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Ildikó Asztalos Morell

Associate professor in sociology

Mälardalen University, School of Health, Care and Welfare

Ildiko.asztalos.morell@mdh.se

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“Solidarity not alms”: Civil rights movements contesting the evictions and denial of social rights from vulnerable EU citizens in Sweden

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Abstract

The chief aims of the Swedish municipality-based Facebook network SEM, “Solidarity with EU migrants” [Solidaritet med EU migranter!] are “to fight for better conditions and humane treatment of migrants primarily from Romania, who came to Sweden in hope of finding work and the ability to provide for their families. The site is to transmit relevant news, actions, organise money collections, political actions and alike.” Those volunteers active in the group believe that “righteousness and solidarity” should apply, even those who are in the grip of EU bureaucracy.¹ Using theories of civil movements in the IT age, I elaborate on how the activists on the site respond to the challenges of the criminalisation of vulnerable EU citizens, by balancing their engagement between the dimensions of “pragmatic voluntarism” vs. “subversive humanitarianism”. Furthermore, I explore how the site counteracts hegemonic master narratives on Roma as both idle and victims, who need to be saved from begging, by providing alternative narratives of subjectivities and identities to the Roma men and women they work with and for, seeing them as agents struggling to improve the lives of their families.

Introduction

EU citizenship was established in 1992 by the Maastricht Treaty. One of the fundamental principles of EU law is the free movement of citizens within the Union (TEU 1992, TFEU 1957). Following the accession of the Central East European (CEE) countries, and in particular the accession of Romania and Bulgaria, a trend emerged of underprivileged migrants, many of these of Roma origin, initiating mobility to wealthier parts of the EU in the hope of finding refuge from discrimination and exclusion in their home countries (FRA 2009). Recent migrations of Roma within the EU have their roots in the transition crises of former state socialist countries and the economy-driven enlargement process, which ignored the social problems in poorer countries. A large proportion of Roma in Romania lack access to major social security systems, since they lack personal identity cards, a card required to access diverse social services, such as health care, education and social services, while 25% of those over 16 state that they cannot read and write (ERRC 2012). While EU member

¹ Find at: https://www.facebook.com/pg/solidariteteumigranter/about/?ref=page_internal

countries are required to guarantee equal treatment to those residing in their territories, independent of which member country they originate from, access to these rights have been challenged in the case of the most vulnerable EU citizens in several EU countries,² including Sweden. The Swedish state, as well as municipalities and authorities within the country, have questioned how these rights apply (or not) to vulnerable EU citizens.

Although there are Roma migrant workers (Mesic et. al. 2015, Corndahl et. al. 2015) in Sweden, it is those approximately 4,000 Roma mainly coming from Romania, who resort to street begging, who provoke the most media and political response. To date, Sweden has not enacted sanctions against begging. However, legal measures were taken in June 2015 in the reform package, “Combating vulnerability and begging – no one should have to beg”, to make it more difficult to beg. Minister Åsa Regnér, as well as the leader of the inquiry, Martin Valfridsson, argued that the ‘sending countries’ bear the primary responsibility for securing the basic needs of its citizens and that begging, an activity resorted to by those most vulnerable citizens seeking refuge in Sweden, cements marginalisation and is therefore not commensurate with the values of a welfare state. Nonetheless, the possibility of a ban on begging is recurrently raised with reference to the need to protect victims of trafficking. In the meantime, the 2015 guidelines paved the way for what is referred to as a “better management of unlawful settlements on public and private land. An inquiry will analyse how landowners’ possibilities to obtain help with measures in the event of prohibited settlements can be improved” (SG 2015).

Against the backdrop of governmental guidelines challenging the responsibilities of the Swedish state towards vulnerable EU citizens, local municipalities intensified actions to evict Roma settlements in several Swedish cities. Voluntary organisations face harsher conditions to provide support for vulnerable EU citizens, especially in uncooperative municipalities, thereby sabotaging their efforts to work for vulnerable EU citizens. Despite the harsher political climate and presence of racial hate attacks (Leander 2014), there are an increasing number of both civil and denominational engagements on behalf of vulnerable EU citizens at the local and national levels (CDR 2015).

This paper addresses the agency of civil rights movements in supporting EU migrants’ efforts to improve the lives of their families in their sending-countries by sending remittances, as well as mobilising against the outcomes of this political turn. I explore the role of activists through the study of a Facebook-based community SOM: “Solidarity for EU migrants” [Solidaritet med EU migrants] and their activities.

Background

The regulation of the right to residence of EU citizens differentiates between economically active and inactive groups. Belonging to one or the other opens different rights of residence (Directive 2004/38/EC). In this paper, I refer to the group that is more commonly referred to as EU migrants in the public discourse as “Vulnerable EU citizens”. I follow the reflection made within the Civil Right Defenders’ report (CRD 2015), which argues that the term “EU migrants” in public discourse typically emphasises that this group consists of those who are economically inactive. With choosing the term “vulnerable EU citizens” I intend to emphasize their citizenship status and their rights attached to this status, rather than their employment status, even if many of those considered as “vulnerable EU citizens” in Sweden are economically not active. EU citizens, irrespective of their economic status, have the right

² In 2011, over 7,400 Romanian migrants received expulsion orders in France. The ERRC report considers that the expulsion orders target Roma in particular, see: ERRC (2013)

to reside for up to three months, “as long as the Union citizen does not become an unreasonable burden on the social assistance system of the host State” (ibid). However, as the report of Civil Right Defenders argues, this does not prohibit member states from providing for vulnerable citizens of member states. Rather, Article 27 of the EU directive 2004/38/EU states that the “expulsion of Union citizens and their family members on grounds of public policy or public security are measures to be done only in exceptional circumstances, where there are imperative grounds of public security”. Despite this restrictive standpoint, Roma from Romania in particular, have been subjected to forced deportations in several EU countries, starting in Italy in 2007, with France following suit shortly after (Mäkinen 2013). These actions prompted criticism by The Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (Committee 2012). Occasional deportations even occurred in Nordic countries from 2010 onward (Mäkinen 2013). While Swedish municipalities refuse to provide adequate housing options, water and sanitation to sedentary settlements (shanty camps), evictions and policing vulnerable EU citizens’ ability to find shelter frequently occurs, especially in unwelcoming municipalities.³

The evictions of vulnerable EU citizens by Swedish authorities has also been challenged from a human rights perspective, especially concerning the fundamental human right to water and sanitation (Davis and Ryan 2017) and shelter. Beside others, Rita Izsák, the Special Rapporteur on minority issues filed an urgent appeal on 30 October 2015 to Margot Wallström, Swedish Minister of Foreign Affairs, against the ongoing “imminent eviction of 150-200 Roma individuals, including minors and pregnant women, from the Sorgenfrilägrät (The Sorgenfri camp) roma settlement in the Norra Sorgenfri area of Malmö, which is scheduled to take place on 1 November 2015” (Izsák 2015: 2). Izsák made her appeal with reference to Sweden being a party of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which includes the protection against forced evictions (General Comment no 7). She also referred to the General Comment 27 of the Committee on Racial Discrimination “which notes that States must avoid any discriminatory practices affecting Roma, including ... unlawful expulsion of Roma” (Izsák 2015: 4). Meanwhile, the following day Martin Valfridsson, the national coordinator for vulnerable EU migrants, argued on behalf of the government in an interview that “it is not possible to offer special treatment for one group to settle unlawfully. One must enforce the law the same way regarding each group of people in society” (Habul and Nygren 2015).

The eviction of the Sorgenfrilägrät in Malmö was carried out despite of this appeal, which appears incommensurate with the general image of Sweden’s migration regime as “exceptional” (Borevi 2012, 2014) due to its relatively generous measures offering full citizenship and access to social services without making demands on newcomers. Sweden has been the country with the highest proportion of asylum-seeking migrants compared to its population. Still, neoliberal pressures and integration into the EU have eroded some of these measures whilst the regulation of labour force migration in 2008 created a more vulnerable and temporary migrant labour force adjusting to the governance of employers.

The Swedish welfare state, known for its universal social rights, came about to help ameliorate social inequality. This welfare regime is based on solidarity, aiming to minimize the adverse impact of the ‘up and down’ turns of a capitalist economy and assumed the deservingness of the beneficiaries. However, the issue of deservingness has been increasingly questioned by neoliberal and conservative critiques, prompting an increased surveillance

³ Swedish municipalities initiated more than 80 evictions of informal Roma settlements on the grounds of poor sanitation between 2013 and 2016 (Davis & Ryan, 2017).

emphasising a work ethic, as opposed to welfare dependency (Schierup et.al. 2006). Thus, diverse workfare packages, combined with tax relief for those working, were introduced by the bourgeoisie coalition government [borgerliga alliansen] to help bolster the unemployed to take employment, while punishing those passive ‘consumers’ of welfare benefits.

A media and politicised fear of welfare tourism led most of the 15 EU countries to introduce transitory measures following 2007, insofar as restricting access to labour market and welfare systems for Romanian and Bulgarian citizens. This is in tune with the neoliberal employer-driven migration concept that migrant labour contributes to a cheap labour force when in demand in the developed countries of the EU and was welcome, whereas the social burdens of social citizenship for “unproductive” precarious migrants lacks attractiveness for employers was not.

Sweden, along with Finland, were two exceptional countries that did not introduce restrictions, despite a heated media discourse preceding the accession process. Ruist’s (2014) study documents that the feared drain on the welfare budget from migrants from poorer EU countries has not been realised. Conversely, there has been a 30,000 SEK (Swedish Crowns) net profit from the average Romanian and Bulgarian migrant per capita during the period from 2007-2010. Despite these facts, welfare tourism remained on the political agenda, and has been actualised by the ongoing presence of beggars from Romania and Bulgaria in Swedish cities. Prior to widespread migration, begging had not occurred in this visible way in public spaces since the development of the welfare state that aimed to ameliorate social differences (Barker 2017). Due to the relatively wide reach of Swedish welfare services in accessing needy members of society, the number of beggars, (presumably Roma minority citizens from Romania and Bulgaria), were estimated to be approximately 4,000 people in Sweden in 2015 (Valfridson 2016). Additionally, there were another 27,974 Romanians and 9105 Bulgarians residing in Sweden in 2016 (Statistics Sweden 2016). Hence, those found begging by the inquiry constitute a little more than 10% of those coming from these countries. There is obviously a grey zone concerning the ethnic identity of migrants, as there are also Roma from these countries engaged in work, while there are also non-Roma among those begging.

Despite the initially open access policy in Sweden following the accession of Bulgaria and Romania in 2007, the political climate has hardened in relation to beggars. Begging as a phenomenon has been regarded as unwelcome and incongruent with the Swedish solidarity-based welfare system, a view shared across the political spectrum from Social Democrats to bourgeoisie parties, such as the Conservative Party [Moderaterna] and nationalist party [Swedish Democrats]. It was the Social Democrat and Green Party coalition government that initiated a government inquiry leading to the above-mentioned reform package, “Combating vulnerability and begging – no one should have to beg” (Government Offices Sweden 2015) to come to terms with this issue. The reform package was preceded by an ongoing public debate since 2008, in which going beyond nationalist voices, the influential political scientist Rothstein (2013) also raised his voice against begging. In his argument, a Nordic standpoint took shape. Rothstein argued that similarly to the Swedish legislation prohibiting the buyers of sex and not those selling sex, one should be prohibited from giving alms to beggars, while begging itself should not be criminalised. The argument appeals to the dehumanising relationship between giver and beggar, an act that “numbs the [giver’s] social conscience” without extinguishing the root causes of poverty (Rothstein 2013). Another topical concern found in public discourse, has been to save the poor from exploitation through trafficking.

There have been common beliefs concerning the prevalence of this model (Djuve et al. 2015). As Barker (2017) sums up in her analyses of the debate: “The dominant concern is that the Roma beggars may be victims of criminal coercion rather than perpetrators of crime” (p. 129). While research indicates that the overwhelming majority of Roma migrate by free choice (Djuve et al. 2015), the Swedish National Police Board (2012), and subsequently the government inquiry, found some compelling cases of trafficking. The moral quest to protect vulnerable people from the possibility of exploitation has therefore been the rhetorical ammunition used by diverse political groups to criminalise organised begging, and was even used as an argument for the reform package (Barker 2017).

This appeal to morality, together with the inquiry behind the reform package, has been characterised as an example of “benevolent violence” by the state (Barker 2017), in which the need for protection against dehumanising conditions prompts responses that at the same time “blessed” the use of police to evict vulnerable citizens.

On the one hand, the government did not want to outright prohibit begging in this package, and openly criminalise it. The rhetorical intentions of the government are to “protect” the vulnerable from the inhuman conditions of begging. Yet on this matter, the policy directs attention to the sending countries of migrant street beggars, designating the responsibility to protect the rights of Roma as that of the sending countries. In this effort, governmental aid efforts are joined to the involvement of voluntary organisations working for the benefit of Roma in Romania and Bulgaria. Even if no ban has been issued on almsgiving, the public are encouraged instead to give to charity organisations rather than direct to beneficiaries. This approach also meant that resources were not ringfenced by the government for promoting the support of migrant Roma in Sweden.

On the other hand, the reform also opened ways for criminalising the infrastructural conditions under which begging was made possible by taking away jurisdictional hurdles to facilitate the eviction of vagrant migrants from private and municipal lands. The public inquiry consolidated laws protecting private property and associated legislation which can be effectively used to support evictions, such as local Public Order Acts, giving leeway to the police to evict those residing in abandoned sites, parking lots and forests, often by mobilising large resources, with associated police brutality (CRD 2016) as well as fining those found sleeping in cars. Even though the government inquiry cautioned taking social considerations into account in cases of evictions, such caution is often not taken when local municipalities and authorities undertake evictions without effectively securing alternative shelter for vulnerable EU citizens. With the blessing of the reform package, municipalities therefore leave the main responsibility to voluntary organisations to arrange support, such as in Malmö, where approximately 200 people were evicted from the Sorgenfri campsite on 5 November 2015 (Solidaritet 2016).

These political goals obviously aim at pushing responsibility back to the home countries without reflecting on the broader structural causes of poverty, such as massive job loss and welfare retrenchment following transition to capitalism and the unmet responsibilities of the Romanian government. Instead this approach delegated the major task of support to charity organisations working in the home countries. Along with Barker (2017) and Kaufman (2015), I see the emergent penal sanctions by the state as expressions of nationalist tendencies, which subjects outsiders, especially noncitizens, to increased controls in the name of national interests. Such tendencies violate the principles of free movement within the EU in

criminalising poor migrants, while the state and capitalist society benefits from migrants and appreciates resources for the economy.

As indicated above the 'reform package' left local solutions for the "begging" problem to municipalities and police authorities, leading to an increase of surveillance and the criminalisation of sleeping arrangements of vulnerable Roma. Thomas Hammarberg, previously commissioner of the European Council for Human Rights, and the person responsible for the Council's report on the situation of Roma within the EU noted that "The task of the special coordinator has been finished, but his views had an obvious effect. Especially in the Stockholm region, frequent police arrests now occur. Some Roma are evicted several times during the same day" (Hammarberg 2016); indicating that these activities are in conflict with international norms and laws which require the authorities to open alternative accommodation provision for the evicted. Hammarberg sees these control measures as aiming to ensure that Roma "leave the country and not return" viewing such actions as a repetition of historical violations by authorities against Roma.

The Stockholm municipality has been particularly criticised for the brutal eviction of 60 Roma, the majority being women, from a site in the forest in Högdalen, attracting over 100 police officers, including helicopters (Hammarberg 2014). Hammarberg is particularly critical in his commentary on this case as there was a fire in the settlement the night before the eviction causing material and personal damage with the residents suspecting that the incident was caused by a racist arson attack. Despite this and the residents wish to leave voluntarily and clean-up site, the municipality ordered the forced eviction, an action described as an obvious demonstration of power by the police and critiqued for the "brutal, insensitive nature in regard to the situation of these people" (Hammarberg 2014), despite the residents offering no resistance.

Social mobilisation on behalf of EU migrants

Despite the image of Sweden as a country with high welfare standards, where the state has an overarching responsibility for social rights, civil organisations have historically had a wide range of welfare-oriented engagement (Jeppsson Grassman 1993). Among these, many have historical roots in Swedish denominational and associational mobilisation for welfare (for example provided by churches). The neoliberal retrenchment of the Nordic welfare state has led to a new engagement of non-profit organisations with welfare concerns, indicating a long-term shift in the welfare provision mix of Nordic countries (Riches and Silvasti 2014).

As mentioned earlier, the governmental reform package assigned a major role to civil society in providing for the needs of vulnerable EU citizens. In most municipalities, local churches and charity organisations take on the lion's share in making arrangements, basing their actions along historically formed engagement practice for those in need. Diverse municipality-based efforts have emerged to assist vulnerable EU citizens initiated on both denominational grounds, driven by the Swedish church [Svenska Kyrkan] or the Mission Church, and others provided on an idealistic basis, such as Crossroads, which is led by the City Mission [Stadmissionen] and provides a supportive centre for migrants, in addition to the centre run by [Läkare I världen], which provides free medical care (Helmner 2015; Markovits 2015). The synergies between the efforts of idealistic organisations and municipalities merge in some cases, such as Crossroads in Lund (Månsson Bengtsson 2015). There is also a vibrant engagement with development projects in the home countries of migrants led by different organisations, e.g., Heart to Heart (Svärd 2015).

However, high profile violent evictions by Swedish authorities, has prompted civil organising and opposition to emerge in a more subversive form. Diverse forms of local actions groups emerged, collaborating with other local non-profit organisations for the benefit of vulnerable EU citizens. Depending on the general attitude of local municipalities, the efforts of these action groups to cooperate with the municipality either succeed, or end in confrontation with these state entities.

SOM “Solidarity with EU migrants” [Solidaritet med EU migranter]

This Facebook community was founded in 2014 by a local activist network in response to the increased securitisation of vulnerable EU citizens in Sweden. The kick-off event for the network behind SOM was a demonstration on 12 November 2014 in Malmö, “Solidarity for EU migrants” (Solidaritet 2015). The group has since been active in supporting actions by creating shelters and providing support for vulnerable EU citizens. The association is politically, organisationally and denominationally neutral. They do accept support from parties and institutions, yet strictly without any stated conditions or demands. A human rights perspective provides the values upon which the organisation is grounded: to provide shelter, protection against persecution, an endurable life and a zero-tolerance against discrimination based on ethnic origin. Hence, the community works against “prejudices and lies, tangible violence and harassment, threat and arson against encampments” on the one hand, and “against the apathy and ignorance that municipalities, police and other authorities show” on the other.

As their manifesto states: “Our goal is to improve the acute situation for these people materially, but even to fight for their cause politically.” (Solidaritet 2014) The network addresses attacks against vulnerable EU citizens, framing such actions in the context of institutional negligence: “How does it feel to know that one’s even if temporary home has been burned down and the police lay down the investigation within three hours?... and: If one would get hurt, one would not get help at the hospital?” The network also addresses racist political sentiments: “There are views that some people have less rights to opportunities to life than others, and that some do not have the right to get one’s life valued by a legal and political system” (Solidaritet 2014). In particular, they demand that the municipal authorities:

“create the conditions for EU migrants to live a tolerable life in Malmö. People who live in a tent with an explicit hate threat must get opportunities to housing, the right to shelter from violence, food for the day and conditions to take care of themselves.”

SOM uses a political analysis that goes beyond the charity principle. Most importantly, they argue that the network is “not engaged with charity, but with a practical solidarity between all of us who were hit by the crises of capitalism independent of where we are from” (Solidaritet 2016). Even if they are critical of the conditions of Roma and the destitute state of welfare for the poor in Romania, they place the responsibility for the conditions in Romania on the transition capitalism and how CEE countries became incorporated into world capitalism. “Sweden, with its membership in the EU, and with Swedish large companies’ exploitation of Eastern Europe, took part in and created the acute situation where people migrate in order to achieve tolerable preconditions for their lives” (Solidaritet 2016). In their subsequent world

analysis, they highlight the importance of seeing the mechanisms contributing to poverty in Eastern Europe, and how these are interlinked with processes in Sweden, arguing that: “We ‘Swedes’ are the victims of the same exploiters as the poor EU migrants.” Based on these declarations, the community positions itself within a critical left-leaning discourse. Through this self-representation, they represent themselves as victims of the same causes exploitation as Roma, using this as the basis of solidarity, rather than one-sidedly positioning Roma as victims.

Mobilising for- and with vulnerable EU citizens: “Pragmatic voluntarism” vs. “subversive humanitarianism”: A theoretical framework

In this paper, I make use of the theoretical developments in research around mobilisation on behalf of refugees. Although EU migrants constitute a legally different category, with in principle privileged rights in receiving countries, they experience surveillance and the contestation of their rights of stay, which make their situation parallel to that of asylum seekers. The retrenchment of migrants’ rights, and increased surveillance of their mobility, prompted civil movements throughout the Global North in support of vulnerable migrant groups. Pro-refugee movements, like pro-vulnerable EU citizen movements, share common sentiments of ideation. Collective actions arose throughout the Global North as forms of resistance against state sovereignty over migration policies, exhibiting collective action “resulting from individual citizen’s emotional and moral self-reflexive sentiments” (Freedman, 2011: 613). Collective pro-refugee movements do not typically follow traditional patterns of collective organisations. They are not initiated by established political parties, are rather apolitical and appeal to “normal” citizens without any specific party affiliation, are typically networked in non-hierarchical ways, and are “not based on any form of traditional partisan or ideological organisation” (ibid: 619). Instead, informal networks play a key role in such action groups through providing structural connections, socialisation and defining individual perceptions (Giugni & Passy, 2001). The main source of motivation is often “humanitarian” personal concern.

Freedman (2011) described actions taken by these movements as “pragmatic activism”, which “intended to awake a moral and emotional reaction to the plight of these children, and replaces a more properly ‘political’ criticism of migration control policies” (ibid: 622). Others find that pro-refugee social movements engage in diverse forms of “subversive humanitarianism” (Vandevoordt & De Praetere, 2018) to the degree that they engage with activities going against the dominant terms of exclusion implemented by governments (Marchant 2007).

Social movements reframe the asylum and deportation discourse of illegality into discourses of human rights (Dimitrov, 2006). with refugees and vulnerable EU citizens treated as equals rather than clients in the manner of professional organisations. Vulnerable groups are thus offered subjectivity and participation in social movements, as opposed to seeing them as mere receivers of aid. There has been little research so far (Asztalos Morell 2018) to explore which kind of subject positions are offered by the pro-refugee/vulnerable EU citizen organisations in their action platforms, (such as Facebook communities), in their efforts to reframe conceptions of vulnerable groups. From a dynamic rather than static perception, citizenship is perceived of as an “enactment”. Citizenship is vindicated through a collective contestation of rights (Beltrán, 2009 on Arendt). Disruptive acts of citizenship (in contrast to stable citizenship practices) contest the order of stable citizenship practices, and enact new

subjectivities (Isin 2009: 383). Using this concept, Nordling et al. (2017: 712) “read the struggles of undocumented migrants and their allies as such acts – carrying the potential to alter overall understanding of processes of inclusion and exclusion”, noting that they see these contestations and movements as the exercise of “substantive citizenship”. Actions of solidarity between citizens and denizens in the struggle for the rights of the latter, thus create new spaces through resisting the control of migration (Squire, 2009).

Such “enactments” of citizenship occur in collective spaces (Beltrán, 2009), for which social media can provide a suitable forum. Castells argues that social movements in a network society “fill the gap left by the crisis of vertically integrated organisations inherited from the industrial era” (2001: 140). Instead, organising emerges along “loose coalitions, semi-spontaneous mobilisations, and ad hoc movements of the neo-anarchist brand substitute for permanent, structured, formal organisation”. He further highlights that the network society powered by the Information Age technologies, offer the spur of “emotional movements, often triggered by a media event, or by a major crisis”. Such emotional movements “seem often to be more important sources of social change than the day-to-day routine of dutiful NGOs” (ibid. 141). Social media is thus opening new ways for mobilising, “enabling users to collaborate, work, and share online” (Richter 2012), opening “many to many” type communications (Simons, 2016). This stands in contrast to the “one too many” communication in traditional media, in which the flow is unidimensional. Social media is therefore composed of “prosumers” (consumers of information are also potential producers of information) (Cunningham, 2010: 111).

As Castells (2003: 140) argues, the “communication of values, mobilisation around meaning, become fundamental” for social movements emerging in the Information Age. Such movements “are built around communication systems – essentially the Internet and the media – because they are the main way in which these movements can reach out to those who would adhere to their values and from there to affect the consciousness of society as a whole” (Castells, 2003:140). Hence, identity formation around key values of “who are we” is of the essence for social media-based movements (Simons 2016: 279). Therefore, it is of interest to study how pro-vulnerable EU citizen mobilisations embrace opportunities to create spaces between “inclusion” and “exclusion” (Nordling et. al., 2017), as well as opportunities for autonomous agency, voicing claim-making by vulnerable EU citizens.

Research methods

This analysis is based on a narrative approach, the benefits of which have newly been discovered for social movement research which is otherwise much focused on policy and structural-oriented analyses (Cantat, 2015). According to Yuval-Davis (2006: 201-2), the “stories people tell themselves and the others about who they are (and who they are not)” constitute their identity, and can in turn be viewed as self-constructed stories about their self-realization processes and identity formation (Asztalos Morell 2015). Narrative analyses view life stories as the products of the person, while on the other hand the persons themselves are seen as created through the stories (Fivush 2008).

As Bamberg argues (2007: 3), narratives precede us and also exist as meaningful standard narratives, (“master narratives”) within a given social and cultural context. These standard narratives, or “storylines”, allow the individual the opportunity to formulate his/her identity, thereby belonging to a given category or subject position. Thus: “The key functions of master narratives is that they offer people a way of identifying what is assumed to be a normative experience” (Andrews, 2004: 2). These narratives become formative of who we are: “Stories

we create with others through socially shared interpretations and evaluations of our personal past constitute our very being” (Fivush, 2008: 55). However, as critical discourse analysis elucidates, there is a discursive fight for defining reality (Fairclough, 1995) and our experiences and understandings may confront the master narratives. Counter-narratives emerge in relation to master narratives, defining the “boundaries of the mainstream” (Delgado, 1995: 64) and are formulated within suppressed, marginalised groups.

This leads to a further aspect of the communicative act. Beyond its potential for personal identity formation and transformation, it has social transformative potential beyond the acts of the individual. In times of radical social events and traumatising social circumstances, real-life experiences open up arenas for the reconstitution of ideals, and form a dynamic field for potential change. Stories telling experiences of injustice, with their culturally and socially imbedded normativity, are set against the hegemonic rhetoric and transformative praxis of the state (Lauristin, 2004), positioning the narrator within or outside of this narrative (Bamberg and Andrews, 2004). As Cantat (2015: 104) notes, narratives “perform a critical social and political function, and participate in the discursive construction of a sense of identity – ‘of who is ‘us’ and who is ‘them’”.

The analysis of social media offers an opportunity for the study of the ongoing production of identities through communicative acts, in addition to the emergence of social action mediated by these processes. For the purpose of this study, I differentiate between hegemonic narratives external to the social media site, legitimising the eviction regime; and counter narratives within the site which mobilise against the hegemonic narratives of the state. The speech acts explored are situated within these counter narratives, on the studied Facebook site. I explore how the “I” constructions of the narrators within the emerging counter narratives are formed. How do the narrators position themselves within the paradigm of the ongoing construction of the counter narrative? Furthermore, I explore how Swedish supporters of the site negotiate the terms of the counter narrative shared on social media with vulnerable EU citizens, and the internal relationship between these two broad groupings.

Data collection

In order to explore Information Age pro-EU migrant movements, several active sites on Facebook were consulted. As described in the introduction to this paper, out of the three major such sites, “Romhjälp” [Rom help], “RUNG” and “Solidarity with EU migrants”, the last seemed to be the one in which both Swedish activists, and in a few cases EU migrants, actively participated. This provided an opportunity to explore the interplay between activists and Roma migrants, for the benefit of whom the movements mobilised. This group has 4,699 likes and 4,450 followers, with 2-10 original posts per month, not counting comments. This paper is therefore based on the information flow on the Facebook site “Solidarity with EU migrants” which took place between 2015 and 2017. The analysis in the paper is based on an inductive approach, utilising mixed methods with the primary information being postings on the website.

Stages of analyses

Blomberg (2012: 84-85) along with Bamberg (2004) differentiates between three stages in narrative analysis that make visible the identity work of the narrator. In the first stage, the main agents of the narrative are identified in time and space, and how they are presented in the story, what the relationship between them is; what the narrative is about, and how categories can be used to position the agents.

In this first stage, the consolidated data has been categorised along thematic clusters of narratives, i.e., “storylines” (Bamberg et al., 2004) following the above outline.

In the second stage of the analysis, one focuses on what is realised through the interactions between the participants in the speech, and between the storyteller and listener

In the final stage of the analysis, the focus is on exploring how the storyteller positions her/himself in relation to the discourse, interpretational repertoire or storyline.

In the following section, three major “storylines” are explored:

- Pragmatic voluntarism rooted in moral commitment;
- Challenging authorities, acts of subversive humanitarianism, and;
- Incorporating the Roma migrants and forms of subjectivity offered.

Pragmatic voluntarism

Engaging with individual fate

There are various ongoing campaigns on the site addressing the needs of people. There are postings to find accommodation⁴ possibilities or volunteers to teach Swedish. Economic solidarity is also promoted through collective actions. Those behind the site organise the collection of money through selling button pins with the symbol of the group, a Roma wheel and a text: Support the struggle for Roma! Buy a button!”

There are also countless cases where members initiate campaigns to help individuals in need, giving them a personal voice and face. Such help takes diverse forms. A Roma woman, G, is foregrounded with her goal to “secure a better life for her children than she had for herself showing an altruistic woman, dedicated to her family, standing in contrast to the image portrayed in public discourses of idle beggars lacking agency and waiting for alms. She is not presented as a victim without agency. Quite the opposite, she is addressed as a fighter who is conducting an “inexhaustible fight for the rights of Roma: for shelter, respect and being valued”, in spite of the hardships and racism meeting her in Sweden. In the meantime, she had to leave her children in Romania with unwilling in-laws who were violent against her children. G had to return urgently to Romania and would like to take her children to Sweden due to the children’s vulnerable situation yet, she is lacking the means to qualify to fulfil the bureaucratic requirements to allow her to do so in legally secure ways. The member posting argues:

“I believe in a world without boundaries, where all can choose where it would be best to live one’s life, independent of political and bureaucratic hurdles making it difficult. I believe that we are the majority. Let us help G to start a new life with her family in Malmö!”

The initiator of the campaign sets up a list of necessary steps: 1) collecting money for the trips to Romania; 2) finding an apartment in Malmö; and 3) finding a job for G, all preconditions for a continued residency permit [uppehållsrätt] in Sweden. The case of G engaged 86 comments, and resulted in a collection of three times the desired money and contacts

⁴ Accommodation offered does not necessarily imply an individual bed to sleep on. Some of the alternatives offered are ‘warm-up’ places open during the night without proper facilities to sleep on.

mobilised to find her a job and a flat. This engagement shows how right kind of support can be a game changer, turning G's life from being forced to rely on begging to a normalised life with a job and proper housing.

Being an information channel

The site also transmits information on the services available for EU migrants. These places, run by none-profit organisations, are described as the “last outpost where destitute people can get help”. Many postings simply connect to articles informing readers about facilities. In one posted article, a municipal council member explains the point of view of the municipality:

“Concerning EU migrants from Romania, we have said that we cannot solve those problems. They can only be solved in Romania, a country that has to end discriminating [against] Roma and build up a welfare society.”

What the city has to offer is 40 places in a night hostel, “Härbärge Vinternatt” [Hostel Winter night] from December to February, which is run, together with the Crossroads Project, by the Pentecostal Churches' City Mission (Skåne Stadsmission 2018). There is breakfast and a shower offered, and the possibility to wash clothes. The hostel will also provide individual help to look for work through contacts with the Work Bureau [Arbetsförmedlingen], and assist in contacting social services, police and the City Mission health team. There is also a “warm-up cottage” [värmestuga], a utility where people can warm up, go to the toilet, have a warm meal and charge their telephones. This place is run by the cultural association “Kontrapunkt” [Counterpoint] (Solidaritet Värmer 2018), and is open during the winter nights. All people who do not have somewhere to sleep are welcome to use the facilities.

There is collaboration between the associations behind these units. Some receive funding from the municipality, such as Crossroads and most receive support from other non-profit organisations, such as the Swedish Church [Svenska Kyrkan]. However, most of these services available for vulnerable EU citizens are insecurely funded. Crossroads is half financed by donations, and as such is very sensitive to the good will of donors. Although Malmö municipality doubles up (match-funds) any donations received, if donations are low then municipal support for the service is also low. Thus, even though according to a posting:

“They [the municipality] signaled that they will continue with the collaboration next year. However, it is not sufficient, since it was hard to find new donors. We turn to many potential donors. But there are many groups who need support.... This is a target group that there is not as much talk about any more... The interest has declined.”

“We” and “them: negotiating boundaries

Some posters upheld xenophobic views and placed chain comments on sites such as the SOM community. While the site manager suggests deleting such commentary, some of the members actively engage in debate, with one openly mocking and posting degrading comments about vulnerable EU citizens, such as the following:

“See how one builds new shantytowns (Karlberg), Observatorielund.... Uses the streets and parks as a public toilet. If you want that this should continue, please go and clean up the shit after the beggars. I am tired of the mug rattling...

It would be better if you organised a large demonstration against Romania and its government that is neglecting the EU money available for the Roma/beggar group. The EU should place Romania under custody.”

In contrast, while a supporter of SOM admits the critique levelled at the Romanian government, he is critical about the proposal to deny support to those coming to Sweden:

“Similarly to the case of asylum seekers, we cannot only take care of these people in the areas nearby their homes. We cannot close our borders, claiming that it “would have been better for them where they come from!”

As this citation indicates the site is a forum for negotiating the discourse on EU migrants. Allows the formation of identities around moral values, which also implies setting boundaries between we and them.

Protest against local municipalities and the authority’s criminalisation of Roma

The roots of the Facebook group was in the pragmatic voluntarism for the benefit of vulnerable EU citizens in Malmö as described earlier. Meanwhile, this struggle met obstacles unresolved by voluntary action. One of the core events around which the radicalisation of engagement culminated, was the evacuation of the Sorgenfri camp in Malmö on 3 November 2015. According to an article posted from 26 October 2015, the camp had been located on an abandoned industrial lot, with an estimated 200 people living there. The Malmö municipality had ordered the owner of the lot to clean it up several times. However, despite several attempts at evacuation of the site, the police could not carry this through since according to regulations prior to 2015, one had to know the name of those who should be evicted, which was not possible to find out. Since the owner could not carry out the eviction order, the Environmental Board moved in, claiming the eviction was to be carried out on sanitary grounds: “There is no water, the garbage hill is growing and there is a large amount of human waste that can spread disease.” Around 50 residents of the site protested at the town hall. The protesters refused to return to Romania, claiming that many of them are not registered by the authorities there. Accompanied throughout by volunteer supporters protesting (Habul and Nygren 2015), the police finally emptied the camp by force tearing down all that was left behind.

A posting on 28 November 2015 reports on a meeting of the “Network for The Rights of Roma” [Nätverket för Romers Rätt], together with former residents of the Sorgenfri camp, which took place in Stockholm with representatives of the Civil Rights Defenders. The network members expressed a certain hopelessness concerning the struggle for rights: “Politically, we have taken the fight for as far as it is possible to come in Malmö. The whole governing political leadership in Malmö is on principal against creating respectable accommodation.”

Despite this mass eviction, no viable alternative shelter has been created by the municipality following this action. A month later, on 1 December 2015, volunteers again protested against the Malmö municipality for not providing sufficient shelter for vulnerable EU citizens. The municipality announced that they planned to provide 40 hostel [härbarge] places, claiming that “We do enough!” However, although a decision was taken in March 2015 to open these places, no such places were opened by 1 December of that year. In addition, volunteers feared a cut down of planned hostel places to 20 places. The year before (2014), the solution for

providing a “roof over the head” had been even less viable, since only an all-night coffee shop without sleeping facility was made available for 100 people by the Sofielund Cultural Centre [Folkets Hus]. Therefore, concerned at the evidence of limited intent to provide accommodation for vulnerable EU migrants the members on the site demanded: “Flats, shelter, camping, a roof over the head is needed now!”

Authorities are portrayed to thwart attempts made by civil organisations in support of vulnerable EU citizens: “The municipality antagonises the efforts to open a hostel with beds for the homeless.” (Solidaritet 2016). In contrast, a positive narrative describes the opening of the evening coffee shop Kontrapunkt, where the homeless can come to use the toilets, charge their telephones and the like, praising the work of volunteers who “Keep the coffee shop going” (Solidaritet 2016).

Unravelling police surveillance

The site also gives an account of diverse sorts of atrocities that vulnerable EU citizens endured during their stay in Sweden. Even if the stories were told by engaged volunteers in contact with vulnerable EU citizens, and not by the migrants themselves, they are important testimonies that were made possible due to the trusting relationships between the volunteers and the migrants. One story recounts police violent assaults, as two vulnerable EU citizens were sleeping in a car since they had no other home.

“They were lifted out of the car adamantly, and moved to the police patrol wagon. A big Ford wagon is often named in connection with police harassment of Roma. It is worse when they patrol at night” (Solidaritet 2016).

The two men were held under arrest for seven days without any reason being given, and they were not allowed to contact their families. The parents of one of the men were desperate, not knowing what happened with the son. “He was very surprised since he is not a criminal, he has not stolen anything.... The police accused him of stealing petrol in a petrol can. A thing they have not done.”

The member making the posting gives expressions to his/her moral outrage over the police actions: “There are surely police who do a good job. But is this the Malmö model to make the city unattractive for EU migrants, more specifically Romanian Roma.” (ibid)

This posting has been challenged. One member argues that the police action is well motivated, aimed at exploring the potential crime of trafficking noting that it is the responsibility of the police to investigate. “Try to be objective!” Another member supports this line of reasoning. “I am tired on all these accusations against the police! Concentrate on those who give the task to the police!”

One further participant in the commentary adds to this story a recent incident, in which two cars of Romanians were attacked and the windows were smashed, while a third car was set on fire. As the commentator adds: “Roma are harassed by racists as well as by the police.”

As this comment further elaborates, authorities either counter the efforts of voluntary forces to work for the improvement of the conditions for EU migrants or, as in case of the police, allegedly openly harass and criminalise migrants. Similar reports of “hate and violence from

the police and security guards directed against vulnerable EU citizens” in Stockholm have been documented by the civil rights organisation HEM (2016). Meanwhile, as HEM argues, racist attacks are not prioritized in terms of investigations of such ‘hate crimes’.

Indeed police attitudes toward Roma have been the subject of recent public criticism in Sweden. The Malmö police held a secret register of 5,000 Roma, including children and elderly for the purpose of any eventual criminal investigations which might occur. To keep such a register is against the law, and the lawsuits by those detailed on the register have won widespread recognition (Francia 2016). A posting of a radio broadcasting (EKOT News 2015 15 December) further claims that the Swedish police have been recording and registering details of Roma beggars in Sweden for a year without these people having been suspected of any crimes.

Action of subversive humanitarianism

From shaping opinion to collective actions

As the postings discussed in the previous section elucidate, humanitarian activism for vulnerable EU citizens encounters hindrances due to the institutional and ideological boundaries set up by authorities. Challenging the opposition by authorities implies mobilisation and political agency. This links back to what Vandevoordt & De Praetere (2018) called “subversive humanitarianism”. They distinguish “subversive humanitarianism” from “pragmatic voluntarism” arguing that the former assumes engagement with activities which go against the dominant terms and processes of exclusion implemented by governments (Marchant 2007). Such kinds of radicalisation are prompted by ongoing confrontation between institutional practices and realisation of the objectives the movement. I have interpreted the way in which the engagement with vulnerable EU citizens is intertwined with political sensitisation and mobilisation on the site as an expression of such radicalisation. The site covers a wide range of politically sensitising activities, ranging from keeping its members posted on ongoing political developments of importance for vulnerable EU citizens, to diverse protest actions.

Challenging hegemonic discourses presupposes creating counter narratives which introduce alternative subject positions and values. One such issue concerns recurrent demands for a ban on begging as discussed above. Related to the vote for a begging ban in Vellinge municipality, the Facebook site unveiled the party membership of politicians who voted both for and against it. Information on different local mobilisations against the ban were also posted. The “Help beggars” association in Lund argues that a ban would push vulnerable groups towards criminality whilst another group suggest that the ban would increase the trafficking of women and children. As the site informs readers, two associations, the “Centre for the Social Rights” [Centrum för Sociala Rättigheter] and the Civil Rights Defenders, have already appealed to the court in Malmö to challenge the begging ban. The site also made a call for protests against the ban on begging in the nearby municipality of Vellinge. Subsequently, the County Council [Länstyrelse] ruled against the ban issued by the municipality of Vellinge (Karlsson et al 2015), a supportive action endorsed by the members of the site.

The ban on begging is however on the agenda at a national level. In part, because the Swedish Conservative Party [Moderaterna] have newly initiated a ban on begging on the national level

(Boström 2015). Some of the conservative media, such as Göteborgs Posten, which is an arena for opinion formation, represents those begging as victims of trafficking and involved in prostitution, as an article in the radical journal ETC argues. Referring to a study in Norway by Fafo [Norwegian Research Fund] (Djuve 2015), the author of the ETC paper, Israelsson (2017) argues that the majority of those begging come to Sweden with their families and are not organised into gangs. Rather, as the poster of the article claims, the ban on begging would simply increase the vulnerability of those begging to becoming victimised by criminal organisations.

Another way to contest discourses demanding a ban on begging is through participation in petitions and media appearances that represent this point of view. A group of signatories, including diverse associations, such as HEM, Kontrapunkt Malmö, Crossroads Malmö and Lund, the Association to Help Beggars in Lund, the Centre for Social Rights and the Association of Young Muslims in Sweden, as well as intellectuals, (such as a PhD student and a professor), summed up their argument against the ban in an article of 25 September 2017 posted on the site (Karlsson et al 2017). They argued that a ban on begging does not solve the problem of poverty and on the contrary such a ban would be against the law of order [ordningslagen], the European Convention and the System of Government [Regeringsformen]. They noted that a municipality can introduce specific rules to keep general order in a public place, but to ask for money does not imply a disruption of such an order, which would legitimate a ban. The member posting the petition to challenge such begging bans asks:

“What would happen if the resources put into hunting after people who have no other alternative than begging for money would be invested on projects instead, such as “Counterpoint” [Kontrapunkt] in Malmö, City Missions activities or ‘Housing first’ [Bostad först].”

Principled fights against eviction and in support of human rights

Another key concern of the site concerns the evictions of vulnerable EU citizens. As a recent study shows, there were 83 evictions of groups of vulnerable EU citizens between 1 January 2013 to 26 January 2016; concerning Bulgarian and Romanian citizens who were not on the Swedish population register (ie undocumented migrants without legal status) with eviction occurring from land that belonged to the municipality and evictions carried out with the help of the Swedish Enforcement Agency. These figures did not include evictions by the police (Davis & Ryan, 2017). An important political alliance for the key activists behind the “Solidarity with EU migrants” is the CRD [Civil Rights Defenders]. A comment on a posting on 10 December 2015 by Robert Hård, the chief at the CRD (Hård 2015), argues that the debate should focus on the responsibilities of Sweden towards vulnerable EU citizens in the country. A report from 2015 by the CRD (2015) sheds light on the state’s responsibility to provide social assistance, health and shelter, education and protection against hate crimes, as well as the right of protection of both transient residents and citizens against unfounded evictions.

Another posting calls attention to the inquiry by the UN’s Economic Social and Cultural Rights Commission (ESK) on Sweden, which in 2016 recommended that Sweden change its legislation so it would better fit the UN’s demand on protection against arbitrary evictions (Kommittén 2016). There is a post which references an article in the journal Dagens Samhälle of 4 April 2017, authored by representatives of the association HOME [HEM] and the

Human Rights Foundation [MR fonden] (Wadenström and Jansson Pearce 2017) demanding that the government respond to the ESK critique, since a year had passed and the government had yet to respond to the recommendations. That article starts by describing a current eviction. The Swedish Enforcement Authority [Kronofogdmyndigheten] is one of the institutions with the capacity to evict people if they have accumulated unpaid debts, including for parking penalties. In this case, the authority had torn down a shelter where a pregnant woman lived outdoors in weather of minus 6 degrees centigrade. She was awoken by the police during the night, and required to gather her personal property which she carry before the bulldozing began on her shelter. The ESK report referred to in the article was reported as finding the increasing number of evictions in Sweden to be alarming (ibid). The article went on to argue that eviction is not only an issue of property rights, but also of human rights, highlighting that the reason why Roma find shelter on other peoples' land is purely because they are denied access to housing, education and work. Evictions occur all over Europe, thus causing vulnerability and human suffering. Camps are therefore presented as the symptom of the social exclusion of the Roma group.

The ESK report from 2016 referenced above is highly critical of Sweden, not only in relation to evictions but also on account of a proposed new law making evictions even easier, a statute which is expected to accentuate the marginalisation of the group. The report's authors noted that Sweden's signatory to the European Convention of Human Rights implies a responsibility to immediately secure basic human rights, including the right to housing, health, social security and education of vulnerable groups. That Sweden has acted to improve the situation of Roma in Romania is positive, yet does not take away Sweden's responsibility to guarantee the rights of those people who are in Sweden. The posting then concluded with a question:

“Is Sweden going to live up to the human rights responsibility that she has for vulnerable Roma from other EU countries when they are in Sweden?”

The site also contained postings on the declaration by Amnesty International (Lindenfors and Westeson 2017), which requests an “honest” response to the issue of anti-Roma legislation by minister Åsa Regnér, who is responsible for the reforms impacting EU migrants.

Thus the site is connecting to the critical statements formulated by diverse international organizations monitoring human rights violations in order to establish legitimacy, legal and moral grounds for their anti-establishment activism.

A voice for vulnerable EU citizens

As can be seen from the debates above, SOM first of all addresses others encouraging them to give their support to the vulnerable. Hence, the site is primarily utilised by those supporting vulnerable EU citizens. One phenomenon impacting use by vulnerable EU citizens however has to do with the lack of resources, such as access to the internet, language barriers and the knowhow to utilise such resources. For example, one of the Roma participants posts his comments in Romanian. This is an interesting difference compared to a similar Facebook site “Stop the deportation of Afghan Youth!” [Stoppa utvisningarna av afghanska ungdomar] as on this latter site Swedish activists successfully incorporated Afghan youth to become active members. In contrast to Roma, these young Afghani people have internet skills and gained

sufficient knowledge in Swedish to be able to converse in Swedish, thanks largely to the school education they have right to access during the asylum process (Asztalos Morell 2018).

However, despite perhaps less active use by Roma migrants on the SOM site, there are many postings following up personal stories, as indicated at the beginning, which advocate support for individuals. These portrayals of Roma challenge the images of vulnerable EU citizens as victims or undeserving vagabonds. Articles posted also provide new subject positions for those portrayed. For example, one Roma woman is interviewed in an article in which she criticises the ban in the municipality of Vellinge, claiming that she is the only one begging in this small town:

“It feels like this decision is against me personally..... It feels like a hard punishment, as if I was a criminal.” She also disclaims the image of being a beggar: “I am really not sitting with a mug all the time or following people to beg for money. I move around all the time. I am cleaning. If somebody is throwing away a cigarette, I pick it up. It is people who come and give me money and not me who asks for money.” (Landelius 2017)

That article also gives voice to a female Roma beggar who gathers money to educate her two children to cook and bake. By posting these articles, Roma beggars (and particularly women) directly receive a voice which presents them as agents of their lives, enduring suffering in unwelcoming Sweden for the benefit of their children. As such those engaged in the site actively challenge the image that the media portrays of EU migrants. For example, the site includes a post consisting of a letter to the editor of a journal, *Skånska Dagbladet* (Larsson 2017), which members of the site had contributed to. In opposition to the negative approach to Roma the authors of the letter argue that it is also important to give voice to those living in Malmö, who “have established contacts with Roma, have arranged soup kitchens, and discussed and helped with fixing work and housing and solutions to problems that emerge when people do not have someplace to live”. The people writing this letter to the editor thus show an alternative attitude to Roma who stay in the locality as they have been harassed away from most of the other places where they’ve tried to establish somewhere to stay.

There are articles posted on the site, in which EU migrants are portrayed as trouble-makers, in order to confront such images. Since the camp in Malmö where most of the migrants were staying in caravans has been removed, many of the homeless EU migrants had begun to live in their cars, which are stationed in different parking lots. Although this is not illegal in itself, it is a phenomenon that has seemingly provoked a range of reactions. On the one hand, residents seem to have complained to the police that EU migrants occupy parking places, and that they leave garbage behind. Subsequently to these emergent complaints, the chief of police made a parallel with the cars that criminal gangs use in Malmö to avoid penalties. The police have confiscated 1,000 such “strawman” [målvakt] cars⁵. According to the police, there are approximately 10,000 such “strawman” cars in Malmö although they are registered with only a few owners in the city. Without saying so explicitly, this article therefore insinuates that those approximately 15 EU citizens who are living in cars could in fact be using these vehicles associated with criminal activities, and through this association with crime the police might find a way to confiscate their places of residence. A further posting challenged the view

⁵ Strawman owned cars are formally owned typically by a person pressurized to sign responsibility for a vehicle that is lacking proper documents and insurances by criminals. Such cars are rented out by criminals illegally without proper papers. New penalties accumulate unpaid.

presented by an article in the journal *Syd Svenska*, in which the police explained why they continually woke sleeping migrants who were in their cars during the night:

“They are not allowed to do that [sleep in their cars]. It is criminal activity. We are responsible for the upkeep of the law. It is evident – they keep on breaking the law. It is evident that we have to continue with it until it ends.” The posting comments: “It is a criminal act in Malmö to sleep in a car. If one has nowhere to live, has no money and therefore cannot afford a paid camping place, then one is a criminal. To be poor is simply an ‘irritating condition.’” (Sidner and Renmark 2017).

Indeed the confiscation of a vehicle is one of those hardships that vulnerable EU citizens are regularly subjected to. The Uppsala police proudly posted on their Facebook site that they had been able to confiscate two caravans (Andersson 2017).

“Today we had the opportunity to utilise the brilliant ‘car strawman’ law [bilmålvaktslagen: a law allowing the police to confiscate a car that has unpaid penalties] to confiscate two caravans. They are taken to a parking place and the owners can get them back when they pay off the debt for unpaid parking penalties. These mount to over 40,000 SEK to each of the cars.”

As the posting states: “Unfortunately, caravans are often parked in the wrong places, and are accompanied with littering and discomfort for those who live close to the caravans.” The police were therefore represented as being proud of having made it possible to “make the area more pleasant, so it can be used according to its original destination for recreation”.

One of the members posting on the website found it scandalous that the police were making life harder for vulnerable EU citizens: “God how nice that they are so proud that they have made the lives of the homeless hell.” However in contrast a critical voice challenged the sympathy for migrants: “This would not have happened if they had behaved decently. Is it OK to put oneself 40,000 SEK in debt?” However, the overwhelming majority of the comments are against the negative implications of this law for vulnerable EU citizens.

The site is thus overwhelmingly critical about the position taken by the government which results in a focus on securitisation of Roma rather than respect for their human rights. This punitive focus results in a one-sided emphasis, making easier for the police to punish deviant behaviour which stems from poverty, instead of supporting institutions aimed at alleviating hardship, whether social services or NGOs that could improve the humanitarian condition of vulnerable EU citizens living in Sweden. Posters emphasise how there could be efforts to help those in poverty to find alternative ways to improve their situation, and in so doing they turn the subject position of vulnerable EU citizens from lawbreakers to victims of institutional atrocities.

Conclusion

This paper explored how the social media site, “Solidarity for EU migrants” [SOM], functioned as a site for social mobilisation on behalf of “vulnerable EU citizens”, a vulnerable group without a voice of their own. As argued by Castells (2003), social media occupies a key role in the Information Age to communicate values and mobilise around values.

Contemporary social movements commonly rise from emotional responses contested as a perceived injustice and in support of common moral values. An engagement with vulnerable EU citizens facing poverty can be interpreted as the actions of “pragmatic voluntarism”

(Freedman 2011). In the meantime, the confrontations of SOM with hegemonic policy discourses, and the local praxes of authorities in their efforts to practice a pragmatic voluntarism, has provoked the ongoing politicisation of their agency, turning the actions of volunteer groups towards “subversive humanitarianism” (Vandevoordt and Verschraegen 2018), including mobilisations critical to the political establishment.

Bringing forward human rights-based claims through social media-based mobilisation is an enactment of citizenship through a collective contestations of rights (Beltrán 2009). Activists make vulnerable EU citizens part of their mobilisation; this offers a voice for these vulnerable EU citizens who otherwise carry out their private contestations against injustice by means of private civil disobedience against the arbitrary rules imposed upon them by hegemonic bordering authorities, thereby hindering them from exercising their rights for free mobility.

Social media allows the mobilisation around moral values, articulating and elaborating the boundaries between us and them (Simons 2016), which is due to its new forms of “many to many” type communication composed of prosumers who are both creators and consumers of communication. Through a collective elaboration of meanings, “counter narratives” (Andrews 2007) are generated, thus juxtaposing the hegemonic media and political discourse. The meanings and moral underpinnings of this hegemonic securitisation and bordering discourse are therefore challenged. Vulnerable EU citizens are offered alternative subject positions. The image of vulnerable EU citizens as idle, criminalised victims, or themselves transgressors of law and order is replaced by the subject position of altruistic individuals struggling for the benefit of their families while enduring hardship and self-denial. All the more, the struggle of vulnerable EU citizens is heaved from the level of private, isolated endurance to the enactment of civil citizenship and the collective contestation of rights. This qualitative shift in the agency of activists behind this site implies mobilisation in the non-virtual arenas: writing petitions, contesting politicians and organising public demonstrations, and by this making the boundaries between social media mobilisation and agency in situ permeable.

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