

Anna Möllers,
Dirk Schuck,
Bernhard Kleeberg
(eds.)

Nomad Properties

Political
Anthropologies
of Nomadism from
the 18th Century
until Today



STRUKTURWANDEL
DES EIGENTUMS

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Nomad Properties

Structural Change of Property

Edited by Silke van Dyk, Tilman Reitz and Hartmut Rosa

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Introduction

Bernhard Kleeberg, Anna Möllers & Dirk Schuck

This volume is the result of a conference on *Nomad Properties: Political Anthropologies from the 18th Century until Today*, held in Erfurt in the summer of 2022.¹ It brings together different perspectives on nomadism/nomadic societies and the relation of nomadism to property. The volume combines scientific articles on this topic with perceptions and insights from representatives of various nomadic groups who spoke at the opening event of the conference, the *Erfurter Forum Asphaltnomad:innen* (*Erfurt Forum for Asphalt Nomads*). Here, activists and actors in the field of the politics of nomads/nomadism in Germany were given a platform to express their views. The purpose of this Forum was to switch and possibly merge perspectives on nomadism between those living as nomads in Germany today and scholars working on the past and present of nomadism in a wide range of academic and cultural contexts. The Forum was intended to challenge our academic habits of mind and situate our knowledges. Though we did not actually achieve this goal—if only because we used German at the Forum and English at the conference—it did help us sharpen our view of the history of the practice and concept of nomadism as discussed today. So, while this volume follows the usual pattern of conference proceedings and presents articles on nomadism and its construction throughout history, it also includes contributions from the opening event as well both in German and in English translations. One contribution is an artistic one: the filmmaker Anna Maria Friedrich, who curated and recorded the opening event for her documentary *The Vagabond's Garden* (2024), ponders the romanticism that still lies behind some nomadic lifestyles today.² The historical emergence of this roman-

1 The editors of this volume would like to thank Lorenz Hartung for his valuable assistance in editing the manuscript. We would also like to thank the artist Ricaletto for his kind permission to use the poster of the opening event, see the section *Stories* in this volume.

2 The German title of *The Vagabond's Garden* is *Lichter der Straße*, and it premiered at the DOK in Leipzig in October 2024. The film is available from the film production company *Rosen Pictures*. <https://www.rosenpictures.com/Projekte/Lichter-der-Straße>. We would like to thank Anna Maria Friedrich for curating the opening event.

ticized image of nomadism is one of many topics the scientific contributions to this volume touch on.

The Concept of Nomadism and its Paradoxical History

In the ancient narrative of the emergence of civilization, nomadism serves as a negative mirror of agricultural sedentariness. The juxtaposition of the farmer and the nomad can already be found in the Bible. Genesis 3:19 reads: “By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.”³

This narrative still structures early modern discourses on the emergence of civilization. The political anthropology of the nomad holds that, unlike the farmer who plans ahead and lives a well-ordered, disciplined life, the nomad is not tied to land but is mobile. This affects his habits and his moral constitution: he is unsteady and improvident since he only follows his needs and appetites. The farmer obeys the natural cycle of self-discipline, cultivates his land, enabling him to prosper, and thus furthers civilization, while all the nomad does is just consume the fruits of the earth without investing any labor. It is not surprising that the juxtaposition of the nomad and the settler was fundamental for narratives of colonial appropriation because such juxtaposition helped legitimize the seizing of land and the spread of colonial rule.⁴ It was specifically powerful in the 18th and 19th centuries, when the concept of the nomad appeared in comparisons of contemporary “primitive” peoples like the Iroquois of North America with the original state of humankind, and the development of habits in relation to landed property. One example of this can be found in the *Customs of the American Indians Compared with the Customs of Primitive Times* (1724) by the French Jesuit missionary Joseph François Lafitau. Fifty years later, in his *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1784–1791) the philosopher of the Prussian Enlightenment, Johann Gottfried Herder, weighed the advantages and disadvantages of nomadic independence against the civilizing force of humankind’s second nature—the habits of the settler/farmer.⁵ By the early 19th century, the conviction that property and sedentariness were inextricably linked to the development of good habits and a prereq-

3 Praising self-disciplined, hard physical field work is not exclusive to Christianity. Shennong, the Farmer God of ancient China who was the first to make a plough from wood and taught the black-haired people how to use it, is just one example.

4 Cf. Ballantyne–Antoinette Burton 2009; Nettelbeck 2018.

5 Lafitau 1724 ; Herder 1965, 307–310. Cf. Kleeberg 2012a, 23 f.

uisite for social integration seems to have been firmly established.⁶ It was closely linked to the emergence of the disciplines of sociology, social psychology, and ethnology and referred to analytical concepts such as the “psychic habitus.”⁷ In this view, “the nomad” was still seen as primitive, childish, unstable, and unreliable until the late 20th century and sometimes even atpresent—whether as a subject in the colonies, a member of the lower classes, or as a migrant.

Given the notion of the nomad as an ill-founded construction of the colonial past, the basis for a sustained contemporary reassessment of the concept of nomadism must be a critical approach to European colonial history. Accordingly, the complex and important nexus of mobility and colonial rule has been an emerging subject in colonial history in recent years, acknowledging the many different indigenous communities that have been evicted from their lands or killed by colonizers. Postcolonial Studies was able to refer to a discourse that offered an alternate, positive understanding of the nomad: following the critique in the 1960s and 1970s of science and capitalism, “nomadic thinking” became a positive example for opposing political, economic, and scientific hegemonies. Precisely because the nomad had been regarded as an antithetical other, the notion of the nomad was used as a counter-concept to deconstruct existing ideas of the social and of civil society. In 1980, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari constructed a new framework for nomadism. Focusing on the production of space produced by settled and nomadic communities, they differentiated between settled communities that generated a “striated” space on the one hand which consisted of clear borders, fixed places, and movement between some spaces and nomadic communities on the other that produced a “smooth” flowing space without any definitive markings or borders and that remained open for a variety of different movements. Thus, it was not the striving for property/territory that nomadic practices exemplified but freedom of action and movement, communication, and a way of life—such practices were no longer regarded as deficient in comparison to sedentary life.⁸ On the contrary—Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the rhizome was an attempt to rethink the nomadic as an emancipatory principle by moving from a merely linear idea of progress to the paradigm of a structural pattern capable of stimulating alternative ways of thinking. This impulse has been taken up, for example, in designing new epistemologies that break with established standard ways of thinking, especially hegemonic ideas of the global North. Such new epistemologies can

6 Nomadism in particular thus had to be controlled, cf. Brantlinger–Ulin 1993.

7 Elias 1988. Cf. Kleeberg 2011; Kleeberg 2012b; B. Kleeberg 2015.

8 Deleuze–Guattari 1980; English translation: Deleuze–Guattari 1987. Cf. Somers–Hall 2018, 242–259; Holland 2006.

be found in the “nomadic concepts” of the historian of science Isabelle Stengers or the “nomadic subject” of feminist theorist Rosi Braidotti.⁹

Against the background of a neoliberal, (post-)industrial growth society, however, which has privatized the whole of nature and society, the nonconformism and flexibility of thought and action called for in this postmodern framework has been appropriated as a virtue of new forms of a global nomadism that is both precarious and privileged: workers and managers alike lead the life of the migrant as “the political figure of our time.”¹⁰ Today, nomadism appears to be a contemporary form of life that characterizes a growing number of people. These people can be poor or rich, they might identify themselves as nomads or prefer not to. From travelling day laborers to war refugees, to scholars, to a global managerial class, nomadic forms of life seem to be on the rise again. They can be voluntary or forced, temporal or permanent. But although nomadic/migrant thinking remains a point of reference for the formation of emancipatory theory within this heterogeneous field, the call for a return to a subsistence economy has spurred the reappearance of the negative figure of the nomad, often as *rancune* (resentment) of the forced sedentary in favor of mobility in the sense described by Adorno.¹¹ Deleuze’s and Guattari’s concept was criticized from a different angle as well. As Tim Cresswell argues, the nomad of the twentieth century—i.e., the mobile scholar or the global traveler sitting at airport terminals and waiting for his or her next flight—has been overgeneralized and deterritorialized. Deleuze’s and Guattari’s nomad “is a remarkably unsocial being—unmarked by the traces of class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality and geography.”¹² Cresswell thus questions and ultimately refutes the overall emancipatory potential of nomadism, the cultural buzzword of a globalized world.

Against this background, this volume aims to take up the critical discussion of the figure of the nomad and to present research on historical topics and perspectives related to recent developments in political, anthropological, and social theory. Especially with regard to the development of the European community,

9 Stengers 1987; Braidotti 2011a; Braidotti 2011b; Braidotti 2010; Oliver Christin 2010. On “nomadic” and similar concepts, cf. Surman–Stráner–Haslinger 2014.

10 Cf. Nail 2015. For a positive account of the flexibility of the nomad thanks to the laptop around the year 2000, see Holmes.

11 Adorno 2018, 445. On this, see in particular Belina 2022. Negative accounts of the nomad can be found in all political camps, although the New/Alt Right in particular has revived the (anti-Semitic) idea of the cosmopolitical nomad who lacks any relation to her home soil. Cf. Passeick 2023; cf. Langer 2021. A more positive image of nomads who “wander between the metropolises, economic and cultural centers of the world and who decide where they can find the best job offer, the most attractive working environment and—almost always—the most attractive living environment” can be found, for instance, in Dahm–Scherhorn 2021, 133.

12 Cresswell 1997, 377.

the concept of nomadism at times served to invisibilize vast social inequalities between (alleged) “nomads.”¹³ However, we can also see other, emancipatory strands in the conceptualization of nomadism, which we refer to in this volume. As Łukasz Moll, one of our contributors, has shown in a recent article, Deleuze and Guattari’s critical effort was tied to a reconstruction of a nomadic *nomos* in a contrast to the classic ancient idea of *nomos* as a territorialized rule of sedentary societies. Moll uses the idea of a nomadic *nomos* as a conceptual tool to shed new light on current migration flows within the European Union and the efforts to control them as a political entity.¹⁴ In this respect, nomadism is closely related to the idea of the commons. Another emancipatory understanding of nomadism allows us to question the Enlightenment narrative of visibility as a token of progress and emancipation: While the Enlightenment takes the classic view and understands the visibility of (social) groups as the first step towards their political and social recognition, nomadic groups may want to escape this “panopticism,” as Michel Foucault has called it in *Discipline and Punish*,¹⁵ in order to evade state control and to protect their way of life. This has been the case since the earliest forms of state control, as anthropologist James C. Scott has shown.¹⁶ This also relates to an issue of historical methodology: if strategies to evade this visibility were successful, it can be assumed that they left few traces and that there are therefore few records of these nomadic communities.

Nomadism and Property

The main purpose of this volume is to explore the nexus of nomadism, habits, and property. Right up to the present, nomadic forms of life are still often characterized by a different appreciation of infrastructure and property/possession, as well as a different perception of time. As expressed by several activists present at our opening *Forum Asphaltnomad:innen*, a comparatively simple way of life can be regarded as luxury since it allows for a different and more conscious way of dealing with time and with essential goods. The mobility of a nomadic way of life can also be accorded the potential of breaking through reified patterns of thought

13 For further criticism of this use of the figure of the nomad, see, e.g., Lipphardt 2015.

14 Moll 2023.

15 Foucault 1977, 195–228. On these aspects, cf. the contributions by Sina Steglich and Bernhard Kleeberg in this volume.

16 Scott 2017. Critical anthropologists like Scott have also questioned the narrative of domestication, agrarian revolution, sedentarism, and civilization on the basis of early historical and anthropological literature.

and behavior. The pejorative understanding of nomads as indolent and impulse-driven is then countered by the possibility to gain new and other experiences that help reshape habits. In respect to patterns of thought about property, for instance, nomadic lifestyles might help redetermine the distinction between property and possession: the distinction often seems unnecessary, as essential goods serve a specific use and are often understood more as common possessions than as the personal property of one specific member of a community.

This runs counter to the classic bourgeois nexus of the acquisition of property as an alleged basis for individual character development, and its corresponding appropriation of virtue—the core argument of the concept of *possessive individualism*. For example, Anna Möllers uses the example of the 19th-century *Aboriginal Protection Society* in her paper to show how the initial reduction of nomadic lifestyles to the impulsive leads to a paternalistic demand for resocialization and rehabitualization. In accordance with the colonial narrative described above, the “nomad” is shaped in the struggle for land ownership and serves to delegitimize legal claims. Since the early modern understanding of landed property as a derivation from the agrarian cultivation of land and soil largely prevailed in natural law and legal theories, nomadic ways of life suffered from the alleged deficiency of their non-sedentariness, which made them incapable of claiming land ownership in the eyes of early modern natural law theory. The issue of landed property is still central to the expropriation of mobile communities today since they move between different areas and accordingly understand land as something to make use of and not something that can be privately owned to exclude others from its use.

The Structure of this Volume

With this volume, we want to elaborate on different conceptions of the figure of the nomad to further our knowledge of how this figure is being used for various political reasons in various historical settings. The articles are grouped into three sections dealing with different aspects of the relation between nomadism and property: (1) identities, (2) scientific appropriations, and (3) histories. The fourth section—(4) stories—adds three contributions that relate to the opening event and thus to our current understandings of the relation between nomadism and private and landed property. The last three contributions are not of a scientific nature but present the views of people living nomadic lifestyles in contemporary Germany.

Identities

The first group of papers deal with nomadism and identities. Several groups were and still are identified with their mobility, thus leading to an often one-dimensional and romanticized idea of nomadism or even to racism and eviction. Elena Marushiakova and Veselin Popov present a social history of changes in the lifestyles of the Roma in Central, Southeastern, and Eastern Europe since the 15th century. They describe the National Socialist persecution of the Roma and focus on the transformation of state projects aimed at integrating the Roma into society. Against this background, the strategy of the Roma themselves to achieve greater social recognition and social visibility through political recognition as a minority represents a new historical development. Marushiakova and Popov make clear that academia has defined and still defines the Roma primarily by their nomadic way of life, even though there have always been groups of Roma who—in addition to those living in forced settlements—have traditionally lived and continue to live sedentary lives. The connection between sedentary and nomadic subsistence in the Roma way of life is therefore a key focus of this contribution.

Chechesh Kudachinova discusses the Altai Republic in Siberia, which is one of the poorest regions in Russia. This region has, however, been romanticized and virtually colonized by tourists because of its unspoiled nature. In her contribution, Kudachinova addresses the overemphasis on the spatial mobility of the stereotypical nomad and argues against a one-dimensional and romantic representation of nomadism, which often leaves out the social realities of the groups concerned. She focuses on different nomadic groups of the Altai region who were forced to adopt a sedentary existence during the Soviet period and are now returning to a nomadic way of life for various economic reasons. By recapitulating the history of nomadic groups in the Altai region from this perspective, Kudachinova also argues that nomadic and sedentary forms of subsistence are often shaped not only by economic pressures but primarily by colonial power structures.

Łukasz Moll introduces a new perspective on the nomadic in connection with the discourse on common goods and the question of the commons. He emphasizes that both approaches seem to contradict each other. The demand for a clear demarcation of common goods is particularly prominent in the critical mainstream of the debate on common goods in Elinor Ostrom and David Harvey. According to this line of argument, what is removed from private economic access as common property should be clearly defined. This reflects a justified criticism of the neoliberal apotheosis of fluidity and mobility, which can serve corporate appropriation in the area of digital commons, for example. Also, as a hegemonic idea of a globalized world without borders, this notion disregards

the precarious status and legal character of non-profit networks. Moll attributes this discursive mixture to a simplistic juxtaposition of a fixed political order and a mobile and subversive nomadological principle. In line with this notion, permanent property is opposed to free wandering, either as a nomadological counterimage or as an ideal. Moll argues, however, that this opposition has been exhausted, which is why he advocates a nomadological opening of the commons. We need to imagine a nomadological *nomos* that operates between stability and mobility. An alternative idea to the nomadic as free wandering would be the idea of social relationships in motion, and, instead of identifying the nomadic as anarchic, we could think of a vibrant democratic law that constantly arises from communal life. The emancipatory vanishing point of nomadological thinking today is not simply a new variant of the cosmopolitan world citizen but rather all those who want to enable shared access to common goods through their actions. This identity can take many forms—but it is crucial to actively pursue this goal.

Scientific Appropriations

The second part of this volume deals with the different historical appropriations of the concept of nomadism in academic contexts in particular. In her article “Into the Woods: Fleeing Urban Modernity, Celebrating Nomadic Lives, Redefining the Social in Interwar Europe,” Sina Steglich focuses on the journal *The Nomad*, the first issue of which was released in June 1923. Published by a group of people who called themselves the *Kindred of the Kibbo Kift*, this journal chose the figure of the nomad as its ideal. Asking about the reasons for constructing an idealized figure of the nomad as a romantic depiction of the flight from modern life, Steglich elaborates on the opposition between modern society and nomadism in interwar Europe. She asks about the origin and goals of the *Kindred of the Kibbo Kift* and how they used the concept of the nomad to disclose the nature of modern British society.

Coretta Ehrenfeld addresses the link between nomadism and transnationalism and, using two case studies, explains how the system of migrants living transnationally could be interpreted as a modern way of leading a nomadic life. Emphasizing how individuals who live transnationally perceive multiple geographical points as “home” and are simultaneously settled and build social networks in these places, she challenges the dualistic concept of nomadism versus sedentariness that often persists even in modern research. Furthermore, she explores forms of modern mobility and transnational identities, and the simultaneous devaluation of these ways of life in modern sociological theories, some

of which go back to Deleuze and Guattari's distinction between the "smooth" and the "striated" space.

As the last contributor to this section, Marco Schröder explores the relation of nomadism, Marxist theory and anthropology. He approaches the construct of property from the perspective of a theory of commodity that is based on a value-theoretical understanding of the term. To understand how property regimes shape society and how commodity-based structures shape social life, he draws on ethnographical examples about nomadic societies. With this approach, he challenges the anthropological logic of the 18th and 19th centuries, which was often based on a dichotomy between progressive and fixed societies versus primitive and mobile societies.

Histories

The third section deals with different anthropological theories constructed in the 18th and 19th centuries that used the framework of nomadism to discuss ideas about civilization and modernity. Dirk Schuck compares the social evolutionary theory of Adam Smith with that of the late American anthropologist and political scientist James C. Scott. Schuck argues that, remarkably, the difference between the 18th-century political economist and the contemporary anarchist anthropologist does not lie primarily in their understandings of the chronology of factual events in the economic and political history of human societies but in their different normative assessments of it.

In her contribution, Anna Möllers elaborates on how the figure of the nomad was constructed in anthropological theories of the early 19th century. She further deepens the modern discourse of the "wandering savage" by showing how the initial reduction of nomadic lifestyles to the impulsive is paternalistically followed by the demand for resocialization and rehabitualization. To show that the modern pejorative image of the nomad is thus shaped by colonialism in the struggle for ownership and serves to delegitimize nomadic lifestyles, Möllers focuses on three different sources of the early 19th-century view, all of which present their own specific image of the nomad: James Cowles Prichard's *Researches into the Physical History of Man* from 1813, Robert Malthus' famous *Essay on the Principle of Population*, and finally a small selection of texts from the *Aborigines Protection Society*—a society that emerged in the 1840s and was related to the philanthropic and abolitionist movements.

Bernhard Kleeberg takes up this discussion and explores the portrayal of urban nomads in Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor*. To document

and interpret the moral and physiological dimensions of the urban poor, Mayhew merged journalism and ethnography into a hybrid form of early sociology that combined vivid narrative reports with statistical methods, the use of daguerreotypes, cartography, and interviews. Drawing on race theory, colonial anthropology, and a Malthusian theology of sin, he classified the “London street-folk,” from costermongers to the destitute poor, as liminal figures between savagery and civilization. As “wandering tribes,” they led a restless life of “roving” around, and were indolent unless compelled by the necessity of immediate needs. Hence, they were morally unsettled, improvident, and incapable of self-discipline. This view justified efforts to discipline and “civilize” the nomads of the big city through resettlement and integration into structured social spaces. While reinforcing bourgeois Victorian ideals of order and self-control, however, Mayhew simultaneously gave a voice to those on the margins through interviews and firsthand observation.

Early German sociology discussed nomad properties not in relation to a stage of civilization but as an eternal characteristic of “the Jews” as “the wandering tribe.” In his article, Dekel Peretz focuses on Franz Oppenheimer and Werner Sombart’s debate on the relation between nomadism and Judaism. It is striking that the Jews are seen here as archetypical nomads. Sombart identifies the figure of the Jewish nomad with the desert and contrasts this with the rooted Germanic peoples, whom he identifies with the forest. He regards the Jewish spirit as the epitome of modernity, endowed with the power of cultural uprooting, abstract thinking, and the genesis of the money-driven economy. Oppenheimer attempts to break through this philosemitic essentialization by relativizing Sombart’s thesis historically. Both move within the field of tension of the specifically German sociological distinction, coined by Ferdinand Tönnies, between “community” (*Gemeinschaft*) and “society” (*Gesellschaft*), the first of which refers to the communitarian and concrete personal relations, while the latter denotes a social order based on contractual relationships and therefore remains abstract. Even though Sombart’s reference to the revolutionary force of the nomadic Jew remains ambiguous in its evaluation, Oppenheimer nevertheless anticipates its anti-Semitic turn that regards the Jewish nomad as a “dangerous anomaly.” Ultimately, Oppenheimer’s criticism aims to attribute a positive emancipatory potential to the spirit of trade allegedly incorporated by the Jews, which could be observed in their developed awareness of the cooperative possibilities of an extended social division of labor. This is what Hegel already described in his early essays as a “tremendous system of communality”¹⁷ in modern society.

17 “[E]in ungeheures System der Gemeinschaftlichkeit” in the German original (Jenaer Schriften Bd. 1, 230). Cf. Menke 1991, 503.

Stories

The last three contributions by filmmaker Anna Friedrich and activists Melle Mendikowski, Birte Lampart, and Jakob Kronenwetter, present personal perspectives on the mobile life. By incorporating contributions from people who lead a nomadic or mobile life in Germany, we want to broaden our view of the topic and emphasize the fact that there are still many repressive mechanisms in operation today.

The market trader Jakob Kronenwetter writes about the history of the Yenish minority in Germany. Kronenwetter has fought for the legal recognition of the Yenish people as a registered minority in Germany for decades. He explains the historical role of the Yenish as bearers of news up until the 19th century and discusses the business ethics of the traveling market trader: market traders could return to a place only if they were welcome, i.e., if the customers were satisfied with the previous year's goods. The Yenish thus became visible as a specific social group, characterized on the one hand by a particular trading spirit and on the other as conveyers of sociopolitical emancipation since they traveled through many regions and countries and constantly spread knowledge about different cultures and ways of life.

Melle Mendikowski and Birte Lampart describe the lifestyle of conserving resources at the Leipzig trailer park commune *KarlHelga, Inc.* Their contribution deals with the specific cultural and political role the commune plays in Leipzig's city life in creating free spaces for residents and neighbors alike. These are being used for activities like subsistence farming or the recycling of old materials in buildings. They discuss the questionable role of the city administration, which arranged for the property to be sold to a group of investors over the heads of a commune that has existed for two decades. Mendikowski and Lampart highlight that the resource-conserving character of special construction methods can only be maintained to a limited extent against the requirements of building authorities.

Our volume closes with a poem about living a mobile life written by the curator of our opening event, film maker Anna Friedrich, presenting her own personal perspective on nomadism in Germany today.

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Identities

Service Nomadism and the Transition to Modernity of Roma in Central, South-Eastern, and Eastern Europe¹

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Introduction

The subject of our scholarly interest are Roma (formerly known as Gypsies), whose specific type of nomadism has been of interest to scholars and the general public for more than 100 years. In this chapter, we will not discuss the theory behind different types of nomadism and their characteristics, which has already been done excellently by other scholars, too numerous to be cited. Because of the specificity of our topic, we employ the notion of service nomadism here: Introduced by Robert Hayden, it can be understood as a mobile way of life based on supplying goods and services to villagers and townspeople. One of the key features of service nomadism is the constant intertwining between nomadic and a settled ways of life and the dependence of nomads on resources created by the settled population. To maintain their existence, the Roma communities of service nomads change locations; thus, the access to and availability of resources become determining factors in a group's mobility and in the scale and directions of their travel.² The classical mobility of service nomads is expressed through continuous cyclical wandering, usually in familial groupings, on the lookout for economic niches where it is possible to pursue servicing occupations.

One extremely important aspect that must always be considered when talking about Gypsy/Roma nomadism, is that, from the beginning of academic research on Roma, their nomadic way of life has been presented as their most essential feature. Some authors suggest that the uniqueness of Gypsy/Roma is related to their status as 'eternal nomads' and their lack of a relationship with the land, both in a spiritual and an economic sense.³ One can often read that Roma are "un people

1 The article results from VEGA project No. 2/OO57/24 *Identity of Roma in Transcarpathia: Past and Present*, carried out by the Institute of Ethnology and Social Anthropology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences in Bratislava.

2 Hayden 1979, 297–309.

3 Bíró 2013, 11–40.

sans patrie,”⁴ or “citizens of the world and nowhere,”⁵ or, as has become especially popular in recent years in the spirit of James Scott, as a people who master “the art of not being governed,”⁶ i.e. people who stand (or at least try to stand) outside society, as carefree wanderers, not subject to any rules. In fact, none of this corresponds to existing realities, at least for Roma in the regions of Central, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe. As deep and fact-based research has shown, their homelands, for centuries, have been the countries where they live, and they search for the best way to “be governed” as equal citizens and even participate in such governing.⁷ Even the romantic myth about the lack of rules among nomads has long been disproven by in-depth ethnographic studies of the strict norms in their communities, including the existence of a Gypsy court used to punish those who break the rules.⁸ Along with this, the existence of settled communities has been almost entirely ignored or explained as a direct result of coercive measures by authorities aimed at their sedentarization. However, as we will explain, the relationship between Roma’s nomadic and sedentary life is much more complicated and ambiguous and changing over time.

In this chapter, we present a general picture of Roma service nomadism in Central, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe as it existed and functioned from their arrival in Europe in the Middle Ages to the present day. We employ historical sources and data from our ethnographic research, conducted over almost 40 years. The point of departure of our analysis is the fact that, over the course of their history, Roma were never an outcast social phenomenon or a hermetically isolated and self-sufficient social and cultural system. They have always existed simultaneously in at least two dimensions.⁹ This fundamental principle is based on the ‘community-society’ juxtaposition which is used here with altered content cleared of its evolutionary hierarchy.¹⁰ In our understanding, it concerns the relations between two simultaneously existing typological phenomena intertwined in one inseparable unity. In our case, ‘community’ refers to the Roma as an ethnic formation that is clearly distinguished from its surrounding population, and ‘society’ refers to the Roma as an ethnically based integral part of the respective nation-states in which they are live, and whose citizens they are, and which may be defined, in short, as ‘ethnicity’ and ‘civic nationality’ respectively.

4 Stewart 1991, 39–52.

5 Acton–Gheorghe 2001, 54–70.

6 James Scott 2009.

7 Marushiakova–Popov 2021.

8 Marushiakova–Popov 2007, 67–101.

9 Marushiakova–Popov 2016, 15.

10 T önnies 1887.

From this point of view, it becomes clear why the presentation of Roma nomadism must always be placed in its relevant historical (and contemporary) context. In our case, this means that the analysis of this social phenomenon in Central, South-Eastern, and Eastern Europe should be carried out in the different historical eras, namely in four main periods: during the Middle Ages and the Enlightenment, within the framework of the three great empires (the Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian and Russian) ruling over this region until World War I; in the modern era, beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century under the three great empires and continuing after World War I within newly independent nation-states; under the communist regimes established in the region after the end of World War II; and finally, today, after the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Socialist Bloc, as these countries integrated into the European Union.

Roma Nomads in the Middle Ages and the Enlightenment

When discussing the arrival of the ancestors of today's Roma in Europe, historians begin in the early fifteenth century, when the so-called Gypsies entered Western Europe, usually omitting their earlier settlement in the Balkans. Without going into detail, we can note that Byzantine sources already made mention of the name "Atsinganoi" (originally denoting a heretical sect), which began to be used to refer to the ancestors of today's Roma from the eleventh century onwards;¹¹ certain authors even connect the Atsinganoi who settled in Thrace in the ninth century with Roma. From the Byzantine sources, it is unclear whether Roma led a nomadic or sedentary lifestyle at that time. Still, in the sources relating to the Venetian possessions in the Balkans, both nomadic and sedentary ways of life are clearly visible. In a well-known fourteenth-century description of the island of Crete, for example, the nomads are mentioned as "descendants of Ham" who live in tents and do not stay in one place for more than thirty days. Other descriptions from that time point to sedentary Roma; for example, in huts near the fortress of Modon (now Methoni in Greece), who were engaged in blacksmithing and enjoyed certain tax benefits. Moreover, it is known that a special "feudum acingano-runum" had been established on the island of Corfu, where the people were sedentary and occupied by blacksmithing and agriculture under the leadership of their own "baron" (which indicates a certain degree of internal self-government).¹²

¹¹ Soulis 1961, 142–65.

¹² Kenrick 2004; Gilsenbach 1994, Rochow 1983, 163–178; Rochow–Matschke 1991, 241–254.

In the Ottoman Empire, from the fourteenth century onwards,¹³ Roma in the Balkans (called Kıpti, i.e. Copts, meaning Egyptians, and Çingene) already had an established social position. Contrary to popular belief, unlike their counterparts in Western Europe, the Roma there did not live “on the edge of society,” nor even on its lowest rungs; moreover, some of them (Muslim Roma) had a higher social status than the conquered local population (at least in theory, and often in practice), compared to whom they enjoyed a number of tax preferences. And as surprising as it may sound, the Roma living settled in the Ottoman Empire have always dominated the nomads. Already in 1430, in the Ottoman tax register of the Nikopol Sandzhak (Sandzhak or sancak is a territorial-administrative unit), 3.5 percent of households registered were Roma living in different villages as farmers.

Indeed, Roma are mentioned in many tax registers. The most complete was the specialized register of Roma living in the province of Rumeli (covering almost the entire Balkan peninsula) from 1522 to 1523: The so-called jamaats, comprising several families, are almost all settled Roma, and only eleven jamaats were defined as nomads. Among the registered occupations, in addition to musician (the most common), there were also several dozen other professions, most of them clearly suggesting a sedentary lifestyle. From the description, it is also clear that Roma in the Ottoman Empire (in contrast to Western Europe) were an ethnic category that was not defined by their way of life (sedentary or nomadic). Such a ratio between settled and nomadic Roma, with the former predominating, was constant throughout the Ottoman Empire and in the newly established newly independent states (Serbia, Greece, Bulgaria) in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; only its exact parameters changed. Of course, more accurate numbers on this subject are impossible to gather because the available demographic data are often fragmentary and unreliable.

It is certain, however, that the settled Roma lived in the cities and villages of the Empire. In the cities, they subsisted not only on various types of unskilled labor but also engaged in their occupations and even established their own ethnically separated professional guilds (so-called *esnafs*)¹⁴—something that was impossible in Central and Western Europe. The first such Roma guilds were registered in the seventeenth century in Istanbul; they gradually expanded their reach and flourished in the nineteenth century, as many Roma founded guilds in cities in the Balkans, with their own inner life, annual holidays and flags. There were also settled Roma in the villages, where they made their living from agricultural work; the first village inhabited entirely by Roma was registered in the fifteenth century

13 For a concise history of Roma in the Ottoman Empire, see Marushiakova–Popov 2001.

14 See Marushiakova–Popov 2016, 76–89.

near Sofia; in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, European travelers passing through the Ottoman Empire noted entire villages inhabited only by settled Roma.¹⁵ Obviously, in the Empire, they were also nomads, who were also included in the administrative and tax registers—initially taxed within separate tax units (*jamaats*)—and after the seventeenth century, with the introduction of the capital tax, as taxable heads of families. In the Ottoman Empire, a nomadic way of life was not prohibited; there was only a mandatory requirement for all subjects of the Empire to have a place of residence for the purpose of taxation. Over the years, this requirement was not always been observed, especially in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as the Empire gradually entered a period of constant crisis. However, the basic taxation principles and the relatively small number of nomads remain unchanged.

The nomadic way of life of the Roma in the Ottoman Empire was directly related to the requirements for tax residence. They wandered during the warm season and lived in villages, where they were registered, in the winter months. They usually did not own houses and stayed in rented properties. The locations of their winter settlements could change, but in most cases, the Roma preferred to adhere to limited, well-known regions where they had already established good contacts with the local population. In this way, the entire territory of the Empire was divided into segments by the individual Roma nomadic units, united on a family basis (composed usually of several extended families).

This pattern of Roma wanderings proved durable and persisted over the centuries. In certain circumstances (most often wars, economic crises, etc.) Roma could change their place of residence and conquer new territories as the Ottoman Empire proved to be especially attractive for Roma nomads from the so-called Danube principalities (Wallachia and Moldova) who were constantly entering it. These cross-border mobilities of Roma were particularly large during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and communities who participated in this—the first *Vlax*—migration speak the so-called Old *Vlax* dialect of the Romani language.¹⁶ In the nineteenth century, an even bigger wave of migration—the Second *Vlax* Migration, sometimes even called the *Kelderara* invasion—followed. These communities speak the New *Vlax* dialect of Romanes.¹⁷ In both waves, the migrants were Roma nomads; during these migrations, the number of nomads increased, although they nonetheless remained a minority.

The Donau principalities of Wallachia and Moldova are a specific case in history, at least for the Roma living there: The principalities were vassals of the Ot-

15 Marushiakova–Popov 1997.

16 On Roma dialects, see Matras 2002.

17 On Roma migrations, see Marushiakova–Popov 2018, 88–100; 2006a, 10–26.

toman Empire but maintained their social structures and their internal legislation. The two principalities are the only places in medieval Europe where Roma had the status of slaves for almost five centuries (from the end of the fourteenth century to the middle of the nineteenth century).¹⁸ The Roma slavery system in Wallachia and Moldova was complex. From a property standpoint, Roma were divided into slaves of the state (so-called crown slaves), slaves of the monasteries and slaves of the boyars (high aristocracy according to local norms, owners of large estates); from the perspective of their way of life and their occupations, the Roma were divided into two main categories, sedentary and nomadic. There is a clear correlation between the two classifications: The settled Roma (generally called *Vatrashi*) were the property of the monasteries and boyars, and a small segment was owned by the prince and princess. They were used as domestic servants or worked in agriculture; others were artisans in the cities. Roma nomads were primarily the property of the crown (i.e. of the state and not the personal property of the princes). A small number of slaves belonging to monasteries and boyars also had permission to maintain their nomadic lifestyles and paid for this privilege. The Roma nomads were divided into four categories: *Rudari* (ore-miners) or *Aurari* (gold prospectors, known as *Băieși* in Transylvania) who panned for gold in mountain rivers; *Ursari* (bear trainers), who offered various services related to iron mongering and often led trained bears; *Lingurari* (spindle makers), who produced wooden household utensils. *Lăieși* (itinerant Roma) were usually blacksmiths or ironmongers who also made bone combs and leather sieves, in addition to working in construction and as seasonal farmhands.

The Roma crown slaves all paid an annual tax to the princely treasury, which varied greatly across category and time. It was usually paid twice a year, on the days of St. George (24 April) and St. Michael the Archangel (8 November). The Roma's nomadic way of life was seasonal; the nomadic season was not clearly fixed, but was probably influenced by the annual tax payment schedule and the seasonality of agricultural activities. In winter, monastery and boyar nomadic slaves would stay on the estates of their owners, where they were joined by the slaves of the prince with the consent of the estate owners.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, numerous changes occurred in the lives of Roma nomads in the principalities. Most of them continued their traditional nomadic way of life; others, however, began to build dugout houses, huts or regular houses, where they would spend the winter on the outskirts of towns and villages. Certain *Lingurari* built their settlements in the mountains, where they produced wooden utensils for sale during the warm (nomadic) season. The ratio of sedentary to nomadic Roma varied across time, and the figures

¹⁸ See Achim 2004, Marushiakova–Popov 2009, 89–124; Rotaru-Gaunt 2023.

in this respect cannot always be unequivocally accepted. A clear, though slow, trend is nonetheless visible, with this ratio increasingly moving in favor of settled Roma. According to data from the mid-nineteenth century, the ratio of nomadic to sedentary Roma was circa one to three. Nomadic Roma were free to roam at will (even outside the borders of the Danubian Principalities, as attested by numerous accounts). Their only obligation to the state was to pay the annual tax, and they enjoyed a relatively high degree of internal self-government. The state administration intervened only in conflicts between Roma and the surrounding population. Murder was punished severely with capital punishment; severe punishments were meted out for specific crimes, but in many other cases, the law remained lenient toward nomadic Roma (for offenses committed by other Roma, their owners were responsible). For instance, the Romanian Book of Morals, a law code issued by Moldavian Prince Vasile Lupu in 1646, included a provision, "If a Roma man or woman, or their child, steals a hen, a goose, or some other small animal once, twice or three times, let them be discharged; if they steal something bigger, let them be scolded (sic!) for the theft."

This attitude toward Roma nomads should not come as a surprise against the backdrop of the widespread evidence of the cruel treatment of the Roma in the principalities of Wallachia and Moldova. However, such historical records mainly refer to the situation of settled Roma, who lived permanently on the estates of their owners. The situation was much different for Roma nomads, who enjoyed many freedoms and even privileges other comparable social strata (especially serfs) could only dream of, which explains why despite a general tendency toward settling down, some nomads in the principalities of Wallachia and Moldova remained as a particular reservoir of the Roma nomadic way of life.

Furthermore, this specific situation helps explain the changes in the lifestyles of Roma nomads after their liberation from slavery, a process that occurred across a few decades in the middle of the nineteenth century. Practically, their new civil status as free people would have required them to become peasants faced with numerous, heavier taxes and other obligations. From this perspective, it becomes clear that the end of Roma slavery in Wallachia and Moldova was important, but not the only factor in the major Roma migrations during the second half of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, which saw Roma nomads from the principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia gradually dispersed throughout Europe and eventually reaching North and Latin America, South Africa and Australia. This mobility was not a consequence of their acquired freedom—nomadic Roma already had the opportunity to migrate in the past. It may sound paradoxical, but the major migrations after the abolition of slavery were instead an escape from freedom and the subsequent civil engagements and responsibilities