

POWER RELATIONS
IN A NUTSHELL:
ON THE VIDEO
WORKS BELVILLE
AND GAZELA /
Vladan Jeremić
& Rena Rädle

The expulsion of poor Roma communities from the city that we have been documenting in Belgrade in the videos *Belville* and *Gazela* in 2009 is not a singular case but a widespread practice in Europe. This year, the class-based and racist moves against Roma migrant workers became for a short time a big topic in the media, when it was announced that French President Sarkozy was evicting Roma holding Romanian and Bulgarian papers from Paris. For years now, Roma refugees have been “repatriated” to Serbia and Kosovo after living ten and more years with precarious asylum status in Germany. It was in autumn 2010 that Roma organizations and activists succeeded for the first time in mobilizing demonstrations against the deportations from France in several cities in Europe. Rising nationalism and an accompanying pauperisation are characteristics that all European societies have in common nowadays. The poor Roma communities in East European countries are the first to be hit by ethnic and class hatred. If you analyze the situation of the Roma and the state institutions, it turns out that this relationship is “handled” by police and aid organizations. The dependencies are so high that it is nearly impossible for people to organize politically. Police, aid organizations and kapo-like functionaries make up an alliance of corruption that keeps things under control.

This scenario is not confined to the situation of the Roma; it is typical of the social position of so-called “illegal” immigrants, and not only in Europe. And it stands for the relation of “the rich North” towards “the

poor South”, countries with unstable governments, where capitalists rely on local warlords to maximise economic exploitation. Only a very few people manage to organize themselves for political struggle in such circumstances. We see it as a big problem that in anti-communist Europe there is no left movement that takes solidary action with the millions of deprived Roma, underprivileged immigrants and illegal workers. On the other side, neo-fascists are getting organized and nationalist parties are gaining votes with anti-immigrant and anti-Islami election campaigns. Another question that arises is whether the analysis, strategies and values of the European left have anything to do with the reality these people live in.

All these aspects make the case of the Roma in Europe exemplary for analysis. *Belville* and the work with Roma and about their situation is a lecture in “power relations in a nutshell”. The material of the video *Belville* was recorded spontaneously while things were evolving over a period of several days and nights. In the evenings we would review together the material, people could see themselves and things they hadn’t been part of during the day, we would listen again to the statements of politicians and UN-officials; a raw cut would immediately be on the internet. It was an immense motivation for the people that there was a camera documenting what was going on. Through the montage the density of the events was reduced and brought into a shape that allowed for an understanding and analysis

of the events. The video was first publicly viewed in the Belville settlement. The process of recording was a process of witnessing, self-reflection and learning with the community. The video *Belville* is a didactic tool. It is screened in educational workshops, conferences dealing with the issues of Roma rights and European fascism, in campaigns for Roma refugees' rights to stay in their country of asylum and, last but not least, at art exhibitions.

In our view, political practice in art has to communicate its message at various levels. Its activity and reception cannot be confined to the privileged aesthetic gaze in the context of contemporary art. Formalism and references to aesthetic norms reassure the viewers in their self-perception, making the artwork become just another lollypop in the candystore. Art is more than that, it can develop methods for putting theory into practice. The specific potential of art is based on the fact it can at the same time practice, analyze and criticize a method or concept. Art does not take place in a laboratory situation. The artist must be conscious of the consequences, implications and circumstances of production and consumption. Needless to say, the production of art is subject to the same relations of exploitation as other forms of production in capitalist society. But this doesn't mean that we are condemned to reproduce the existing conditions in our society. Our task is to use artistic production against the matrix of exploitation and in this way to turn the situation upside down.

To Think (Film) Politically:
Art and Activism between Representation
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WEIYTH Seminar Notebook 1

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exhibition SpaPort 2009 in Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and developed through the collaboration of DeLve with a team of international curators and artists. Continuation of the collaboration with a team of co-curators takes the form of a series of public seminars that focus on individual topics opened through the first exhibition, among which are: non-essentialist models of community, ethnopolitics, complicity, cooperation, belonging, politics of memory, culturalization of politics, all seeking to articulate some of the key issues of post-traumatic and transitional socio-political realities in the region.

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