et al., 2015).

There are two levels of categorization when it comes to Romanian migrants in Spain. First, there is the generalizing category of ‘Romanians’ when referring to Roma and non-Roma Romanians, and even to other migrants from Eastern Europe in Spain. To this homogenizing and stigmatizing category – often used by anti-immigration politicians from the right wing⁴ – many non-Roma Romanian migrants strongly react by distancing themselves from Roma, calling them ‘ethnics’ and reinforcing anti-Roma racism. This approach from non-Roma Romanians contributes to the consolidation of the term *Gitanos del este* (Eastern European Roma) to designate Roma from Romania as a separate inferior category of migrants in the eyes of civil servants and social workers in Spain. Here is how one official at the Catalan Immigration Department shared with us his view of the Romanian Roma:

It is their culture that makes them live precariously, that makes them live at the margins of everything. (...) Gypsies from Romania are pariahs, they don't have a good relationship with the Romanians and neither do they have a good relationship with the [Spanish] Gypsies.

The value of wage labor and the (in-)visible work of migrant women

Social services oscillate in their interactions with Roma women between providing social benefits while monitoring and evaluating their deservingness. Exploiting the ambiguity left between social policies and gendered roles, social workers use their discretionary power to alternate the ways they address families with children, either as vulnerable clients or as fully responsible adults. When a *family* demonstrates the ability to financially look after the children, social services become more supportive; but when a *mother* has no income, she risks losing her children to state custody (cf. Empez Vidal, 2014).

Local social workers are the first to assess the situation of families and to decide whether to offer material provision and to urge women to: search for work, follow training for waged jobs, learn the local language (Spanish in Madrid, Catalan in Barcelona), and manage health issues (especially concerning reproductive life). These programs rely on local and regional budgets and are run by specialized companies or third-sector organizations, in line with a neoliberal move towards privatization of the social services. Special collaborations between local authorities and private services such as *Xarxa ROMEST* (Barcelona) and *Comisión Población Excluida* (Madrid) bring together experts to share experiences and to advance methodologies of working with Roma migrants as a ‘vulnerable group’.

The excluded individuals – citizens or migrants – are those to whom the state ascertains their inability to obtain the minimum living standards. The social services implement policies for social inclusion, demanding that the target population, women and men alike, comply with certain conditions. The most important condition is to have a work place or to be looking for one. Helena, a civil servant in the municipality of Barcelona, explained the case of Marina, a single mother who was recently evicted:

She considered herself a Romanian. She has all the markers of this type of a Roma from Romania. This mistrust, this ... unwilling to relate to the services, but at the same time

she needs help. I worked for ten years with autochthonous Roma in a very depressed neighborhood ... so the first thing that I thought was 'this girl is a Roma'. So, I asked her openly. She said 'yes', but that she is not doing ... well ... anything [wrong]. Fine. It was only to understand what I could observe: this contiguity, this difficulty to plan and to imagine a future, which you can detect when working with Roma. This was a young lady who lived by selling cloths and having social benefits ... our attempt was to build for her a plan for getting work. It was like 'You came to Spain. Don't you have a daughter and don't you want something better for her than what you are doing now? This will happen only if you follow a process.' But she is a person who at first is very nice but then doesn't accept what you tell her.

This is a prominent example of how a mistrustful civil servant who entertains deep-seated stereotypes regarding Roma is blaming the victim for her distrustfulness of the system and its functionaries. Furthermore, measuring the capacity of people to integrate into the formal (waged) labor market reveals entrenched capitalist and patriarchal normalities that often result in the 'failure' of poor migrants. As noted earlier, gender dynamics render women the prime target group for social workers, as men often abandon their participation not least because they must work (mostly informally and for long hours) in order to meet the family's basic needs. Being employed in informal or semi-formal jobs, migrant men can benefit little from social programs that cannot offer them access to provisions. Importantly, having a formal job or a 'criminal record' prevent one from applying for social benefits. '[The social workers] tried to reach the men and bring them to talk. First men were coming too. But then they were not coming anymore' said Jena, an NGO social worker in Barcelona.

State authorities reaffirm and perpetuate the men's role as breadwinners and women's role as caregivers, while the social services push migrant women to obtain waged employment. This gender bias is institutionally perpetuated based on assessing vulnerable migrant women through programs aimed to correct a given situation but without considering the intersectional dimension of exclusion. A Roma migrant woman living in a slum in Madrid rhetorically asked:

Where should I go to look for work? Look at me, I'm 55, my husband is in prison, and I have nephews to take care of. Who's going to employ me? They [social services] should really look at people and give benefits to those who have no means for living.

Focusing on the integration of poor migrants to the waged labor market, the manager of the social services in Barcelona despondently explains the shortcomings of the current scheme:

When they work with scrap-metal I have the same problems as with all families for accession to the labor market. [They say] 'I can live from scrap-metal' thus the inclusion in the labor market is not so interesting for them. This is important because if you already can make a living, what can I offer you? A training that is not work in order to find work that I don't have, whereas you already have work.

Officials are thus left to enforce the rules of a lacking scheme whose shortcomings are evident to them as well as to potential clients. Civil servants clearly need to justify the imposition of rules of conduct on clients, as expressed by Jena:

You are coming to ask for help. It is not me who says you cannot do it. It is your decision as an adult person. But if you come here it is because you cannot make it with the money you earn.

For Darius, a municipality Counselor for social rights in Barcelona, Roma migrants do not relate to the idea of social protection, thus legitimizing special state interventions.

The social services have no obligation to finance special programs for excluded populations. Ensuring the basic needs is enough. But through these specific social programs (...) we have the intention to bring this population [Roma] in contact with social services, a population that does not feel beneficiary of social services, or that has no intention to be beneficiary of social services, largely because they do not consider it necessary because they already have another modality of subsistence that has nothing in common with social protection.

The social services consistently rationalize their intervention as providers of support and as superintendents of the lives of migrant women. While defending their interventionist approach, officials 'know' that poor migrants prefer not to ask for aid from social services than to suffer the consequences of their prescribed 'failure'.

An important way in which street-level agents explain their dealings with Roma has to do with their own sense of working under difficult condition to achieve the best for their clients. In Spain, institutions that are in charge of family policies often claim to be underfunded and professionally ill-prepared to deal with vulnerable subjects. Social workers regularly express frustration with the situation on the ground and vent bitter feelings of not being able to accomplish their job. Yet, rather than pointing the finger at the Spanish authorities, many street-level agents condemn Roma for not equally doing their best to make the system work. In this dynamic of getting frustrated by work for institutions but ending up blaming the victims, emotions play a major role (Anderson, 2014; Hochschild, 1979). Here, we spotlight how prevailing 'tiredness' among civil servants and in particular medical personnel underlines the anticipation of a 'failure' on the part of migrant Roma women. As one NGO social worker in Barcelona pointed out, there is a widespread mixture of exhaustion and mistrust in dealing with pregnant Roma women: 'I think that many civil servants are tired of spending resources [on Roma], that even when we reserve space for these people, they at best come for one visit and after ... well, in general there is no continuity'.

It is crucial to our argument that in formally categorizing Roma women and families as 'vulnerable', civil-society actors and state authorities clearly take stock of the intersection between, gender, ethnicity, and economic/social/cultural marginalization in society at large (Kóczé & Popa, 2009; Oprea, 2004). However, in practice, social workers seem to ignore intersectionality and instead they apply the mainstream normative standards to the evaluation of their clients. Evoking emotional challenges and fatigue, civil servants regularly abandon any special attention for the particular position of Roma women in their assessment.

From provision to control: instrumentalizing social services

In 2004, the Vincle Association⁵ was commissioned by the Catalan government to conduct research and to publish a report on the situation of Roma migrants in Catalonia.⁶ According to the Vincle Report (2006), Roma migrant children were portrayed as 'delinquents' and as being at risk of getting exploited by their own families (e.g. mothers with children begging in the street). Immediately after, the Catalan government launched a tender for running a special program to attend to Roma children at risk. Vincle won the tender and since 2008 it manages social interventions with Roma

migrant children under the supervision of the General Direction of Services for Child Protection (hereafter DGAIA), which has sub-units collaborating with the local social services and with the police unit for minors. Although having no Roma employees or specialized expertise on Roma, Vincle presents itself as an association that professionally manages programs for Roma migrants (both Gallego-Portuguese and, more recently, from Eastern Europe).

Vincle's program for managing Roma migrants is premised on the idea of a 'population trapped between criminality and [state] protection', as put by one social worker. These are mostly poor migrant families that may apply to social services, but, to secure their subsistence, may also resort to criminalized street gathering (Duneier & Carter, 1999). The right hand of the state (the police), together with the left hand of the state (represented here by DGAIA), commissioned Vincle to survey Roma migrant families and to evaluate the life conditions of children in particular. A team consisting of a social worker and an interpreter visit the families in their dwellings, offering special benefits while applying standards of evaluation for child well-being and family values. Emma's view, as social worker in Vincle, on interventions with Roma conveys the institutional concern with monitoring and controlling a suspected and criminalized population:

We entered this world from the families. We contacted many of them through Gendarmerie [*Mossos d'Esquadra*], through the office that deal with detainees, or in the Justice Court after they got released to their parents. The task was to go to the neighborhoods and enter into these families. Well, the idea was to create trust and to learn about their real life. To observe minors, teenagers in a family and then to decide to which needs we could respond, in order to fulfill our duty towards DGAIA. Eventually you realize that ... well ... what mostly concerns DGAIA is to guarantee a few minimal benefits for the minors.

The penetration into the intimate family sphere and its evaluation by Vincle serves as instructive information for DGAIA in subsequently deciding on the type of intervention. In fact, it was not uncommon for DGAIA to take Roma children into state custody based on Vincle evaluations (Vrăbiescu, 2016). Once the state withdraws the custody of the migrant parents, they are left with an abusive option: to see their children, the family should 'voluntarily' return to Romania. The parents should prove they have better living conditions in the country of origin (e.g. permanent dwelling) and commit to return 'home' (Kalir, 2017). The Spanish authorities then consent that the family can reunite and leave to Romania.

The twisted outcome of the control and assistance program induced by the child protection institution is that some parents, being poor migrants, would accept an abusive relationship of surveillance by social workers. Families that enter the child protection institution potentially receive more benefits from the state, but these benefits come with a stricter control by social workers who ask the parent/s to spell out the income and expenditures, to show commitment to find formal employment, to prove their care for children (supervising homework, bringing children to school, etc.). The motivation for some poor families to accept the stricter monitoring by DGAIA instead of the local social services is the bigger 'carrot' in the form of higher monetary rewards. As one NGO worker put it: 'Maybe they have more generous funds, who knows.'

The state repressive position becomes obvious when social workers prefer to act against minor women and mothers despite their pronounced vulnerability. In many of

the interviews conducted with social workers, the views of Roma migrant women included stereotypical verdicts about family structure and 'early marriage' and sexual relations. Discussing the case of what street-level agents called 'imprisoned daughters-in-law', social workers condemned the marriage of young women who live with the husband's family. Social workers emphasized 'early marriages' and 'parental responsibilities' among the difficulties encountered while helping Roma migrants to become successful integrated subjects.

In one case, a social worker at an NGO was called to the hospital to attest the paternity of a new-born child. The Roma family that was expecting a baby was known to the social workers. That was the reason the hospital notified the NGO once the woman arrived to deliver the baby. The personnel were suspicious about the father because he was white, thin, and younger than the mother, and his family name differed from the one on the mother's identity document. When the NGO social worker arrived at the hospital, the couple indeed admitted that another man was the biological father. They went on to explain that they were afraid that if the father 'looked like' Roma the child might be taken into state custody immediately after birth (as had happened to them before).

Another case of a 15-year-old mother who just gave birth at the hospital in Barcelona was analyzed during our interview with the emergency department's manager of DGAIA. That evening the hospital alerted DGAIA, which instantly revoked the custody of the new-born baby who was then taken away by the police. The authorities could have sheltered the mother together with her baby in a center for minor mothers but decided not to. The official told us that DGAIA had been informed by an NGO worker who suspected that the girl was part of a gang because she was seen together with other Roma who were known for robbery. The DGAIA official then added that although the mother had no criminal record, this was an 'obvious case', claiming that 'the girl has been obliged to marry a man in the gang in order to force her afterwards into robbery'. Eventually, a few weeks later the parents rescued the child from state custody and fled to Romania.

The abusive intervention in the life of migrant women, and especially minor mothers, force them to return to Romania in order to maintain the family unit intact. The state is actually inflicting violence on women, revoking the custody of their children, with no reasonable grounds and no protection offered. Thus, the outcome of state interventions that start with upholding the ideal of child protection and helping vulnerable women turns out, in practice, to be the reverse of what institutions claim. In the case of Roma migrants the adverse result leads to further marginalization, exclusion from state protection and provisions, and potential removal from Spain.

Conclusion

By offering state provisions and charitable assistance in the first place, civil servants and third-sector workers intervene in the lives of migrant Roma women under conditions of strict surveillance and control. These interventions are a double sword: on the one hand, they create dependency while attracting marginalized and impoverished migrants with serious incentives offered; on the other hand, they legitimize the surveillance and justify, in the eyes of state authorities, potential penalties. Roma migrant women are conditioned by their failure to keep struggling to integrate within schemes that de facto exclude, stigmatize and punish them.

An operative two-tier system is propelled by a neoliberal notion of individualization, measurement, assumed responsibility, and consequential 'gain or pain'. Roma families, and more specifically women, are individualized and assessed according to a normative yardstick that represents the values and expectations of care workers (often a proxy to 'mainstream' Spanish society). Thus, the category of vulnerability is negotiated, in practice, between the marginalized Roma women and social workers, who de facto do not address but reproduce multiple-discrimination. Street-level agents and social workers offer provisions and protection, and, at the same time, they control and regulate the lives of their subjects according to patriarchal norms and neoliberal standards. Within the assemblage of political decisions, bureaucratic practices, and the discretionary power of social workers, some basic rights are recurrently contested, turning vulnerable migrants into failed-integrated subjects. Poor Roma migrant women are surveyed and assessed, categorized as failed-integrated subjects, and then punished.

The cases we presented showed two modalities of gendered intervention on the part of state and civil-society actors in which women's labor in the household and child rearing is disregarded or under-valued and men's (and women's) informal jobs are condemned. Negotiations between state agents and marginalized migrants are dynamic but never take place in a balanced fashion given the disparity of power positions. The reproductive life and working activities of Roma migrants are continuously rendered suspect and stigmatized. The imbalanced power relation twists the outcome of social intervention; instead of alleviating marginalization, state authorities act with confidence against the most vulnerable people, among them poor migrant Roma women.

Notes

1. We use the term 'Roma migrants' to refer to the Spanish state's working category of 'Gitanos del este' (Eastern European Roma). Both these terms refer principally to Romanian Roma migrants.
2. We hereafter use the 'caring state' to refer both to Spanish authorities and to civil-society actors who engage 'vulnerable groups'. Not simply shorthand, this analytically meant to highlight that most NGOs and private companies providing care services in Spain are heavily, if not entirely, financed by the state. We thus underscore that the caring state has been NGOified and privatized.
3. See National Strategy for the Integration of Roma in Spain 2012–2020. Retrieved February 4, 2017, from http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/roma_spain_strategy_es.pdf.
4. See the case of Albiol, a politician running for office in Badalona, who was tried for xenophobic anti-Romanian and anti-Roma racial incitement (Cros, 2013).
5. Vinclé, first a private company, later functioned as an NGO bidding for projects with the Catalan government and the local authorities in Barcelona. Since 2014 Vinclé has completely converted in an NGO managing sub-contracted programs mostly addressing Roma migrants.
6. According to Pajares (2007), the Roma from Romania represent 5–8% of the total Romanian migration in Catalonia, which amounts to around 7–8000 people.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Can Yıldız and Nicholas de Genova for their helpful guidance and instructive notes during the preparation of this article. A special gratitude is extended to Prof. Colin Clark for his close reading of an earlier draft and the many wonderful suggestions and engaging comments he provided.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

This work was supported by the European Research Council [ERC-Starting grant number 336319].

References

- Abramovitz, M. (1996). *Regulating the lives of women: Social welfare policy from colonial times to the present*. Boston, MA: South End Press.
- Alber, E., & Drotbohm, H. (Eds.). (2015). *Anthropological perspectives on care: Work, kinship, and the life-course*. New York, NY: Springer.
- Alonso-Villar, O., & Del Río, C. (2008). *Occupational and industrial segregation of female and male workers in Spain: An alternative approach* (ECINEQ WP 2008-84). Society for the Study of Economic Inequality.
- Anderson, B. (2014). *Encountering affect: Capacities, apparatuses, conditions*. Surrey Ashgate.
- Brown, K. (2016). *Vulnerability and young people: Care and social control in policy and practice*. Bristol: University of Bristol, Policy Press.
- Carrasco, C., & Recio, A. (2001). Time, work and gender in Spain. *Time & Society*, 10(2–3), 277–301.
- Clark, C. (1999). Race, ethnicity and social security: The experience of gypsies and travellers in the United Kingdom. *Journal of Social Security Law*, 6(4), 186–202.
- Clark, C. (2008). Introduction themed section care or control? Gypsies, travellers and the state. *Social Policy and Society*, 7(1), 65–71.
- Cros, B. (2013, November 19). Xavier García Albiol será el primer alcalde juzgado por su discurso xenófobo. *El Diario*. Retrieved from http://www.eldiario.es/catalunya/Xavier-Garcia-Albiol-discurso-xenofobo_0_198080964.html
- De Genova, N. (2013). Spectacles of migrant 'illegality': The scene of exclusion, the obscene of inclusion. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 36(7), 1180–1198.
- Dominelli, L. (2002). *Feminist social work theory and practice*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Dominelli, L., & Hoogvelt, A. (1996). Globalization and the technocratization of social work. *Critical Social Policy*, 16(47), 45–62.
- Duneier, M., & Carter, O. (1999). *Sidewalk*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Ellis, K. (2011). 'Street-level bureaucracy' revisited: The changing face of frontline discretion in adult social care in England. *Social Policy & Administration*, 45(3), 221–244.
- Empez Vidal, N. (Ed.). (2014). *Dejadnos Crecer. Menores Migrantes Bajo Tutela Institucional* [Let us grow up. Minor migrants in state custody]. Barcelona: Virus Editorial.
- Evans, T., & Harris, J. (2004). Street-level bureaucracy, social work and the (exaggerated) death of discretion. *British Journal of Social Work*, 34(6), 871–895.
- Fassin, D. (2011). The trace: Violence, truth, and the politics of the body. *Social Research*, 78(2), 281–298.
- Fekete, L. (2014). Europe against the Roma. *Race & Class*, 55(3), 60–70.
- Fineman, A. M. (2010). The vulnerable subject and the responsive state. *Emory Law Journal*, 60(251), 1–41.
- FitzGerald, S. A. (2016). Vulnerable geographies: Human trafficking, immigration and border control in the UK and beyond. *Gender, Place & Culture*, 23(2), 181–197.
- Fook, J. (2016). *Social work: A critical approach to practice*. London: Sage.
- Gandhi, A. (2017). The sanctioning state: Official permissiveness and prohibition in India. *Focaal*, 77, 8–21.
- Garcés-Mascreñas, B. (2013). *Reconsidering the 'policy gap': Policy implementation and outcomes in Spain* (Working Paper Series 18). Barcelona: GRITIM UPF.
- Halberstam, J. (2011). *The queer art of failure*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Heaslip, V. (2015). *Experience of vulnerability from a gypsy/travelling perspective: A phenomenological study* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Bournemouth: Bournemouth University.

- Helms, E. (2013). *Invisible victims: An analysis of human trafficking vulnerability and prevention in Bulgarian Romani communities* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Denver: University of Denver.
- Hochschild, A. R. (1979). Emotion work, feeling rules, and social structure. *American Journal of Sociology*, 85, 551–575.
- Humphris, R. (2016). Borders of home: Roma migrant mothers negotiating boundaries in home encounters. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 43(7), 1190–1204.
- Jaggar, A. M. (2002). Vulnerable women and neo-liberal globalization: Debt burdens undermine women's health in the global south. *Theoretical Medicine and Bioethics*, 23(6), 425–440.
- Jovanović, J. (2015). *Vulnerability of Roma in policy discourse on combatting trafficking in human beings in Serbia: Perspectives of the national policy actors* (Working Papers Series, 2015/4). Budapest: Center for Policy Studies, CEU.
- Kalir, B. (2017). Between 'voluntary' return programs and soft deportation: Sending vulnerable migrants in Spain back 'home'. In Z. Vathi & R. King (Eds.), *Return migration and psychosocial well-being* (pp. 56–71). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Kalir, B., & Wissink, L. (2016). The deportation continuum: Convergences between state agents and NGO workers in the Dutch deportation field. *Citizenship Studies*, 20(1), 34–49.
- Kóczé, A., & Popa, R. M. (2009). *Missing intersectionality. Race/ethnicity, gender, and class in current research and policies on Romani women in Europe*. Budapest: Central European University.
- Lago Ávila, M. J. (2014). El otro Madrid: El chabolismo que no cesa. Actuación autonómica en políticas de realojamiento e integración social 1997–2010. *Estudios Geográficos*, 75(276), 219–260.
- Lavalette, M., & Penketh, L. (Eds.). (2014). *Race, racism and social work: Contemporary issues and debates*. Bristol: Policy Press.
- Lipsky, M. (1980). *Street-level bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the individual in public services*. New York, NY: Russel Sage Foundation.
- Mackenzie, C., Rogers, W., & Dodds, S. (Eds.). (2014). *Vulnerability: New essays in ethics and feminist philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Oprea, A. (2004). Re-envisioning social justice from the ground up: Including the experiences of Romani women. *Essex Human Rights Review*, 1(1), 29–39.
- Pajares, M. (2007). *Inmigrantes del Este: Procesos migratorios de los Rumanos* [Eastern migrants: Migration process of Romanians]. Barcelona: Icaria editorial.
- Paulle, B., & Kalir, B. (2014). The integration matrix reloaded: From ethnic fixations to established versus outsiders dynamics in the Netherlands. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 40(9), 1354–1374.
- Prendergast, C. (2007). The motivation and bias of bureaucrats. *The American Economic Review*, 97(1), 180–196.
- Rogozen-Soltar, M. H. (2012). Ambivalent inclusion: Anti-racism and racist gatekeeping in Andalusia's immigrant NGOs. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 18(3), 633–651.
- Surdu, M. (2015). *Those who count: Expert practices of Roma classification*. Budapest: CEU Press.
- Tyler, I. (2013). *Revolting subjects: Social abjection and resistance in neoliberal Britain*. London: Zed Books.
- Vallhonrat, X. C., Casasayas Garbí, Ò, Muñoz Romero, F., Diaz Giner, P., Diaz Molinaro, M., Tatjer Mir, M., & Larrea Killinger, C. (2015). Shantytowns in the city of Barcelona: Can Valero, La Perona and El Carmel. *Revista D'etnologia de Catalunya*, 40, 18–28.
- Vermeersch, P. (2012). Reframing the Roma: EU initiatives and the politics of reinterpretation. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 38(8), 1195–1212.
- Vincle Report. (2006). *Gitanos procedents de l'Europa de l'Est a Catalunya. Informe encarregat i elaborat per l'associació Vincle por el Departament de Benestar i Família* [Roma coming from Eastern Europe to Catalonia. Report commissioned and written by Vincle Association for the Department of Welfare and Family]. Catalunya: Generalitat de Catalunya, Departament de Benestar i Família.
- Vrăbiescu, I. (2016). Roma migrant children in Catalonia: Between the politics of benevolence and the normalization of violence. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*. doi:10.1080/01419870.2016.1229491
- Wacquant, L. (2009). *Punishing the poor: The neoliberal government of social insecurity*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Yuval-Davis, N. (2006). Intersectionality and feminist politics. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 13(3), 193–209.