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Paradoxes of European free movement in times of austerity

The role of social movement actors in framing
the plight of Roma berry pickers in Sweden

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ABSTRACT The purpose of this paper is to provide insight into the capacities of social movement actors (SMAs) and interest groups to negotiate responsibility, heighten issues of accountability and earn legitimacy from authorities and the wider public for the plight of dis-privileged Roma migrant berry pickers in the Swedish labour market. The objective is guided by a multi-sited ethnographical approach to data collection and analysis, which theoretically anchors in social movement frame analysis. The paper proposes that SMAs, in the face of incapacities of state and industry parties, generate the potentiality to leverage immediate humanitarian distress experienced by the workers and to accentuate their political and public visibility. Delimited by the internal organisational structure of a berry industry, partly operating behind informal employment schemes, future studies should devote closer attention in localising/identifying possible “back-stage” data-gathering settings. Policy-makers and special-interest organisations concerned with internal EU labour migration, labour standards and living condition issues, may consider the social and humanitarian implications of persistent responsibility ambiguities. The paper raises issues of informal work and forms of labour exploitation. The paper provides deeper insight into the societal nexus in which a “hard-to-reach group” of seasonal workers faces potential and actual exploitation.

KEYWORDS Sweden, Bulgaria, Frame analysis, Internal EU seasonal migrants, Roma berry pickers, Social movement actors

Introduction

In the summer of 2012, the Swedish viewing public were confronted with a disturbing set of images on their televisions. These included ramshackle forest encampments in which Bulgarian Roma families, including pensioners and small children, sheltered beneath make-shift tarpaulins from the none-too-kind Swedish summer, with only primitive sanitation and water supply arrangements at their disposal. Those who inhabited these camps had arrived seeking work in seasonal berry picking, only to find a “harvest” that was far too meagre to fulfil their economic needs or even recover their daily costs. They were now in desperate circumstances, having made the long and expensive journey to Sweden, sometimes incurring considerable debts to do so. What ensued thereafter was a mass exit from these berry-picker forest encampments. Straggling lines of dispirited Roma were to be seen trudging along deserted roads in northern Sweden. They were heading south towards their embassy in Stockholm, and hopefully repatriation to Bulgaria.

The paper examines the responses of a variety of state, social movement actors (SMAs) and interest organisations which attempted to ameliorate the berry pickers’ plight in Sweden. It explores the differing reactions generated by unfolding events and suggests differing capacities to flexibly resolve a developing humanitarian crisis, one occasioned by “free movement” of labour within poorly regulated industries in the European Union. This unfolding drama occupied the attention of both the Swedish and Bulgarian authorities. It also raised questions that challenged interest groups such as trade unions – which might be expected to offer some support and protection to these temporary migrant workers in the face of the rather extreme adversity with which they were confronted. Furthermore, other interest groups, such as the leading farmers’ association, were called upon by their members to offer guidance as to problematic legal issues of eviction when encampments began appearing on their land. Meanwhile, the role of food producer associations in Sweden, which also directly benefited from the employment of these seasonal workers, came under increasing public and media scrutiny. For all these interest organisations in the unfolding drama of the Roma berry pickers, their official responses were hesitant and uncertain. Not least the plight of the Roma berry pickers raised uncomfortable issues – in terms of – whether or not Sweden offers fair labour standards that can be effectively applied to all who enter its labour market, including seasonal migrant workers.

For SMAs operating outside of institutional channels there was a direct concern raised over how to respond to immediate questions of labour abuse and mistreatment, especially in the light of the clear failure of the established industry parties and state actors to deal with the situation. Thus, we distinguish between these established institutional players and SMAs, viewing the latter as *ad hoc* groups

of individuals who are “moved-to-act” (for both affective and effective reasons) to address a perceived issue of social injustice. Such actors attempt to go beyond their own immediate self-interest and collectively address temporal concerns of a wider social equity nature. Interest group actors are, by contrast, generally concerned with the long-term pursuit of wider collective goals as members of a formal organisation, of which the declared purpose is to further both the collective interests of the organisation itself and the individual interests of its members. Whilst not necessarily entirely mutually exclusive in their orientations (SMAs can evolve into interest groups, while established interest groups do not necessarily exclude social equity concerns), both types of organisation imply rather differing outlooks, purposes and motivational mainsprings for social engagement. It is here argued that the SMAs, through collective action, have filled a vacuum in public policy response in the face of the institutional incapacities of state actors and the reluctance of civil society interest groups to accept responsibility for the difficult conditions facing the berry pickers.

The paper provides a narrative which unfolds as follows: first, it details encounters between the Roma berry pickers and the Swedish “Small Town” inhabitants, a village with some 500 inhabitants. Second, based on this narrative, the account illustrates the manner in which SMAs have negotiated responsibility and heightened issues of accountability for a “dis-privileged” group of “outsiders” on the Swedish labour market. Third, the final stages of this ill-fated berry-harvesting endeavour are documented *vis-à-vis* accounts from the Roma berry pickers themselves and from engaged SMAs during their long route towards refuge in Stockholm, and repatriation.

Conceptual and theoretical framework

Collective actions of civil society organisations are found by Atger (2013) to be an important vehicle for strengthening the political subjectivity of the Roma. By validating their demands as a collectively stigmatised social group through which they can begin to assert their rights in terms of “enacting a European citizenship”, such organisations can create a re-framing of their negatively defined status as outsiders on the European labour market (see Goffman, 2014). The aim here is to investigate the role played by SMAs in promoting the political and public visibility of the Roma as stranded labour migrants. At the level of theory, therefore, this study seeks to illustrate the manner in which SMAs can re-negotiate responsibility, heighten issues of accountability and succeed in earning legitimacy from authorities and the wider general public, while elevating the political visibility of a dis-privileged group. The collective actions of the SMAs will be viewed through

the conceptual lens of frame analysis as it is elaborated within social movement studies in the following theoretical overview.

The concepts of frame and framing, originally deriving from Goffman (1974), refer to the ways in which individuals can create meaning by localising, perceiving, identifying, and labelling events in their lives. By facilitating the rendering of events as meaningful, frames are operative in the organisation of a person's experiences, and further, in guiding their actions. In social movement studies, this theoretical approach has been elaborated through the concept of frame alignment, which represents the dynamic linkage in action of organisational and individual frames (Snow *et al.*, 1986). The primary results of this negotiated process of shared meaning among social movement participants are the collective action frames which are "intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists" (Snow and Benford, 1988, p. 198), and which in turn, will guide collective campaigns and activities (Benford and Snow, 2000). The success of collective mobilisation is held to be contingent upon the generation of consensus mobilisation (Klandermans, 1984), which Snow and Benford (1988) contend is achieved through social movement organisations' core framing tasks. These are first, the framing of diagnosis, which attributes blame and causality to identified problems, and second, the framing of prognosis, which articulates solutions and tactics appropriate for resolving the diagnosis. As an outcome of negotiated meaning, the development of these contextual frames is, however not a straightforward process; potentially at least, it can result in instances of frame disputes within organisations as disputes over diagnosis and appropriate prognosis become progressively crystallised within the context of the organisation's internal debates and proposed alternative lines of action (Benford, 1993).

In terms of their political effectiveness, i.e., bringing about desired outcomes; frames have further been elaborated in terms of their persuasive qualities in evolving socio-dynamics during mobilisation. Diagnostic frames built upon empirical credibility through consistency with on-going societal events, and frames stressing the seriousness as well as the broadness of social problems have been discerned as particularly influential on bringing about public policy shifts (McCammon, 2009; see Snow and Benford, 1988). In contextualising the legitimacy of their demands and of their project, particular attention is paid to the SMAs' diagnostic and prognostic frames, and how these either receive support or are discounted by state actors, in turn, facilitating or inhibiting the emergence of a temporally bounded master frame which has wider public policy resonance (Snow and Benford, 1992).

Through Roma berry pickers' own accounts, this study illuminates a frame analytical approach by examining their adverse working and living conditions during their sojourn in Sweden. This frame analytic approach also illustrates

the parallel emergence and diffusion of a wider mobilisation of SMAs. From this position, by negotiating with the authorities, and by projecting blame and accountability vis-à-vis emergent and persuasive diagnostic frames, not least through the media, SMAs have succeeded in amplifying the Roma pickers' visibility and problematising their denial of rights, not least the right to decent work and fair treatment on the Swedish labour market as "free moving" European Union fellow citizens. Thus, SMAs and their political significance become integral to the disclosure of tensions in current EU policies on mobility, given contemporary moment by the differential on-going burden of European austerity, particularly in the country of origin, Bulgaria. To begin with, however, we briefly outline the character of the berry-harvesting industry in Sweden and its economic pull for the Roma during current times of crisis.

Free movement of Bulgarian Roma in the era of austerity

The commercialised harvesting of wild berries offers arduous and low paid early morning to late-evening labour. The work is conducted during the brief summer months in the northern mosquito-ridden forests of Sweden. In the search for berry-rich areas, this kind of harvesting requires long treks through rough and sometimes marshy terrain. Actual picking entails continuous back-bending and repetitious sweeping motions using a primitive hand-held gathering scoop through branches of low growing berry bushes. The harvesting of these berries for commercial purposes is today performed almost entirely by seasonal migrants. It is made possible through *allemansrätten*, a freedom granted by the Swedish constitution for any person to access somebody else's land in order to pick and sell flowers, mushrooms and the berries that can be found there (see Sténs and Sandström, 2014). The workers gathering the berry harvest are today either visa-contracted by large berry companies as seasonal migrant workers from South East Asia, or they are designated as "free-pickers" within the industry, a group of "own account" workers under informal contractual conditions that is largely made up of poorer Eastern European citizens from Bulgaria and Ukraine who sell their daily pickings to middle-men in forest collection stations (Wingborg, 2014).

As a part of a global commodity chain stretching from the Swedish forests to the world market, the industry involves the extraction of powder, production of cosmetics and health products. The industry has been sustained on the basis of a high market value for the Swedish berries "ripened in the midnight sun", in tandem with utilisation of cheap labour forces of seasonal migrants. While few Swedes today would consider berry picking as worthwhile employment, for many seasonal

migrant workers their engagement in the berry forests has resulted in successful income generation and an improvement in their standard of living in their home countries (Hedberg, 2013). The prospect of such earnings has, however, also led migrants to take on high-interest loans and to mortgage their family's land, home and belongings in order to pay high upfront fees to recruiting agencies (Network Against Trafficking and Exploitation of Migrant Workers, 2009; Vanaspong, 2012). Recurring labour abuse scandals, involving insufferable living and working conditions, and cases where large groups of workers have been swindled out of their earnings, have, however led the Swedish authorities to tighten the regulations for companies employing migrants originating from "third countries" (outside of the European Union) (Wingborg, 2011, 2014; Woolfson *et al.*, 2012). In addition, the European Union has adopted a new, albeit imperfect, Seasonal Workers Directive (Fudge and Herzfeld Olsson, 2014). The situation regarding protective rights has been rather different for the Bulgarian Roma focused on in this study. As internal EU "free movers", or in EU parlance "mobile workers", the Roma, as with any citizens of the Union, have the right to reside and work in Sweden, or indeed, in any other member state. However, as our narrative illustrates, accessing such "rights" is by no means unproblematic.

Despite EU citizenship with the legal right to cross internal Union borders unhindered, Roma migrants have received a less than welcoming reception in many of the older member states. Several scholars have employed the term "abject citizenship" (Hepworth, 2012, p. 432) to capture such contradictions of implicit exclusion masked by explicit inclusion. In Italy, Roma have been thus constituted through juridical constructions and labelling as "nomads" facilitating deportations (Hepworth, 2012). In Germany, Roma have been consigned to the "boundaries of European citizenship" by being denied access to legitimate rights as European citizens and framed as outsiders threatening public security (Castañeda, 2015, p. 96).

What forces propelled Roma people from Southern Europe travel to Sweden in the search for employment in the berry picking industry? Southern Europe was particularly hard hit by the global financial and economic crisis. Today, Bulgaria records among the lowest levels of social and economic development, with overall GDP per capita levels lower than 50 per cent of the EU average (Eurostat, 2015). With the arrival of crisis, material deprivation reached the highest levels in the European Union, exacerbating an already-present mass poverty. In 2011, 60.1 per cent of the Bulgarian population was "materially deprived", a figure more than three the EU-28 average as a whole, and more than four times for those deemed "severely deprived" (Eurostat, 2013). The impact of austerity in Bulgaria has been especially severe due to low levels of support from the social system, with tight fiscal measures causing serious economic difficulties for the poorest strata (Petkov, 2014, p. 50).

The Roma are disproportionately represented among the poorest strata of the population. Bulgarian National Statistical Institute data show that employment for working age Roma gradually increased from 17.9 per cent of the workforce in 2001 to about a third in 2008, but with the onset of economic crisis this declined to 20.6 per cent in 2011 (Tomova, 2013, p. 33). In addition to the labour market exclusion of Roma during the crisis (Cherkezova and Tomova, 2013), this group has been overrepresented in the sectors most severely affected by the economic downturn. Thus, the construction sector, which accounts for the largest share of employed Roma, has contracted by 30 per cent (Dimitrova, 2009). While only one in three Roma in Bulgaria lives above the poverty line, the Roma poverty rate is more than four times as high as that of the general population (Bogdanov and Zahariev, 2011). In 2011, surveys showed that the share of Bulgarian Roma considering moving to another country was 22 per cent, twice as high compared to non-Roma (Cherkezova and Tomova, 2013; OECD, 2013). Thus, poverty and exclusion from the domestic labour market have been powerful drivers for migration. Against a background of severe austerity in their home state and tightening rights-claiming in many European countries, prospects of decent earnings through seasonal employment, made the search for work, even in faraway Sweden, seem a rational choice (Mešić and Woolfson, 2015).

Methodology of an ethnographic study of “hard-to-reach” informants

The present study is informed by the insights of multi-sited ethnography proposed by Marcus (1995, p. 102):

[...] in multi-sited ethnography, comparison emerges from putting questions to an emergent object of study whose contours, sites, and relationships are not known beforehand, but are themselves a contribution of making an account that has different, complexly connected real-world sites of investigation.

The empirical evidence presented here was gathered in July and August 2012 through ethnographical observations and interviews at three different “real world” sites where Roma migrant berry pickers appeared. Initially, they arrived in the southern parts of northern Sweden, where about a dozen smaller and larger camps were established, each accommodating between 30 to 500 persons. The migrants were interviewed in three specific sites: at the Small Town berry-picker forest camp of some 400 people; in the surroundings of this camp comprising other groups of Roma, specifically avoiding contact with those staying in the camp due to fear

of entanglement with (mafia-like “minders”) or labour contractors discussed below; and at the temporary shelter in Stockholm for those who had abandoned the forest camps and awaited repatriation to Bulgaria. In total 32 interviews were conducted, involving individuals, groups of up to half a dozen or family group members. Communicating with the Roma who could be characterised as “hard-to-reach”, was facilitated by the use of several languages including Serbo-Croat spoken by the author, but primarily through Romani Chib with assistance from a Balkan Romani translator. The translator not only provided the opportunity to interact directly, but also filled an important “credibility” function in encounters with the Roma amounting to “embedding assistance”, both through command of their language and by the confidence created via his ethno-cultural affinity (see Lewis and Russell, 2011).

The conduct of fieldwork, in spite of these advantages, proved to be a delicate enterprise. The berry pickers very often had “minders” in the form of informal labour organisers or “contractors” who also heavily policed their activities. The presence of such gatekeepers was emphasised by several informants who stated that they were ordered by the contractors, who controlled groups of up to 10 or 20 separate individuals, not to discuss their terms of employment in Sweden. If they were asked any inquisitive questions by the authorities, they were instructed to state simply that everybody had arrived as a family group and not as employees. Commonly, they presented themselves as arriving together with family and friends; that no person was contracted; and that the journey to and stay within Sweden was self-financed. Nonetheless, while many informants acknowledged the existence of such informal contract schemes, they explained that they were common elsewhere, in “another part of the camp”, or at “other camps”. Thus, most of the accounts of informal contracts were offered only outside of the camps, in back-stage locations, as it were, secure from surveillance by the contractors.

The second set of interviews was conducted from July 2012 to July 2013 with ten representatives from a selection of five different SMAs, which had initiated direct actions in response to concerns over the living conditions in the camps, or the visible distress of those Roma who fled from the forests. These SMAs comprised, a non-profit Stockholm-based Romani Association Founded on Ethnic Grounds (AFEG) that regularly deals with cultural, political and minority matters; the Small Town local property owners’ association (LPOA); and three direct action groups providing shelter, humanitarian aid and assistance return home. Further interviews were conducted during the same period with special-interest organisations and state authorities, including Bulgarian embassy personnel, municipality officials, and Swedish police and tax-agency officers. The primary data amount to 50 hours of transcribed recordings. What follows is based upon these semi-structured interviews. All mentioned names are fictitious.

Small Town encounters the Roma

For the Roma, their long journey to Sweden proved a financial disaster. Their hopes of returning home with earnings at least equivalent to triple their average monthly income were quickly dashed by a combination of adverse circumstances. These included not least, their premature arrival in Sweden before the berries were properly ripened, lower berry growth than normal, reduced berry selling prices and intense competition among different groups of pickers in the search for un-harvested areas. Soon after their arrival, these factors transformed an anticipated money-making expedition into a struggle just to recoup the cost of the long journey to arrive in Sweden and increasingly, their daily survival.

The first problem was finding somewhere to stay. The Swedish right of access via the *allemansrätten* provides not only the right to access another party's land, but also the right of "shorter residence". The law thus permits raising a couple of tents and spending a couple of nights on someone else's land. The law is not clear, however on the duration of such stays, and the rights of "repossession" by landlords are a matter of legal procedure (Bengtsson, 2004, p. 42). Locations close to the berry-harvesting areas were an immediate priority. In practice, this meant establishing a camp site on which tents or shelters could be assembled, without attracting police scrutiny, landowner-initiated formal legal evictions, or facing harassment by vigilante-like local groups. Some Roma had to move their camps to six different locations. However, legal eviction first required the landowner to pay €60 to the Swedish Enforcement Authority for each person they wished to have evicted, before the authority could order executive assistance from the police. Yet, even the fact that the landowner had called the police to the site would be enough of a signal for the Roma to move on. Ultimately, they set up an encampment near Small Town where they had heard they would be permitted to settle unmolested. Here, the landowner and the municipality agreed that a particular forest area should be allocated, since a general eviction would "do more harm than good" and would simply "push the problem onwards"—dispersing some 400 persons throughout the municipality. In Small Town where the number of arriving migrants had grown to the equivalent of the local inhabitants, the formation of the camp was quickly seen as an "invasion". The Head of Municipality recalled:

Inhabitants contacted me and said: "This is totally untenable. This cannot continue. There is litter and destruction". [...] Then we had the public meeting in Small Town. Together, the police, municipality and landowner met (Small Town) residents so that we would be able to answer their questions. [...] The atmosphere was rather hostile towards the berry-pickers. [...] It was not supposed to be some form of larger official meeting, more like, not even a meeting, but an official coming-together because the inhabitants had called me twenty times a day.

Marcus, a LPOA representative, recalled the Small Town reactions at this public meeting:

Some were very angry and hostile. They thought the current situation was threatening and unpleasant, and they did not dare to go on vacation. [...] That's the thought that comes up when one sees these people roaming around here during the night. And why would somebody stroll around here during night time?

The representatives of the landowner and the municipality explained that they were jointly responsible for permitting the camp to be set up. According to the landowner's representative, they became the focus of the locals' "anxiety and fear" at the public meeting:

They were afraid of the unknown, in terms of the numbers of people that had arrived. They were afraid of burglaries, afraid of people prowling about in the village, and looking and [...] There was a young girl who even said: "If we were to be raped, that's a crime at least isn't it?" I guess that is a testimony that people were afraid.

There was a generalised distrust of the authorities' capacity to deal with the situation. One LPOA representative explained that some local inhabitants had even proposed taking matters into their own hands if the authorities refused to respond to their concerns: "There was some who I heard say: 'If they don't do anything then maybe one will have to do something by oneself about this'".

As the summer progressed, media-reports from a number of locations in different parts of Sweden appeared where local inhabitants had indeed taken vigilante-like actions, ranging from surveillance and "shadowing" of the berry pickers, to hostile confrontations. Other accounts, this time provided by Roma, relayed incidents where motorists had supposedly driven vehicles on a collision course with them. On at least one occasion, the camp near Small Town was attacked with rocks, while a public road leading to the camp was blockaded with vehicles. Fear travelled in both directions. Stevo, one of the Roma, conveyed the sense of menace felt by those in the camp:

People are afraid. They have fears. Why? You have these idiots [...] If I am alone, how will I be able to sleep? There are small children. There are families that would be afraid. What if some hooligans came (as it were), somebody's heart could rupture.

The forest site made available to the Roma lacked even basic sanitary arrangements. This problem they could only solve by visiting petrol stations and restaurants in neighbouring towns. Digging a water-well and constructing rudimentary toilet-pits in the ground and encircling them with curtains, eventually provided make-shift solutions to problems of hygiene and sanitation.

Long queues nonetheless formed at public water supply facilities, generating further complaints to the authorities from irritated local enterprise owners. Finally, after inspection of the camp, the authorities decided to provide a drinking-water cistern, and a small number of portable latrines and garbage containers. Nevertheless, managing personal hygiene remained difficult. As one Roma worker explained: “I go to a petrol station, every two or three days. I don’t want to go every day so that they will force me away”. Others would visit a public beach at a local lake in Small Town. According to Marcus from the local residents’ association (LPOA) Small Town inhabitants were also upset by Roma bathing in “their” lake:

We have a beautiful bathing place here in Small Town, a place where families go to the whole summer. But, they have not gone there (this summer), because these Bulgarians have gone there in large bunches with their cars [...] Especially, because they were managing their hygiene where we were supposed to bathe.

However, seeing the Roma struggle with their basic needs was also becoming a matter of humanitarian concern for some local inhabitants. One group established contact with the Roma, only to be labelled as “traitors of the village interest”. According to a LPOA representative for some “this was something which must be stopped at any price, and where the horror vision was some degrees stronger [...] rumours concerning thefts were larger than in the reality”.

Frame diagnostics emerged within the local association, as the chairman declared at LPOA meetings, the association would now engage in scrutiny where “all levels of the berry industry would be put on the table”. Thus the focus of concern was extended from local “security and order” issues to the unregulated workings of the berry industry with its reliance on informal labour and lack of corporate responsibility, and the economic possibilities and conditions for the migrants and their children. As such, the frame expanded to include problematic issues normally far beyond the debates of Small Town property owners. It became clear that the situation was also an issue for Swedish government regulation and even an EU matter:

How does one, by next year, ensure that there will not be this many (arriving)? How does one control (this) along with the EU’s rules on free movement? This is what the Swedish government must discuss as a political question. [...] My idea is still that the industry must be forced not to accept working conditions of this sort. [...] The berry-buying traders have in some way to be forced to take a work-legal responsibility in relation to this form of berry-trade.

The elaboration of such vexing questions generated “frame disputes” among Small Town inhabitants themselves. These diagnostic and prognostic frames

thus centred on securing the governance of an industry seemingly reliant on the exploitation of migrant workers, the scope and limits of appropriate responses of national authorities, and even of the European Union.

In the following section, these unfolding events which sparked other SMAs to mobilise are discussed. In turn, the SMAs would put the various authorities' interventions in the spotlight. As a result, the collective plight of the Roma would steadily become elevated out of the forests and onto the political and public arena. First, however, there is the Roma's own view of their growing predicament.

Persuasive framing of stranded seasonal migrant workers

For Dimi, who had arrived to pick berries in Sweden with his brother and two other informally contracted workers, it was important to reassure his worried wife in Bulgaria that all was well. The reality was rather different:

I am not ashamed of saying it. I have gone to the garbage cans. [...] Whatever the Lord gives. [...] She says (his wife): "I have heard that there are problems over there", I tell her that "there are none, that those are some others, that we have it good, that we have money".

Apart from strained encounters with the locals, the decisive setback for the Roma was that berry picking simply did not provide enough income even to purchase daily food, leading many to search in waste containers at local grocery stores or to rummage through refuse of local inhabitants.

One SMA representative from a neighbouring town explained their involvement as a reaction to the posting of photographs of adults with young children searching through refuse containers. These were accompanied by derogatory comments from Small Town residents. "Bloody creeps, wasting time in posting pictures on *Facebook* instead of doing what they can to help! No parents would watch their children starve and not do anything about it!" said the SMA representative. This SMAs' mobilisation of humanitarian support would soon be reported in the regional and national press, after which the organisation was to receive a marked increase in donations. With this wider exposure (visual empirical credibility to their diagnostic and prognostic frames), the SMA was also able to gain actor legitimacy at municipality level, as well as support and financing which would result in several food supply deliveries to the camp. Other SMA and church organisations were also to make donations of food and other necessities to the camp inhabitants.

One such organisation was the Roma-support organisation, AFEG, based in Stockholm. When, through media coverage, it was discovered that the “Bulgarian berry pickers” as they were described, were actually from the Bulgarian Roma minority, they immediately began to organise assistance. The AFEG attempted to frame the on-going events as a “humanitarian crisis” for which the blame was to be attributed to the industry for failure to take responsibility for the workers living and working conditions, and to the authorities for remaining all too passive. In line with this diagnostic frame, AFEG’s prognosis focused on various forms of direct action aiming to compensate for these actors’ negligence. In essence, with few actual power resources beyond that of amplifying the plight of the Roma in the media, their repertoire of action was confined to direct forms of assistance and collaboration with other SMAs. In a collaborative endeavour the chairpersons of the AFEG and LPOA jointly participated in a “grand meeting” before the representatives of local councils, the police, berry-buyers and Bulgarian embassy staff. Here they were able to represent themselves as advocates both for the Roma migrant workers and for local inhabitants. In spite of their differing experiences and interests, these SMAs provided mutually reinforcing empirical credibility to diagnostic framing, namely, that here was a real crisis of significant social and economic proportions. They also articulated a mutual frustration with the systematic responsibility-shifting by those in authority, as well as those representing the berry industry. As one berry buyer made abundantly clear, their relationship with the berry pickers was purely based on a simple cash nexus. The head of the AFEG recalled:

This buyer explains that they have no responsibilities because they are not providing the (harvesting) tools! I hear in this talk, that they are bull-shitters – tricking and fixing. I realized during the conversation that they aren’t serious, for then, one would have tackled this differently.

For local authorities, it was the non-existence of national guidelines on how to deal with stranded EU citizens that inhibited a more concerted response. From the perspective of a single municipality the situation called for governmental and national response. The head of the municipality illuminated the wider dilemma posed by the unanticipated problems created by “free movement” in such poorly regulated industries:

We do not have any juridical responsibility. [...] This is a matter that affects all us citizens in the state of Sweden, I would say, and not only the citizens of this municipality. This is a concern for the whole nation. Especially, when one takes the humanitarian matters into consideration. What could one do?! [...] And the berry-buyers are not easy to get hold of. They are, one could say, *free businessmen*. But those who buy from the berry-buyers, what kind of demands do they put down? [...] If one is to achieve tolerable

working conditions like it has been done for those arriving from outside of EU who need permission and employments with someone in order to pick the berries, and suddenly that does not work because we have free movement in EU [...]. that's where it becomes wacky. Couldn't it be demanded to have a contract (of employment) to pick berries, [...] and that way achieve tolerable working conditions, both in terms of pay and housing?

Importantly, as so-called “free movers” within the European Union, exercising the right to cross borders and seek employment in any EU member state, the Roma migrants’ claim to decent treatment resulted in the diffusion of a master frame among SMAs pointing to deficiencies in EU citizenship rights, in which formal rights stand at odds with the realities of an industry which thrives on informal employment.

Negotiation of repatriation

The summer days rolled on with a low yield of the berry harvest, combined with low prices on the meagre amount of berries gathered, and fierce competition among different groups of pickers to find un-harvested grounds. Angela conveyed her frustration: “There are no berries. You see how many [Roma pickers] there are? (There is enough) for bread! For bread only!”

For those who had arrived in smaller groups, with their own vehicles, it was no longer a question of returning with lower earnings than expected, but rather of being simply able to afford the transportation back to Bulgaria and settle the debts they had incurred before they undertook the journey to Sweden. Here is how Linda and Pesha relayed the financial pressure they were already experiencing:

Pesha: He calls already and asks to have his money returned.

Linda: Quite frankly we tell him: we can't even pick so that we have money to return, yet less to earn money back.

Pesha: [...] It's 800€, only for the petrol, for the ferry, to stay here [...] If we had money we would leave in 5 minutes.

For those who had arrived with informal contractors the situation was quite different. The end of July and early August witnessed a mass exit of informally contracted workers from the camps. Jonny described how, following successive revisions to his oral “agreement” and constant pressure from his contractor to steal food and other materials, he ultimately succeeded in fleeing his “minders” and eventually reaching the shelter in Stockholm:

When there were no berries we went to supermarket to get food, [...] he [the contractor] stops the minibus and orders me to go into the container. Salami, meat, a big piece of meat – into the bag. [...] The boss [...] eats alone and you eat bread and lentils when he eats the meat. [...] I was told to steal petroleum. For the cars, so that they could run for free. [...] I was ordered to steal copper. The luggage, and all, I left over there. Without any money, anything at all, I chose the road. [...] I have two children, two small children. I have not come here to steal. [...] I was also ordered to collect bottles (paint), empty ones, and the money went to the boss for his petrol, for oil. [...] His sister's son was together with us non-stop. [...] He followed us and monitored us as we were collecting the bottles. I just said: "Look here! I'm going; I'm going to go just there, I see bottles [...]" [...] I went, he looked in another direction and I was gone.

As the exit gathered pace new communities on the journey's way were implicated in the plight of the Roma. At one of these, some 40 "Small Village" inhabitants were unexpectedly called upon by some 80 thirsty and hungry arrivals who pleaded with the locals for police protection from their recruiters, stating that their aim was to reach the Bulgarian embassy. One group of inhabitants responded by providing meals and contacting the municipality for further support. However, when the municipality turned down this request, the locals began to organise a direct humanitarian collective action. Although a reluctant intervention, the group soon grew to a core of ten persons who emptied their fridges, brought what they had at home, collected donations from neighbouring grocery stores, and made a local bistro and community centre available where Roma could receive meals and spend the night. In order to persuade the municipality to intervene, the media were contacted to put the authorities under the spotlight. Ultimately, the municipality provided transportation onwards to the Bulgarian embassy.

This was only one of several municipalities which eventually would respond by financing the transportation to the Bulgarian embassy. Accumulating numbers of protesting Roma at the gates of the Bulgarian embassy demanded to be repatriated home. However, the cash-strapped Bulgarian embassy, for its part, pleaded for assistance from social services in Stockholm. Meanwhile, impoverished Roma languished incongruously in squalor and desperation on the leafy and affluent streets of the embassy region of Stockholm, awaiting someone in authority who would take responsibility for assisting in resolving their plight.

The continuous arrival of new groups outside the embassy led the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions to request that local municipalities would stop sending Roma to Stockholm as their capacity to deal with the influx was severely strained. As attempts to gain control over the situation by the Swedish authorities unfolded, the situation was also becoming a national concern in Bulgaria, following the Stockholm embassy's plea to the Bulgarian cabinet to

free resources for the repatriation of its citizens. The Swedish municipal social services, inhibited by their own top-down organisational structures, were in fact grateful to the SMAs for their rapid responsiveness in handling the crisis. As one field-assistant commented:

Everybody was taken by surprise. [...] It takes a while when a crisis situation suddenly occurs. [...] Volunteers are more flexible; they are not controlled from above. For us it must come from above, individually we cannot step forward and make such decisions.

Through collaboration between various SMAs, the Roma now camped on the street outside the embassy, were provided with meals and sanitary facilities. When the shelter was eventually established, activists continued working alongside the municipal services by providing extra meals among other activities. One SMA succeeded in fundraising that would finance the repatriation of some 70 persons, meriting its organiser an official “letter of thanks” from the Bulgarian ambassador. The SMA representative explained:

I could not do it myself (organise the returns). I went to the embassy and said that I wanted to assist them. I established a good relation with them. They were ashamed, invested their own money, and toiled for days and nights. [...] With this connection I worked from the embassy, collecting passports, and according to our scheme, sent firstly families with children, pregnant women, the elderly and the youngest ones.

The final number of transported back to Bulgaria mounted to 654 persons of which 361 were in buses financed by the Bulgarian embassy, 196 financed by the Swedish authorities and 70 transported by air through SMA funding. In addition, encouraged by the embassy, another 27 were assisted with travel arrangements by the embassy after contacting acquaintances back home who agreed to assist in financing their return.

This section has illustrated that the SMAs have conducted significant direct collective actions and engaged in openly auditing hesitant responses of the public institutions. Their compensatory initiatives were gratefully received by several public officials, and would develop into what resembled ad hoc moulded “partnerships” with municipal and state actors. Jointly they were occupied in deciphering and negotiating the division of mounting obligations to deal with a crisis of (relatively) significant humanitarian proportions, framed by the initiatives of SMAs as a matter for public policy concern, while on the sidelines sat industry actors, careful not to claim more than the profit.

Conclusion

The preceding sections have illustrated a narrative, in which the Roma berry pickers have fought to ensure their safety, construct temporary encampments and gain access to harvesting grounds, and secure food and water supplies. These working-living conditions and the strategies generated from them proved to be disastrous for the Roma who had come to Sweden to earn money from berry picking. In turn, the ensuing crisis sparked the mobilisation of Swedish SMAs. Their responses have not only eased the Roma's tribulations through direct actions and attracted potent media attention, but have also framed the authorities who should take responsibility for the serious nature of and the broader implications of the situation.

The Bulgarian Roma have been elevated onto the public arena and simultaneously into the institutional corridors of power, as legitimate EU migrant workers caught in a crisis situation. Yet in terms of longevity, the SMAs' contribution to the political visibility of seasonal migrant workers has been due to an in-built temporal delimitation in SMA framing activities, focusing on the immediate humanitarian situation of crisis. The issue of lasting relief beyond this particular season and this particular crisis remains to be resolved. Many of the SMA representatives underlined that their actions were ad hoc and were reluctantly orchestrated as a response to the perception of manifestly inadequate responses from authorities. With their resources stretched to the limits, it was clear that their capacity to intervene was not infinite.

The empirical evidence presented here has exemplified unregulated and informal nature of this industry which can give rise to various forms of labour exploitation under the guise of "free movement" within the European Union. From the first arrival of Roma seeking work in Sweden's forests to their demands for repatriation at the Bulgarian embassy, this study has revealed significant limitations in the protection of internal EU seasonal labour migrants. Through this ethnographic account a contemporary European citizenship paradox has been identified, namely, that while protective regulations for "third-country" nationals from outside the European Union have been implemented domestically in Sweden, securing equivalent rights for EU citizens has remained problematic. When the returns from the berry picking were vanishing and the Roma migrants were being exposed to hunger, the risks had trickled down to those at the bottom of the hierarchy. SMAs reluctantly, but quite effectively, mobilised consensus and embraced the responsibility for the adverse situation in the face of hesitation and delay on the part of the authorities, and even on the part of the embassy which should have been the first line of recourse for its citizens abroad in difficulties. It is into these systemic cracks that the Bulgarian Roma

wedged their claim for repatriation, and through SMA support raised their predicament in a wider purview.

The actions by the industry and the authorities have throughout this Nordic saga been deemed as absent or inadequate. In this vacuum of institutional responsibility, the SMAs had the opportunity to come to the fore as important vehicles for amplifying the seasonal EU migrant workers' wider "European" profile. The problem was reframed as one not just of the "Roma", but of internal migrants who are EU citizens working in an industry that has come to rely on often informal or non-existent contractual conditions. The resulting emergent SMA master frame "validated" their EU citizenship rights as "free movers" (following Atger, 2013). It brought into focus and amplified ways of taking responsibility and creating accountability that have emerged as temporary, but nonetheless important vehicles for disrupting the Roma's assigned "abject" status of rights denied, including rights to decent work and living conditions.

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