

Giovanni Picker. 2017. *Racial Cities: Governance and the Segregation of Romani People in Urban Europe*. London: Routledge.

Book review by

**Angéla Kóczé**

koczea@ceu.edu

Assistant Professor

Romani Studies Program, Central European University

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7077-1642>

Angéla Kóczé is Assistant Professor of Romani Studies and Academic Director of the Roma Graduate Preparation Program at Central European University. From 2013–17, she was a visiting Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Program at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. She has published peer-reviewed academic articles and book chapters with various international presses including Palgrave Macmillan, Ashgate, Routledge, and Central European University Press as well as several thematic policy papers related to social inclusion, gender equality, social justice, and civil society. In 2013, the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, D.C., honored Kóczé with the Ion Ratiu Democracy Award for her interdisciplinary research approach, which combines community engagement and policymaking with in-depth participatory research on the situation of the Roma.



Giovanni Picker's book appears at a time when Romani Studies are at a crossroads of being both critiqued and revitalized by critical race, feminist, and post-colonial theories. This timing gives more weight to this book, which I believe, will soon be claimed by the newly emerging academic field of Critical Romani Studies as a foundational model of scholarship. The book focuses on a discussion of race, racialization, and racial manifestation in spatial-political terms. It provides a vivid deconstruction of the embedded racial hierarchy that has circulated historically regarding colony and metropole and which has, in turn, fueled the tangle and durable urban racial divides currently pervasive in the Global North's urban centers. Picker's book is as much eloquent interdisciplinary academic scholarship as it is a political call for scholars in the midst of a crisis-ridden Europe. His book is a plea to decenter and go beyond Eurocentric perspectives that have produced an interconnected materiality, spatiality, and visibility that systematically oppress racialized collectivities such as Roma. One of the novelties of the book is that it uncovers the colonial racial logic in the spatial-political formations of contemporary European urban centers and also analyzes four segregating mechanisms used in this process: displacement, omission, containment, and cohesion.

*Racial Cities: Governance and the Segregation of Romani People in Urban Europe* presents racialization as a political structuring and governing mechanism that corresponds to the colonial logic of regulation based on race and space. Picker passionately guides his readers through various geographical "nodes," as he conceptualizes it, connecting different "Gypsy Urban Areas" in European cities and historical nodes by linking colony and metropole. *Racial Cities* is a book that ambitiously connects the segregation of Roma to the historicized global economic and political restructuring of European societies.

The book consists of eight chapters including the introduction that sets up the conceptual terrain of the book. **Chapter 1** provides a historical framework that supports Picker's theoretical frameworks. The chapter consists of two parts. The first part, *Colony: Segregation Rationales*, outlines the colonial ideologies and segregation rationales based on three colonized cities: Rabat under French rule, New Delhi under British rule, and Addis Ababa under Italian rule. The second part, *Metropole: From Sedentarization to Segregation*, provides a historical overview of the formation of stigmatized "Gypsy Urban Areas" from the late nineteenth century to the last quarter of the twentieth century. This part of the chapter mainly deals with the stigmatized and racialized representations of urban marginalized groups. It shows the social and political foundation of the stigmatized urban areas after 1945. **Chapter 2** discusses the first local segregating mechanism, *displacement*, through the case study of the 2010 eviction of the Roma population in Cluj-Napoca. This is a dense ethnographic analysis that exemplifies how material deprivation, racialized representation, and public policies sustain and reproduce the segregated "Gypsy Urban Area" in Cluj-Napoca, which is located at one of the largest garbage dumps in Central Europe. This part shows the consequences of material and symbolic marginalization and how, together, these lock people into devastating socio-economic conditions and hazardous environments detrimental to their health. Picker straightforwardly talks about the kind of perception that justifies the evictions of Roma in this context. He states that, "The main issue at stake is that the ways in which these policies are legitimated – and equally, the very conditions for imagining and implementing them often revolve around a racist understanding of the place of Romani people, and by extension any group deemed unworthy, in society" (2017, 65). He also connects displacement to the racial logic of social and spatial structure which is the foundation of the modern racial state (Goldberg 2002). **Chapter 3** shifts the focus from Central and Eastern Europe towards Western Europe, namely to Pescara, Italy. In Pescara, there is a semi-

peripheral neighborhood called Rancitelli where the majority of residents are Italian Romani families. Picker analyzes in this specific context the second local segregating mechanism: *omission*. The politics of omission, as Picker explains, rests “ultimately on the neglect of racism as a structural and powerful social force imposing various thresholds of inclusion and exclusion, domination and oppression, exactly because it conforms to the overwhelmingly accepted (de)politicized approach of denying or downplaying the importance of the structural in local and micro-level social phenomena” (76). His unit of analysis, the stigmatized and segregated “Gypsy Urban Area,” is scrutinized via an ethnographic method to demonstrate how a politics of omission has been practiced in Pescara in the last several decades. On the one hand, the state has been withdrawing social services and, on the other hand, there has been increasing police enforcement in the “Gypsy Urban Area.” These measures have predominantly been driven by the doxa of post-1970s neoliberalism. **Chapter 4** outlines the construction and perpetuation of urban camps, which exemplify the third local segregating mechanism: *containment*. The twin empirical focus is on Florence, Italy, and Montreuil, France. According to Picker, “[...] containment is a specific form of arbitrarily imposing isolation, separation, enclosure and ultimately radical segregation” (Picker 2017, 101). The author does not define what “radical segregation” is or what it looks like. Rather he further specifies the difference between containment and confinement: “The *confined* are instead relegated to a relatively static and temporally fixed position of isolation like prison. The *contained*, in contrast to the confined, are therefore disposable, malleable, and less forcibly bound to a specific socio-spatial and socio-temporal configuration; however, the symbiosis between the contained and the camp is symbolically established in everyday, state and media perceptions and discursive formations” (*ibid.*, *emphasis added*). Picker also emphasizes that the contained have an illusionary freedom to gain public voice as ensured by their citizenship rights; however, in reality their possibilities are constrained by their social and legal statuses, which prevent them from challenging the domination of the state and NGOs who sustain and perpetuate the persistence and discursive and material construction of camps. **Chapter 5** is focusing on Salford, England, and specifically on its local “Gypsy camp.” Through this case, Picker describes and analyzes the fourth local segregating mechanism: *cohesion*. Social cohesion is part of a mainstream social policy discourse in Salford, England; however, in this politico-spatial context it is instead used to legitimize racially structured segregation. He demonstrates that under legally supported conditions, *social cohesion*, described by Picker as a “floating concept,” can be used to support and justify separation, residential isolation, and spatial segregation of Romani and Traveller people.

**Chapter 6** evaluates the four local segregating mechanisms by linking them to the previously described threefold scheme of colonial segregation rationales, such as cultural preservation, hygiene and sanitary conditions, and enforcing social order. In order to create an epistemic link between colonial segregation rationales and European local segregation mechanisms induced by the logic of racialization, the author needs to conceptualize Roma as an internally colonized “racialized other.” Picker deploys Carl Ginzburg’s (1989) concept of “clues” to connect and create a correspondence between colonial segregation rationales and current local segregation mechanisms. The author decenters the readers’ perspective and shows new ways of connecting and understanding the structuring force of race that is embedded in the European colonial project and still informs contemporary local segregating mechanisms. He exposes the silent and unarticulated mechanisms of racialization that still drive socio-spatial arrangements that specifically relate to Roma. **Chapter 7** attempts to unpack what is beyond segregation and how scholars and activists can decenter and dismantle the deep-rooted structure of race and racialization. In order to do that he

proposes to build up an archive(s) and create the repositories of stories (these stories have been erased or invisible) that describe the racially structured contemporary postcolonial condition.

Picker explains that existing research on the spatial arrangements, disintegration, and exclusion has mainly focused on Eastern or Western Europe. The exception is Bancroft's (2005) study that connects both regions, that is, it looks at British and Czech contexts, in which "Roma and Gypsy-Travellers" are targets of historically constructed forms of racial thinking and social practices. While Bancroft's work is empirically comprehensive, it is "anchored to the contemporary relations between space, identity, and race, without accounting for the ways in which racism and urban marginality, stigmatization and class formation variously intersect to keep spatial exclusion in place" (Picker 2017, 3). Picker goes beyond the work of Bancroft and "other work on Romani people's socio-spatial conditions" (*ibid.*). Contrary to these studies, which see "segregation as a direct consequence of prejudice," Picker analyses it from a wider and more critical perspective. He critiques Eurocentrism and colonial capitalist expansion, which reproduce the hierarchical racialized spatial formations in contemporary political economy.

Picker analyzes the role of race as an analytic concept in the colonial era and in current European cities by situating race in the contemporary neoliberal capitalist order. According to him, the central motive of the book is to show the logic of racialization in the contemporary marginalization of Roma. "The genesis of race – its various elaborations and proliferation throughout imperial rule – is a heuristic angle and a valid reason for detecting correspondences between contemporary segregating mechanisms and colonial segregation rationales [...]" (Picker 2017, 8). According to his theoretical framework, Picker demonstrates the genesis of race as embedded in the colonial project: "Race emerged as part of the colonial project not as an exogenous product, but within continuous circulations, borrowing and learning process between external (colonial) and internal (within the metropole) strategies, observations, interpretations, beliefs and practices concerning personhood and morality" (2017, 9). *Racial Cities* deploys race as an analytical concept and "politically charged social force" that regulates social, political, even spatial arrangements through colonialism and still is active today in our current color-blind era of global capitalism. Picker challenges the color-blind, "raceless" studies and scholarship on Roma by showing the colonial techniques, logics, and order that reproduce racial inequality and persistent structural violence against Roma that have persisted in Europe for centuries. He walks us through the theorization of race by different authors, including Stuart Hall, David Theo Glodberg, Howard Winant, and also refers to Foucault who discussed the surplus population as a "racialized other." In this part, it would have been more productive to connect race racialization to the Foucauldian concept of governmentality. Huub van Baar (2011) in his seminal work, *The European Roma*, elaborates on newly emerging neoliberal governmentality. In this regard, Picker misses the opportunity in his theoretical framework to discuss and further develop van Baar's Foucauldian-based discussion of neo-liberal governmentality in relation to a racialized neoliberal governmentality that is imbricated in the European project of addressing the situation of the Roma minority. Following this theoretical thread, Picker could have a discussion on how Roma, as a racialized population, became the internal others, the indigenous colonized population in Europe (Kóczé and Trehan 2009; Kovács 2009). His "correspondence" between internal contemporary segregating mechanisms and external colonial segregation rationales is paradoxically supported by the Europeanization project. This is a unique case, as Huub van Baar explains, as there is no other minority that has become target of the Europeanization project to the same extent as the Roma (Van Baar 2011, 157–158).

Another critique of Picker's otherwise excellent theoretical framework could be to also consider the value of a gender analysis and apply intersectionality theories of race, gender, place, and geographies, related studies. Katherine McKittrick's (2006) *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* is an interdisciplinary analysis of black women's geographies in the black diaspora, which could be a reference for such a further study. The geographies of colonies and "Gypsy Urban Areas" as juxtaposed units of analysis could reveal some gendered patterns of captivity, which continues to be an overlooked and silenced topic – just as many Romani-related studies failed to address race consciousness for decades. *Racial Cities* is the first book that accounts for the contemporary European postcolonial condition. It profoundly deepens our understanding of the structuring forces of race – a colonial product that is still embedded in and informs much of contemporary Europe.

## References

- Bancroft, Angus. 2005. *Roma and Gypsy-Travellers in Europe: Modernity, Race, Space, and Exclusion*. First ed. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Ginzburg, Carlo. 1989. *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Goldberg, David Theo. 2002. *The Racial State*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Kovács, Éva. 2009. "Fekete testek, fehér testek. A „cigány” képe az 1850-es évektől a XX. század első feléig" (Black bodies, white bodies: Representation of the "Gypsy" image from the 1850s to the beginning of the twentieth century). *Beszélő* 14 (1): 74–92.
- McKittrick, Katherine. 2006. *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Picker, Giovanni. 2017. *Racial Cities: Governance and the Segregation of Romani People in Urban Europe*. London: Routledge.
- Trehan, Nidhi, and Angéla Kóczé. 2009. "Racism, (Neo)Colonialism, and Social Justice: The Struggle for the Soul of the Romani Movement in Post-socialist Europe." In *Racism Postcolonialism Europe*, edited by Graham Huggan and Ian Law. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.
- Van Baar, Huub. 2011. *The European Roma: Minority Representation, Memory and the Limits of Transnational Governmentality*. Amsterdam: F&N.



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License.

