

BOOK REVIEW

Jekhipe Beyond the Nation-State: Collective Life in Matache's *The Permanence of Anti-Roma Racism*

BRAM WISPELWEY

The Permanence of Anti-Roma Racism: (Un)uttered Sentences,
by Margareta Matache (Routledge, 2026)

While Margareta Matache's *The Permanence of Anti-Roma Racism: (Un)uttered Sentences* is many things—genealogy, theoretical intervention, historical archive, and ethical call—a central argument gives it a special urgency: Matache demonstrates that anti-Roma racism is not a marginal feature of European modernity but one of its constitutive logics, with profound implications for health, rights, sovereignty, and decolonial futures. Beyond its specificity to Roma and Romani peoples, the book offers one of the most important recent analyses of racialization, structural violence, and dehumanization in Europe and beyond. One of the book's great strengths is Matache's ability to welcome readers from adjacent fields while simultaneously challenging foundational assumptions about race, colonialism, enslavement, and humanity itself.

The Permanence of Anti-Roma Racism is especially powerful in its treatment of racial formation. Matache constructs a genealogy of Roma racialization while also offering a broader framework for understanding race as a sociohistorical and political technology and process rather than an essential biological category. One of the recurring pedagogical challenges in teaching race and colonialism is conveying what is meant by race's "social construction." Matache answers this challenge not through abstraction but through historical demonstration. Drawing on Frantz Fanon, she shows anti-Roma racism to be not simply irrational prejudice but a historically contingent system tied to extraction, enslavement, labor exploitation, spatial control, and political ordering. While readers will find resonance with critical race and decolonial scholarship more broadly, Matache's intervention is distinct precisely because Roma experiences have remained peripheral to dominant theories of race and coloniality.

Importantly, Matache refuses reductive explanations. While foregrounding the materiality of Roma enslavement and exploitation, she also attends to the narrative, phenomenological, and epistemic dimensions of racism and its purposes. Racialization emerges not only as a mechanism for capital accumulation

BRAM WISPELWEY, MD, MS, MPH, is an associate physician in the Division of Global Health Equity at Brigham and Women's Hospital, instructor at Harvard Medical School, and co-director of the Palestine Program for Health and Human Rights at the François-Xavier Bagnoud Center for Health and Human Rights at Harvard University, Boston, United States.

and domination but also for controlling “power, prestige, and symbolic resources and relations” (p. 54). By remaining attentive to race’s functions, Matache demonstrates how anti-Roma racism became naturalized through law, science, discourse, and everyday social relations, producing forms of violence that are simultaneously economic, political, cultural, and ontological.

Spanning enslavement, scientific racism, eugenics, the Holocaust, and contemporary segregation, the book nevertheless retains a remarkable sense of presence. There is throughout the feeling of a life’s vocation: deeply researched, deeply lived, and deeply committed to the survival and flourishing of Roma people. It is an extraordinary feat, and it represents work that, at many times, must have been excruciating given the subject matter and Matache’s own social positioning as a Roma woman and descendant of enslaved people.

Beyond its treatment of race, one of the book’s most important theoretical contributions is its expansion of prevailing theories of colonialism. Matache complicates simplified understandings of European coloniality by demonstrating how imperial and racial logics operated intra-continently as well as externally. Echoing and extending Aimé Césaire’s “imperial boomerang” thesis, she shows how Europe’s treatment of Roma and Jewish populations formed part of the broader architecture of racial modernity, even before and alongside overseas colonial expansion. She also remains attentive to distinctions within Europe itself, particularly between the forms of exclusion and segregation characteristic of core regions and the enslavement regimes of Eastern Europe.

Yet beyond its diagnosis of racial violence, the book’s most generative contribution may be ontological. Crucially, Matache does not reduce Roma existence to victimhood: Alongside the histories of enslavement, expulsion, forced sterilization, segregation, and extermination, she insists on Roma continuity, survivance, and collective worldmaking.¹

Her discussion of *jekhipe*, or collectiveness, is especially striking. Matache describes a diasporic people who have maintained linguistic, cultural,

and relational continuities across borders without grounding identity in territorial sovereignty, ethnonational domination, or the possessive logics of the modern nation-state. In doing so, the book gestures toward forms of collective life that exceed dominant political imaginaries of liberation, nationhood, and even survival. Matache notes that this approach “might transcend—or perhaps has historically transcended—the biocentric and theocentric feudal notion of land ownership and humanity and the exploitative practices of the in-place multi-hierarchical capitalism concerning soil and other common resources, as well as questioning the restrictive frameworks of borders and nationalism imposed by the nation-state” (p. 35).

In this respect, Matache’s account recalls other suppressed diasporic political traditions—such as the Jewish Labor Bund’s notion of *doikayt* (“hereness”), which imagined collective flourishing in place through cultural continuity, mutuality, and solidarity rather than through territorial nationalism or state sovereignty.² Without collapsing distinct histories or political conditions, these resonances illuminate alternative responses to racial violence and persecution that refuse exclusionary nationalism as the necessary horizon of emancipation.

In a moment marked by intensifying ethnonationalism, border violence, ecological crisis, genocide, and displacement, Matache offers not merely a critique of anti-Roma racism but a profoundly generative political and ethical vision: one organized around relationality, collectiveness, and coexistence rather than domination, exclusion, and possession. Indeed, her reflections raise profound questions about what emancipatory futures could look like outside the logics of racial capitalism and settler sovereignty.

These ontological and political questions carry profound implications for health and human rights scholarship. The book repeatedly demonstrates how anti-Roma racism functions not merely as prejudice but as a structural determinant of health, shaping housing, education, labor, environmental exposure, mobility, political recognition, and access to care. Ongoing regimes of segregation across

Europe represent not simply a social failure but an ongoing human rights crisis sustained by institutions, policies, and narratives that continue to treat Roma lives as lesser, as disposable.

Matache's analysis also exposes some of the limitations of liberal human rights discourse. Formal inclusion and recognition have not dismantled the deeper structures of apartness, dehumanization, and racial hierarchy that organize anti-Roma conditions across Europe. The book therefore challenges readers not only to defend human rights frameworks but to interrogate how those frameworks can become constrained when detached from struggles against structural racism, colonialism, and material inequality.

The chapters on resistance are equally critical. Matache reminds readers that Roma people have never been passive recipients of violence. Resistance appears throughout the text: in slave revolts, in cultural preservation, in linguistic continuity, in self-ascription, and in refusals of assimilation into *gadjikane* norms and hierarchies. These struggles resonate strongly with Indigenous and anticolonial movements elsewhere, particularly in their opposition to bureaucratic and epistemic forms of erasure.

The enduring question that remains after reading the book is strategic as much as moral: How can anti-Roma racism be materially dismantled? Matache surveys numerous institutional and structural sites requiring transformation, from education and health systems to legal regimes and public discourse. Yet the scale and persistence of anti-Roma violence also raise pressing questions about prioritization, reparations, political mobilization, and the possibilities—and limits—of reform within *gadjo*-controlled institutions.

Still, the book resists despair. Despite its devastating historical detail, it remains animated by an uncompromising commitment to solidarity, collectiveness, and liberation. The closing sections, including Matache's moving letter to her nephew echoing James Baldwin, leave readers not with closure but with urgency. In this light, the book's title, which might on first glance be read as defeatist, conceals another possibility. While Matache documents the permanence of anti-Roma racism with

devastating clarity, the book simultaneously insists that racial formations and their material drivers are historically produced, and thus ultimately transformable. That tension, and Matache's insistence on the possibility of a radical Roma futurism, may be one of the text's greatest gifts—not only to Roma studies but to contemporary struggles toward decolonization, liberation, and collective survival.

References

1. G. R. Vizenor, *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence* (University of Nebraska Press, 2008).
2. M. Crabapple, "Here Where We Live Is Our Country: The Story of the Jewish Labor Bund," *Critical Research on Religion* 13/2 (2025).