



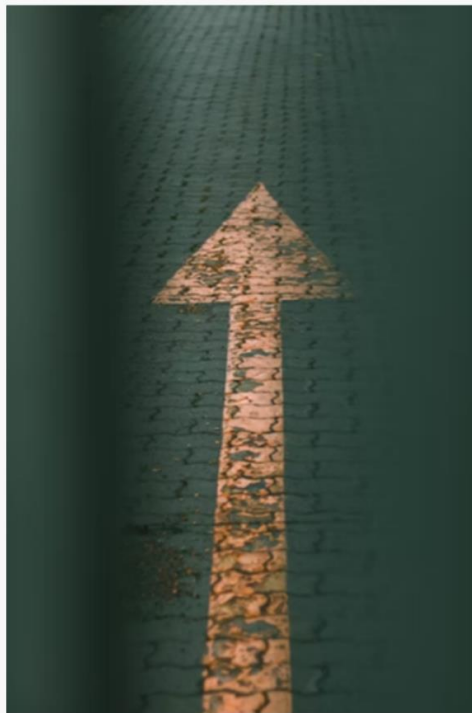
**Maynooth
University**
National University
of Ireland Maynooth



Mobility and/as Resistance

The Political Project of Nomadism

Online Workshop | 20-21 October, 2022



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This event is being jointly organized by the Arts and Humanities Research Institute, Maynooth University and the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, National Institute of Technology Silchar.

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Mobility and/as Resistance: The Political Project of Nomadism

Modern reorganization of space and mobility together with techniques of advanced demographic control has sought to sedentarize itinerant populations. Conversely, the neo-liberal economic order reifies speed and mobility, while ‘deterritorialization’ continues to constitute an important paradigm for the ‘flows and networks’ in a globalized world. From within this apparent dichotomy emerges the figure of the ‘nomad’ – individualized itinerant figures like the vagabond, the hobo, the squat, the tramp and the *flâneur* (all descriptions laden with value judgements), as well as longstanding ethnic groupings such as the Roma, the Irish Travellers etc. – who pose a challenge to the techniques of what James Scott (2009) calls ‘seeing like the state’. Here, we use the term ‘nomad’ as a wide-ranging concept – provisionally, though without losing the conceptual and cultural specificities immanent in each of the aforementioned illustrative categories – to encompass a diverse set of itinerant subjects whose mobility emerges from political will. While the statist gaze fails to understand the perspectives, diversity and complexity of such nomadism, the nomads themselves subvert the utilitarian value system: its obsession with scientific rationalism and liaison with a utility-maximized understanding of space and mobility, and, on the contrary, illustrate the longstanding connection between the politics of mobility and that of political resistance.

While peripatetic communities continue to face ethnic discrimination and structural violence because of their non-sedentary lifestyle, urban lore concerning the Beats, or certain cult figures like Rahul Sankrityayan, or Woody Guthrie, for example, often romanticizes the mobile way of life. This workshop examines this spectrum ranging from marginalization to romanticization and pivots around the heuristics of the ‘nomad’, when ‘seen like a state’, across spaces and ‘modern’ times, broadly defined. In parallel, it considers how the nomads themselves resist, challenge, co-opt, subvert, evade or otherwise navigate the ways in which itinerant behaviors, from the statist perspective, are tailored to fit into a pre-existent taxonomy with respect to a cultural polarity that singles out certain practices of mobility as positive and ‘virtuous’ (for instance, the tourist or the business traveler), and others as negative and degenerative. Consider, for example, how the hobo in the US was perceived as a function of economic degeneracy and literally an outcast; while the ‘dromomaniac’ or the ‘fuguener’ in Europe has been a subject of medical scrutiny and therefore sought to be *cured*. The ‘criminal tribe’ in India, similarly, was posited as a subject of legal intervention and thus sought to be *reformed*. In other words, how a specific phenomenon of mobility is accounted for – whether as an economic, legal or medical function – is determined by how the state ‘sees’ it. We are therefore interested in the political charge immanent in the specific practices of nomadism: how it is articulated by the nomads and, conversely, how it is ‘framed’ by the statist gaze. This workshop thus focuses, on the one hand, on the motives, preoccupations, and objectives that lead to the social construction of the nomad-native; and on the other, it seeks to understand how the nomads have responded, and asserted their own agency.

PROGRAM (in Irish Standard time)

Day 1, Thursday, October 20

12 noon - 12:10 pm

Opening remarks

CHANDANA MATHUR (Maynooth University) &
AVISHEK RAY (National Institute of Technology Silchar)

12 noon - 12:55 pm

Session 1: Travelling Performers

Chair: CHANDANA MATHUR (Maynooth University)

- In the Tracks of Travelling Showpeople – VERONIKA BARNAŠ (IFK Internationales Forschungszentrum)
- Making life happen at the *Jatra*: Fairs as a mode of life for the peripatetic and nomadic-pastoralists of the Deccan – FIRDAUS SONI (University of Hyderabad)

Discussant: MARGARET FREEMAN (Massachusetts Institute of Technology)

2:00 - 3:00 pm

Session 2: Panel Discussion

Theme: Mobility and/as Resistance: The Irish Traveller Journey

Participants: BERNARD JOYCE (Irish Traveller Movement), NORA CORCORAN (Galway Traveller Movement) & CHANDANA MATHUR (Maynooth University)

3:15 - 4:45 pm

Session 3: Imperialism, Colonialism, Capitalism

Chair: AVISHEK RAY (National Institute of Technology Silchar)

- Questioning the occidental modern myth of the *flâneur*: The (im)possibility of an aesthetic wandering inside urban capitalist societies – ISABEL ARGÜELLES ROZADA (University of Oviedo)
- Not Quite the End of Nomadism: Gypsies, Travellers and Roma in Contemporary Europe – ANTHONY HOWARTH (University of Oxford)
- Mobility of “vagabonds” and “gypsies” in the Austrian empire between state control and strategies of resistance (19th -20th centuries) – FRANCESCA BRUNET & ELISABETH TAUBER (Free University of Bolzano)
- Architecture and Nomadic Resistance to Colonial Control in the Middle East – MARGARET FREEMAN (Massachusetts Institute of Technology)

Discussant: ALISON KUAH (University of Cape Town)

Day 2, Friday, October 21

10:30 - 11:45 am

Session 4: Itinerant Communities in India

Chair: ELISABETH TAUBER (Free University of Bolzano)

- From Mangnewale to Mazdoor: An Ethnographic Engagement among Kalbelia Community in Southern Rajasthan – DIKSHA NARANG (South Asian University)
- Sedentarization and Development of the Gadia Lohars of Rajasthan – PRIYANKA CHOUDHARY (University of Delhi)
- Between Essentialized Visualization and Creative Representations of the Itinerant Artist: The Chitrakar Community of West Bengal – URMI BHATTACHARYYA (University of Delhi)

Discussant: ISABEL ARGÜELLES ROZADA (University of Oviedo)

12 noon - 1:15 pm

Session 5: Performativities and Representations

Chair: John Paul Newman (Maynooth University)

- Embedded Nomads: An autoethnography of a Singaporean's journey to Cape Town – ALISON KUAH (University of Cape Town)
- Mobility and Resistance of Bengali Detective-Flaneurs – SAYANI KONAR & PUNYASHREE PANDA (Indian Institute of Technology Bhubaneswar)
- Walking with Lives on Shoulders: Politics of Mobility in Benjamin Dix and Lindsay Pollock's Vanni – SOMSUVRA MIDYA (Calcutta Girls' College)

Discussant: PRIYANKA CHOUDHARY (University of Delhi)

1:20- 1:30 pm

Concluding remarks

AVISHEK RAY (National Institute of Technology Silchar)
