



# Transatlantic Romani Mobilities

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Interviewer: Simone Natale

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Since March 2012, Esteban Acuna Cabanzo has been a Doctoral Candidate at the Albert-Ludwigs University Freiburg and member of the Junior Research Group, COME. In 2011 he earned his Master of Arts (M.A.) in Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology at Leiden University, in the Netherlands. He has engaged in several periods of extensive ethnographic fieldwork among Rom(Gitano) families in Bogota, Colombia; concerning ethnic identity and belonging. Lately, his doctoral dissertation has taken him to Bogota, Toronto and Budapest. Through multi-sited research, he works on understanding Trans-Atlantic Romani mobilities through quotidian practices and experiences.

## **When did you first become involved with mobilities research?**

I first became involved with mobilities one year ago, perhaps in March 2013, when I started thinking about my PhD project that is about Romani mobilities across the Atlantic.

## **How do you use mobilities in your research?**

I have actually found out that it's a very interesting framework to work with, especially because it's very flexible. It's not like other terms such as migration or Diaspora – both of which have a long history attached to them. Mobilities lets you dive into spatial and mobile practices in daily life and that has been really interesting to me. It is a framework that helps get rid of the presuppositions around Romani people and how they travel and how they live. So that's pretty much what my research is about.

**What is, in your view, nomadism in interaction with the issue of mobility?**

I'm very critical of the term nomadism, precisely because this term has been used to label populations. Either you are sedentary or you are a nomad. There is a very strong binary category attached to it, or a binary set of categories. What I would like to do is use the mobility (mobilities) terminology and the mobility turn as a perspective and as a way to think about how people move and connect and apply it to how Romani people move and connect. Or, how Romani groups, amongst themselves, move and connect too. In this case, specifically across the Atlantic. But that would mean that we would have to drop this nomadic, sedentary divide and actually acknowledge that there are many ways to move and connect, amongst very diverse populations. And we need some way to research that.

**How do you use ethnographic research to address the role of mobilities in everyday life?**

I like the term mobile ethnography since it helps you deal with those situations in the field that are not easily distinguishable. Those situations where you're having a conversation, an interview, and everything is going along at the same time. When you engage with mobile ethnography it lets you move with your subjects. It lets you help your subjects and travel with the person that you're working with. Travel in order to understand how a person lives throughout the day. For example, going around a city as your respondents go around a city. Or, if your respondents say, we should go from here, in Bogotá, to here, in Venezuela, just do it and don't be constrained by whatever field you

had constructed before. So, I really like that particular terminology and that particular methodology.