

[Mobility and/as Resistance: The Political Project of Nomadism](#)

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Mobility and/as Resistance: The Political Project of Nomadism

Online Workshop | 20-21 October, 2022

Modern reorganization of space and mobility together with techniques of advanced demographic control has sought to sedentarize itinerant populations. Conversely, the neo-liberal economic order reifies speed and mobility, while 'deterritorialization' continues to constitute an important paradigm for the 'flows and networks' in a globalized world. From within this apparent dichotomy emerges the figure of the 'nomad' - individualized itinerant figures like the vagabond, the hobo, the squat, the tramp and the flaneur (all descriptions laden with value judgements), as well as longstanding ethnic groupings such as the Roma, the Irish Travellers etc. - who pose a challenge to the techniques of what James Scott (2009) calls 'seeing like the state'. Here, we use the term 'nomad' as a wide-ranging concept - provisionally, though without losing the conceptual and cultural specificities immanent in each of the aforementioned illustrative categories - to encompass a diverse set of itinerant subjects whose mobility emerges from political will. While the statist gaze fails to understand the perspectives, diversity and complexity of such nomadism, the nomads themselves subvert the utilitarian value system: its obsession with scientific rationalism and liaison with a utility-maximized understanding of space and mobility, and, on the contrary, illustrate the longstanding connection between the politics of mobility and that of political resistance.

While peripatetic communities continue to face ethnic discrimination and structural violence because of their non-sedentary lifestyle, urban lore concerning the Beats, or certain cult figures like Rahul Sankrityayan, or Woody Guthie, for example, often romanticizes the mobile way of life. This workshop examines this spectrum ranging from marginalization to romanticization and pivots around the heuristics of the 'nomad', when 'seen like a state', across spaces and 'modern' times, broadly defined. In parallel, it considers how the nomads themselves resist, challenge, co-opt, subvert, evade or otherwise navigate the ways in which itinerant behaviours, from the statist perspective, are tailored to fit into a pre-existent taxonomy with respect to a cultural polarity that singles out certain practices

of mobility as positive and 'virtuous' (for instance, the tourist or the business traveler), and others as negative and degenerative. Consider, for example, how the hobo in the US was perceived as a function of economic degeneracy and literally an outcast; while the 'dromomaniac' or the 'fuguener' in Europe has been a subject of medical scrutiny and therefore sought to be cured. The 'criminal tribe' in India, similarly, was posited as a subject of legal intervention and thus sought to be reformed. In other words, how a specific phenomenon of mobility is accounted for - whether as an economic, legal or medical function - is determined by how the state 'sees' it. We are therefore interested in the political charge immanent in the specific practices of nomadism: how it is articulated by the nomads and, conversely, how it is 'framed' by the statist gaze.

This workshop thus focuses, on the one hand, on the motives, preoccupations, and objectives that lead to the social construction of the nomad-native; and on the other, it seeks to understand how the nomads have responded, and asserted their own agency. The workshop will be held in online mode from 20-21 October 2022. Select papers from the workshop will be published as a specially-themed issue of a Scopus-indexed journal. For participation, please send a 250-word abstract of an unpublished/original work with an 80-word bio-note to the conveners, Dr. Chandana Mathur (Chandana.Mathur@mu.ie) and Dr. Avishek Ray (avishekray@hum.nits.ac.in) by 10 June 2022, with 'Mobility Workshop' in the subject-line. Decisions on selections will be communicated by 8th July. Draft papers will be due by 1 October.

This event is being jointly organized by the Arts and Humanities Research Institute, Maynooth University and the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, National Institute of Technology Silchar.

Contact Info:

Dr. Avishek Ray

Assistant Professor

Department of Humanities and Social Sciences

email: avishekray@hum.nits.ac.in

Dr. Chandana Mathur

Arts and Humanities Research Institute

Maynooth University

email: chandana.mathur@mu.ie

Contact Email:

avishekray@hum.nits.ac.in