The Disappearing Gypsy: Spatialized Modernities, Pollutive Bodies, and Urban Cleansing in the European Union

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Abstract:
A contradiction emerges between EU discourses of pluralism, on the one hand, and the legal and lived experiences of the marginal and minority subjects that test these principles, on the other. A tension resides in the meeting place between European official languages of multiculturalism and diversity, and sensibilities about what constitutes a properly “modern” or “traditional” urban space (and on how that space should be policed and regulated) which push the former’s limits or render it meaningless. I explore the boundaries of liberal European narratives of tolerance through a consideration of new restrictions and regulations keeping Romani people (“Gypsies”), one of the minorities in Europe most subject to persecution and segregation, out of sight in spaces in which their movement was once more widely accepted. I seek to understand the growing regulation on Romani movement in iconic and monumental public space in urban France in the context of ideologies and moralities about “clean” space (and “clean” identities), modernity, nation, and consumption. It is not “Gypsies” that are to be kept out of high-profile space, but “visible Gypsies.” Thus it is embodied, and ultimately racialized, elements of appearance, comportment, adornment, body, and movement that emerge as the object to be policed.