Embodying the nation, representing the state: Performativity of police work in the Franco-Romanian bilateral agreement

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Abstract
The French police and Romanian forces seek to identify, surveil and control Romanian citizens who are suspected to be ‘irregular migrants’ or ‘criminals’ in France. The two states sealed a bilateral agreement to deploy Romanian police forces on French territory: twice a year Romanian uniformed officers patrol next to the French police, whereas liaison officers work throughout the year in several French police units. Policing its own citizens on another state territory becomes part of police work in the EU, a police model encouraged and criticized at the same time. This article engages in debates on geographies of policing and cross-national policing in the context of EU citizens’ deportation. It problematizes the ‘imagined’ and ‘fictional’ in nation, state and police work instead of the claimed management, control, and law enforcement. It scrutinizes the role of performativity in the work of Romanian and French joint police forces. It documents cultural organization of the police in France and Romania, and it empirically explores personal positions in Franco-Romanian police forces working together in the Paris region. This article aims to evidence the cultural, social and institutional dynamics within transnational policing played out against the background of a bilateral mission.

Keywords
Policing, territory, state, performativity, mobility

Introduction
Performativity is present in a range of theories about the state and police. One of these, the logic of camouflage, reveals ‘how the state always already disguises the violence that it
pretends to be separate from’ (Jusioynyte, 2015: 116), while another approach problematizes police activities as mainly ‘fictions’ that are performed rather than endorsed by police efficiency (Bradford and Loader, 2016). Bradford and Loader argue that police activities such as ‘stop and search’ are tactics of legitimation rather than crime control or law enforcement acts, and that social order ‘is made possible because the police are given potentially limitless, uncontrollable, and extra-legal powers to do what is necessary to monitor and control marginal populations’ (2016: 17). This article builds on these ideas about police work. Besides, it adds insights from cross-national policing using a conceptual framework focusing on performativity. It aims to reveal how the performativity of police work reproduces states’ power relations and institutional loyalties, as well as cultural and social norms. It questions the ways in which the state is represented and embodied in the daily work of police officers and agents (Mountz, 2003). It does so through the analysis of a Franco-Romanian law enforcement mission acting on the French territory.

I use ‘performativity’—Butler’s (1999) key concept—to help explaining police work as a continuously negotiated process whose effects result from reproducing (social) norms in everyday practices. Specifically within the Franco-Romanian bilateral police collaboration,1 performativity is enacted by the work of policing Romanian citizens on remote territories where officers participate in a multi-cultural (re)creation and maintenance of state borders and social stereotypes. By analyzing the organizational culture and personal positions of officers and agents working within the bilateral mission, this article shows the unsettling character of policing mobility in Europe. It contributes to the geographies of policing (Fyfe, 1991; Herbert, 1997; Yarwood, 2007) by problematizing the securitization of intra-EU mobility, the deployment of police forces on another national territory and the reinforcement of state-borders through deportation practices. It examines performativity in police work to emphasize the role of policing in shaping communities’ boundaries beyond nation-state borders, in reproducing social and cultural norms, and in preserving unequal power relations between states.

Critical policing scholarship revisits the discourses on policing, the police and nation-state building (Vitale, 2017), questioning the so-called militarized tradition of continental European police (Ponsaers, 2001) and the specific tasks of ‘militia’ in ex-socialist European regimes (Lobnikar et al., 2015). Nevertheless, questions of police history reveal the institution’s intertwined past with state colonial or repressive regimes (Loftus, 2009). Romanian and French police practices are shaped by historical legacies, institutional culture and recent migration policies in the EU.

France gained the reputation of a highly bureaucratic state apparatus with a long and ambiguous history of policing (Anderson, 2011; Berlière and Lévy, 2013; Mouhanna, 2019). In France, police structures and practices have been studied extensively, notably the histories of the gendarmerie and the Paris prefecture of police, which originated in the 16th and 17th centuries. France no longer has the same political regime, but it is nevertheless the same state. Emmanuel Blanchard (2014) analyses the logic, structure and loyalties of the French police force by linking its origin to French colonial history. France followed a trajectory of transforming state police structures from a colonial past to a democratic EU ideal of serving society. For colonial rule, ‘providing order was the legitimizing rationale’ (Eck, 2018: 2), whereas today, the democratic demands of the rule of law problematize police practices and their functionality (de Maillard and Mouhanna, 2017; de Maillard and Savage, 2018; Fassin, 2013). A similar statement can be made about the authoritarian and so-called communist regime of Eastern European Romania.

The Romanian police institution was established in its modern framework following the emergence of the nation-state in the 1850s. In the 20th century under the former socialist
regime the police institution held a special status as a militarized structure that included not only tougher ‘civil’ penalties but also another hierarchy and rules for its recruits. Thus the Romanian police was labelled a militarized structure and state organization that was not separate from the ruling party. Since 1989, the ex-socialist police structures have shifted towards a democratic model, a transformation triggered by the desire for EU membership, which requires demilitarization, decentralization and the search for a new police legitimacy (see also Beck and Chistyakova, 2002). The transition that ex-socialist states went through arguably created a type of policing that is less oriented towards the state and domestic sphere, and more open to police cooperation across national borders (Aitchison, 2016). Greener argues for a new international policing that under the gloss of operative necessity urges the ‘standardization of policing behaviour’ (2012: 184).

This article focuses on the bilateral police agreement between France and Romania, a framework that contributes to the deportation of Romanian citizens from France. It documents police teams’ internal dynamics while policing, surveilling and identifying Romanian nationals on French territory, and it explores the ways in which Romanian police officers’ daily duties and responsibilities are negotiated and amended when dealing with deportable nationals. The article starts by contextualizing the Franco-Romanian politico-police alliance for deportation within the EU legal and political framework. Then, by analysing data on Romanian police work in France, it brings to the fore officers’ and agents’ challenges and experiences in working together with their French colleagues and on another state’s territory. The organizational culture of police institutions plays an important role when French and Romanian police officers’ customs, habits and internal rules are constantly negotiated, while regulating the behaviour of their suspects (Herbert, 2001b) and reproducing racial, ethnic and gender stereotypes (see Halsema and Halsema, 2006). The conclusion wraps up the theoretical contribution of performativity in police work emphasizing how the practice of security, territoriality and place (Yarwood and Paasche, 2015) applied in bilateral collaborations (re)creates and preserves states’ (unequal) power relations.

Methodology

This article builds on my multisite fieldwork in France and in Romania over eight months between 2016–2017, conducting observations, focus groups and interviews with different actors within the deportation apparatus. I obtained extensive ethnographic data from different target groups, state and non-state agents working alongside several institutions and private organizations, lawyers, judges, interpreters, and deportees themselves. Focus groups and interviews were audio-recorded, and data were analysed through coding and close reading. For the purpose of this article I selected data from interviews and meetings with French police representatives in Bucharest, Romania, and focus groups and interviews with almost all Romanian police liaison officers who worked at the time under the bilateral agreement in Paris, France. I conducted the interviews in Paris in different police stations when a private room was at our disposal, or in another convenient quiet place such as a café in the city. I draw upon a total of 12 interviews and two focus groups conducted with Romanian police liaison officers. Out of 12 interviewees, six were female and one male was minority. The interviews were recorded, and the language used was Romanian (the translation to English is mine). In addition, I use data from my field notes taken during the interviews and three separate meetings with representatives of the French police in Romania (language used was French and the translation to English is mine). Due to the small sample and the ease of identifying the police officers to whom I promised
anonymity, the quotes will only indicate some specific characteristics of the interviewee for their analytical value.

Indeed, the limited access to the French police forces in France problematizes the study of state structures of security and exposes the limitations of the findings (Fox and Lundman, 1974). This extensive and complex fieldwork gave me the chance to theorize upon the access to state institutions in France and in Romania (Vrâbiescu, 2019a), the deportation apparatus enacted on the EU territory (Vrâbiescu, 2019b), as well as making sense of one-to-one police transnational collaboration. This article is based on data gathered during the entire fieldwork but uses data selectively to focus the argument.

Bilateral police collaboration

The legacy of state formation, the colonial past-present and the (not so convincing) denial of the authoritarian regime coherently define the police as a core state structure in the continental democracies of the EU. Besides the controversial recent (or not so recent) past of both states, France and Romania, police institutions have been challenged by transformations in EU laws and regulations, global dynamics and the global security market (Bowling and Sheptycki, 2015; White, 2015). One of these outcomes is the Franco-Romanian bilateral agreement that was possible within the EU internal structures of security and cooperation. It was signed in 2008 and established police collaboration between the two EU member states. This type of state alliance was designed to respond to state-framed fears and securitization issues directed to intra-EU mobility. The legitimacy and loyalties of police work are explained in terms of the intersection of joint police practices, migration control and deportation regimes in Europe.

Cross-border cooperation reflects processes of European integration and the EU cohesion policy that began in the 1990s. Among the most effective programs for the period 2014–2020 are Europe of Regions and the European Neighbourhood Instrument. These programs are carried out at local and regional level of authority and are limited by the geographic proximity and by agreements between EU and non-EU countries (Scott, 2016). Alongside other international police collaboration structures, such as Interpol, Europol and Frontex, bilateral agreements for police collaboration can be signed between EU member states or with third countries. One reason is that international cooperation is grounded in the principle of mutual respect for national sovereignty, which excludes the possibility of having operational units (such as Interpol or Europol) enabled to act on national territory (Vasile, 2015). However, the EU framework (2008/38/EC) and the Schengen Governance Package (van der Woude and van Berlo, 2015) permit and encourage member states to control migration and to establish collaborations for deportation in addition to extradition, which is the most common operative action used to combat global criminal phenomena.

Crucially, since Romania joined the EU in 2007, France has continuously evicted and deported Romanian citizens. Whereas initially French programs for eviction and deportation did not have an ethnic character, after 2010 it was undeniable that Romanian citizens of Roma ethnicity were the main target of French policies for eviction and expulsion (Bennett, 2011). In France, the securitization of Roma people has led to the eviction and expulsion of thousands of EU citizens every year, either by way of ‘voluntary’ return or forced removal. In the words of a French officer, ‘there are no problems with Romania; everything works very well’, pointing to the practice of deporting Romanian citizens to their country of origin. Within the framework of inter-state police collaboration, bilateral collaboration has several advantages: it is a fast, easy, and limited agreement on a specific
matter. In fact, France and Romania collaborate to respond to the French state’s aim of deporting undesirable EU citizens.

Romanian police liaison officers working with French colleagues are confronted on a daily basis with Romanian nationals who are EU citizens but considered migrants in France. Romanian officers help to identify, localize and control Romanian citizens on French territory, and are aware that the French authorities punish many of the illegalized and criminalized Romanian citizens with deportation (Vrăbiescu, 2019b). One of the consequences of the process of policing for deportation is an ethical and practical struggle by Romanian police forces to make sense of their duties and loyalties. They serve the Romanian state as part of the Romanian police forces: a condition of their job in France is to commit to a minimum of five years of continuous service within the national police structures. And they have the duty to work together with the French police agents and officers who are entitled to perform controls and stop and search procedures, and to enforce order. During this mission, Romanian police officers have no entitlement to stop and search on French territory, and in general their prerogatives and authority are severely limited to ‘just’ helping the French police officers. Many frictions and contestations of loyalties and requirements are at stake during this bilateral mission.

Regulations and norms are not entirely settled but vary in order to match the best interest of the state. However, it is not clear which state’s interest these regulations and norms serve. For example, the fact that Romanian liaison officers have no right to drive a car or even ride a bicycle serves apparently no purpose, and highlights the bureaucratic messiness that means drivers are required to provide supplemental proofs besides the driving licence or exams for a temporary duty such as the mission in France. Some liaison police officers might complain that they are over-qualified or that their work would be more efficient and effective if they had access to ordinary facilities. Instead, the bilateral agreement does not cover or specify what might happen in the situation of, for example, an accident or the deduction of costs for the facilities.

In the following two sections I will discuss several instances where performativity of the police work is enacted and reveals the negotiation conducted on multiple layers. One of them is work value and meaning: how can professionalism be assessed in the police work of bilateral missions? When does professionalism become an expression of internalized euro-centric culture? Other aspects of negotiated and interpreted identity are gender and ethnicity: who is Romanian and who is not? How will Romanian officers explain the French police about their national and ethnic identity? Does gender play a role in assessing police professionalism or national identity? What does it take to build trust among French officers and their Romanian counterparts?

**Work value and meaning in transnational mission**

Romanian police officers and agents struggle through cultural and practical dilemmas: they look up to their French colleagues, but they claim they suffer discrimination on a daily basis and are aware of organizational differences that permit another approach to police work. The particular position of liaison officers in the field grants them limited responsibility and accountability, whereas the job requirements concern a broader area of knowledge and work experience, permitting an exceptional mobility within the police structure by working in the French mission. In contrast to their testimonies that their work is easy and undemanding, and that the police mission in Paris is highly symbolic, there is an ambiguous representation of the Romanian police institution. The liaison officers who work for the Romanian state on French territory are more likely to serve the interests of the French state.
For example, one of their common duties deploys in the following manner: the French police informs the Romanian unit that they stopped a person who has no ID, gave a fake name and birth date, and refused to be photographed or to give fingerprints. At this moment one of the Romanian police officers goes to the local police station to help identify the allegedly Romanian citizen.

One of the police officers recalls in a humorous way a common situation he was in, while at the same time reflecting on the poor communication between the police units and pointing to unequal power relations between the two police structures:

I take my hat, I look on the map to see where the police station is, and I take the metro. I go there and say good morning, presenting myself. I tell them ‘I came here to help you.’ ‘Who are you? What are you, an interpreter?’ ‘No, I’m not an interpreter, I am a policeman.’ ‘Wow! How come?’ ‘Yes sir, you send me an email.’ ‘Ok. So . . . you will help us with the interpretation.’ ‘No, I am not . . . ’ [laughing] but we understand each other by the end of the day. And we get to help them. That’s the situation, before we get to that person [who sent us the email] we talk with many others: with the one who stays at the entrance, with his chief, and so on. The commander of the police station should know about us because there is always official information at every police station about our work, our names, phone numbers, anything they want. But they do not call us too often, maybe because they are negligent. (Interview Stan, Paris 2017)

The tension created by the role of police officers as mere interpreters is still a topic to be addressed in the literature. The police officer felt offended when he thought was perceived as ‘just’ an interpreter and blamed the lack of professionalism from the part of French officers. The ‘negligence’ he pointed at became visible in another example he gave when some French officers confuse police liaison officers with the Romanian police agents who patrol together with the French agents. The territorial and jurisdictional displacement of liaison officers unsettles the hierarchy and the recognition of status and rank:

Once, I went to a police station. I presented myself saying that I am a liaison officer. [They pushed me away saying] ‘go away, we have our policeman here.’ It was the police agent in uniform. ‘You want to fool us? What kind of policeman are you? We have one for us here, he is helping us.’ Look, he is doing something else [I said]. He got it at the end. [laughing] He thought I was a crook. Well, I also did not have an uniform . . . It’s difficult, I understand them. (Interview Stan, Paris 2017)

Performativity in this case is enacted by the quest to ‘look like’ a police officer. ‘What kind of policeman are you?’ asks the French officer. In a domestic environment unwritten codes, body language or sometimes a small joke proves one’s institutional belonging or even position. When borders are crossed, work related identifiers, which are close to the national identity in the case of police forces, become vague. These blurred boundaries risk undermining the very meaning of police work where trust is essential to the organizational structure: ‘He thought I was a crook’.

Professionalism is contested by both sides, but not in an equal way. The Romanian police officers reclaim recognition for their (overqualified) work, whereas the French police officers do not always attest the utility and benefit of working together with the Romanian officers. Contested professionalism in police work highlights the symbolic nature of the bilateral collaboration and the performativity within the police work against the proclaimed technical and instrumental aim of the mission. Against the work value of Romanian and French
officers alike, at play remains the ‘job’ whose meaning is shaped within an organization (Halsema and Halsema, 2006), in this case the bilateral mission. This context creates opportunities for actors involved to act on their own beliefs and produce fresh meaning for (transnational) police work.

While reflecting on the benefits of working in mixed teams and in France, several police officers said they appreciate that the French are looking for the solution to a problem and not looking to identify people as guilty. Importantly, all of my interviewees emphasised how police work in France is ‘relaxed’ and ‘lacks stress’:

What I do appreciate is that they [French police agents/officers] are pretty much relaxed. They do not work all the time under stress, under pressure. [In Romania] it looks like it’s a terrible thing if you do not do something. They are like: ‘lunch break! It’s 12 o’clock we go home.’ I cannot say I like their program necessarily. I would prefer to work from 8-16 and have a half an hour to eat a sandwich than to stay two more hours. I guess they spend this time with the family, but I prefer to spend more hours in the afternoon than to get back home in the evening completely exhausted. In general they are more peaceful, more calm. (focus group, Denis, Paris 2017)

Yet almost all of the Romanian officers I interviewed felt it was important for me to understand their position. They explained that the police work is not hard, but the atmosphere in the institution is stressful and difficult. They usually explained this by saying things like, ‘In Romania the work is much more demanding. We cannot even compare.’ Some explained how stress and pressure emerges from people who are high-ranked and who try to show that they are better. These people invent actions that have no purpose, or they apply penalties and sanctions when a task is not completed or was not completed on time. The result of these conflicts is a bad atmosphere and inefficient work. Often, police officers underlined that they were working together and ‘seeing how the French are doing it,’ and would try to change and implement these new ideas ‘at home.’ Many compare themselves with their French colleagues:

Sometimes I see that we are better trained as Romanian police agents/officers, knowing more fields, than they are. They are well trained in one domain, but we know how to do many more things. Here the agents inform about a situation, but we do not intervene further in building a judicial file. Instead we in Romania we do everything, to the end. We have the capability and the demand to do things, they don’t. (interview Laura, Paris 2017)

They see themselves as being trained better and also as having more institutional requirements to act than their French colleagues. Not only do individual attributes underline the difference in police work, but also structural disparities make the perception of police work dissimilar for Romanian and French police agents and officers. Explaining the ‘subculture of policing,’ Bowling and Sheptycki (2015) emphasize how local knowledge is relevant in police work, producing a space where agents actively create meanings of social order, where they can use or threaten to use violence as a means to achieve peace and security. In police work and institutions violence prevails also by omission and indifference not only by direct physical violence.

When asked about their motivation to join the French mission, money and career were two reasons that the interviewees commonly agreed upon. However, none considered that they determined their decision to join the international mission. Rather, they emphasized
their curiosity toward an international mission, the exposure to culture in Paris and the pleasant work environment:

[the French colleagues] pick on us asking like ‘why did you actually come to France?’ We came because there are these positions and we can contribute to police work. ‘Ah, you came for the money!’ [they say]. I cannot say I came for the money, because I couldn’t save too much since I am here. What counts is the personal experience, to my benefit, but also professionally. Not necessarily for the money. Indeed, initially I thought about it that I will save something, but no chance! One cannot really save money. It is not a fantastic salary, after all. (Interview Olivia, Paris 2017)

Besides being content with the money and the prospect of international missions helping their career, the police liaison officers hold another attitude. They like being in France and working within the French police structure: ‘I like to work in France in the police force. I wake up in the morning and feel like going to work like I would go to football, because I like football very much. [In Romania] I don’t like [the work]’ (Focus-group, Dorian, Paris 2017). Most of the arguments put forward against police work in Romania described the stress, strong hierarchies and labour-related punishment codes involved.

Representing the state through uniformed bodies entails a greater degree of performativity. The police agents have to acknowledge, adapt and interpret for the larger public their ambiguous presence on the French territory while not revealing the restrictions on their policing tasks. For the patrolling agents, the mixed teams were a locus of negotiating their identity through body and language, and their position through culture, class and national identity.

[The civilians] would notice that we had another uniform. Often, when we were caps they would think we are superiors of a high-grade, like chief of police. Because the shirt that is light blue, whereas the French uniform is dark blue, they [the public] would ask to have photos with us and ask a lot, like where are we coming from. (Interview Marcel, Paris 2017)

The uniform matters a lot. It influences how the police is perceived as an institution, more so than reflecting the work of the police in enforcing law and order. Some understood the mission of patrolling as a mere effort to project an image. This image is a controversial one, regardless of the latest struggles to reform towards professionalization: fear connected to the militarized past of the organization, and low public trust in the police institution (Andreeescu and Keeling, 2012; Morris, 2015). The impact of the Romanian police uniform is directed towards the locals and the ‘desired migrants’, and to cultivate citizens’ trust in the police (van Craen, 2013).

[In France] they want to show they are doing something [by deporting Romanians]. And by the end of the day this is also our role, patrolling in Romanian police uniform. In fact, it is all about the image: to show, look, we are doing something to fight the criminality done by Romanians, we brought Romanian police agents. It is like that, a matter of image, this patrolling activity. (Interview Anita, Paris 2017)

Wearing the national Romanian police uniform on foreign territory gave many of them the opportunity to reflect on the efficiency, role and meaning of their international mission. Besides the importance of improving the image of the Romanian state, the police agents saw
their role as being to deter Romanian migrants in Paris. Romanian citizens, mostly of Roma ethnicity, as I will explain further, are confronted with the image of the police institution from their home country. In the following section I aim to illustrate not only how Romanian liaison officers represent their institution and state through their police work, uniformed body and ‘job’ meaning, but also the performativity of an ideal national identity against the criminalized ‘other.’

National identity: Gender, ethnicity and citizenship

Often, while representing the Romanian state in their daily work on French territory and working together with French officers and agents, Romanian liaison officers are excited by their work and are aware of their need to embody a national model. While undertaking police work, the liaison officers enact, contest and reshape national identity according to a perceived ideal. They display a tension between embodying their own national ideal, especially towards French colleagues, and helping to identifying Romanian citizens as criminals. This tension is explained along intersectional dimensions of citizenship, race and gender, which require the permanent negotiation of liaison officers’ status and ability to work.

In addition, the Romanian officers admire how the police hierarchy is managed in France, although as one of the female officers indicated ‘I did not notice French women or black men having a high position in the French ministry of Interior or Defence’ (focus-group 2, Magdalena, Paris 2017). In connection with the organizational culture of the police, some women said they perceived a more favourable attitude in France, while at the same time saying that they themselves had had negative experiences with some of their male colleagues. Romanian women working as police officers recalled several situations in which they were asked in a provocative and sometimes denigrating way about the food they eat in their country or if they had discovered McDonalds yet. During an interview, one of the Romanian agents recalled a moment when she went to an intervention. The police had been called because a man was throwing objects from his apartment down onto the street. It was a busy street. The mixed team met other police agents there and the first thing the French police did was ‘to kiss,’ meaning the cordial way of saluting friends and colleagues in the morning, with two kisses on the cheeks. In her eyes, the gesture during the police operation looked culturally significant and at the same time professionally questionable. This perception of the police work points at what Bradford and Loader (2016) called the ‘fictions’ of policing when explaining the importance of performance rather than efficiency.

In general, women did not have a neutral perception of working with their (mainly male) French colleagues. They especially complained about certain incidents when patrolling in mixed teams of women and men, Romanian and French police agents. Some women explained that the experience had both good and bad aspects:

I was impressed by the experience I had, but in no way do I appreciate French police officers as people or as professionals. Honestly, I had some difficulties with the language at the beginning. Although I knew French, it was difficult when they asked me something, even simple things. It was difficult for me because I had no practice. It took me a couple of weeks to get used to the language. But after that they started with petty jokes. We were supposed to patrol between 17–23 km a day... And I sensed a bad vibe like ‘We go because we have the Romanian girl with us.’ I said I can walk without problem, I am very sporty, I am young, but I cannot understand the purpose of that task. Patrolling means to move around, to watch places and talk to people,
not to have me running all day. Or, if that was needed, we should take a car and do the
kilometres. They were commenting, and ‘joking’… (interview Clara, Paris 2017)

In the same vein, other women police officers were also whispering their disappointment
about the sexist environment they had to work in and the difficulties they had to deal
with given their position in France. In some incidents of sexual harassment, women were
afraid to complain. Like many women working in hierarchical structures, they felt trou-
bled by the potential for confrontation with their French colleagues, which could have
consequences for their own institution and its image or their own professionalism (Lander,
2014). Moreover, having experienced sexism before in Romania, they were aware of
inefficient and insufficient regulation of sexual harassment and knew that institutional
measures were never taken against sexist attitudes. Similar attitudes have been highlighted
by Geneviève Pruvost (2007) who looked at the thresholds French policewomen encounter
during their career. In the same vein, Halsema and Halsema have shown how perform-
ativity works in the process of police modernization where ‘[g]ender norms are taken
up and repeated in the police organization and thereby they become the police norms.’
(2006, 239)

Police activity is also informed by the dynamics of racism. In a classic book, Bonilla-Silva
(2006) explains the concept of a ‘racism without racists’ that is part of the daily bureaucratic
activities of the state. Particularly in the field of the police, two approaches to Roma people
have been noted: the historical context of antiziganism in police recording practices (Selling,
2017) and a contemporary ‘acceptable’ form of racism against Roma people (Kott, 2014;
vان Baar, 2014; Vrăbiescu, 2014). Adding to this, the French media often portray
Romanians and Roma alike as undesirable migrants and unworthy EU citizens (Bessone
et al., 2014). In response, Romanian police officers’ struggle to distinguish themselves from
poor, racialized Roma migrants was a recurrent theme during the interviews, and was often
expressed through contradictory statements:

Maybe [the French police colleagues] think [about Romanians] like that [that they are poor]
because they see these camps. But [people that live in camps] they have at home a very good
situation, the majority. Might be that among them there are people who are poor, but the
majority have houses, cars. We are not talking about some poor people who run away
from poverty and go to France. Yes, they started to differentiate between the Romanians,
I mean between Romanian Gypsy and Romanian Romanians. They have started to see that
there are Romanians who have skills, jobs, not only Romanians that steal. (interview Anita,
Paris 2017)

Embodying the national identity on another state’s territory requires a conversion of domes-
tic norms and boundaries. Across state borders the boundaries between ‘white’ Romanians
and people with Roma ethnicity become blurred. The diverse Romanian diaspora demands
strategies of national representation, which in the case of the police becomes acute. While
police work obliges the shaping of community boundaries, across state borders this task is
amplified as officers’ operational capacities are severely limited. Romanian officers’ effort is
to embody ‘whiteness’ as well as ‘femininity’ standards, which both lead to conflicting
attitudes and material consequences in the masculinist institution of the police (Herbert,
2001a). At the same time, this performative effort is prompted by the disguised violence of
cultural demarcations, to recall Jusionyte’s argument (2015). Some of my interviewees
expressed even blunter statements regarding the difference between people of Roma ethnicity and self-perceived ‘white’ Romanians (Fofiu, 2014; Imre, 2005):

It is not that I felt discriminated, but it is this general perception about us [i.e. Romanians] by French people that we are all Gypsies. And we think that they see on the TV that the Gypsies are doing this and doing that (…) I think some [of them] don’t know where Romania is on the map. They had contact only with beggars. Maybe I would be like that, so I cannot judge them. What do they see: shoplifters, beggars, dirty, homeless people. They don’t see Romanians who are doctors, or researchers or doing something else, one does not see them on the streets, like I can also pass invisible as a policewoman if I don’t wear a uniform. But these people are visible. *(interview Lara, Paris 2017)*

This type of bad ‘visibility’ makes Roma the scapegoats in policing mobility. Romanian and French police officers support each other in explaining why Roma people are criminals and why they are the ones who are guilty of preventing the development of a good image of Romanian nationals. Nevertheless, the French seems to care less about the differences between Roma and non-Roma Romanians. National identity is only at stake for Romanians who need to embody the ideal of a ‘white’ nation (Baker, 2018). They need to establish the boundaries of their identity by engaging in ‘nasty talk’ about minorities without sounding racist. Their explanations recall the words of Bonilla-Silva: ‘subscribing to an ideology is like wearing a piece of clothing. When you wear it, you also wear a certain style, a certain fashion, a certain way of presenting yourself to the world’ (2006: 53).

Reflecting upon the presumed rationale for the whole mission, the importance of ethnicity, ‘whiteness,’ gender and national identity are revealed once more in the work of policing:

[I]t is one thing when while patrolling you try to trace down the Roma who are doing something, like pickpocketing, and it is another thing when you do the job in front of a computer and try to really identify [Romanian citizens]. The fact that I participated in patrolling helps me a lot now. Many of them [the Roma caught in the city centre] worked with fake-charity or shoplifting in that area of Notre-Dame, and now I see them here. I know them. [laughing] The majority of them stay here in 93, in Saint-Denis and they go to steal there because there are the tourists, the money. *(focus group 1, Dorian, Paris 2017)*

Scholars have noticed that the ‘spatial organization of the police reflects the political geographies of different states’ (Yarwood, 2007: 448), but also that the meaning and control of space are part of police work (Herbert, 2001b). International missions redefine space and with it the work-related attitudes, codes and meaning of policing change as well. The bilateral mission is not simply work that French and Romanian police officers, uniformed or not, do in joint teams. The way they explain their mission and have the ability to act reveals a spatial understanding of jurisdiction and ‘its people.’ Romanian officers know where people they target move, live and allegedly commit (petty) crimes. They are not bound by the jurisdictions as French station officers are. At the same time, as their operational capabilities are reduced, the meaning of their job grasps yet another layer: they can collect and interpret data about their own nationals in ways French officers cannot, and they cross jurisdictions without actually being enabled to act. The mission on French territory shifts from being symbolic to be a work of interpreting, reiterating and negotiating cultural and social norms: keeping clear the gender division and subordination, explaining the racial/ethnic boundaries and identifying criminals.
Performativity of police work and contested geographies of policing

Representing the state as part of their job, Romanian officers struggle to embody a national ideal according to their self-image and their presumed expectations of moral and cultural shared (European) values with their French colleagues. By doing this, they replicate the power structure in the society, within their own institutions, and the power relations of their representative states.

Within the bilateral agreement, police work does not only perpetuate norms and stereotypes but inflicts violence on vulnerable and destitute EU mobile individuals (Barker, 2016; Lafleur and Mescoli, 2018; Vrăbiescu, 2019b). These police activities leading to the deportation of EU citizens exhibit the increased need for transnational police collaboration (Bowling and Sheptycki, 2014; Weber, 2013). Bowling and Sheptycki (2015) argue for an analysis of transnational policing that is ‘carried out in a largely unregulated fashion in the name of law without being constrained by the rule of law’ (142). Bilateral agreements are novel forms of transnational policing that transgress national borders. Beside the existing recognized institutions, they create temporary structures of surveillance and control activated against specific groups of people and with less accountable rules. Importantly, as this case study of a bilateral mission shows, the cohesions and alterations between France and Romania reflect states power relation preserved in transnational collaboration. At the same time, it indicates how police collaboration development within the EU framework might challenge the territorial issues of police work. New and more direct channels of communication are put to work to respond to similar or different police structures, jurisdictions and administrations.

The performativity of police work gets to be defined at the intersection of two similar yet distinctive police structures in France and in Romania. Acting on the French territory, the analysis of joint police forces interrogates the very concept of the police and its spatial role in drawing community boundaries. Departing from the community policing model that challenged the masculinist model (Herbert, 2001a), policing across state borders restores the authority police have over citizenry by lifting its military aura, reifying cultural codes, and consolidating gender and racial hierarchies. The work of the police confirms ‘a view of the world in which the social order is continually threatened, and communicates that this threat “naturally” can only be thwarted by the police’ (Bierschenk, 2016: 15). The tension between formal norms and informal practices in police work reveals a necessary performativity which increases in the case of bilateral cooperation. Performativity is directly connected to discretion and the power law enforcement forces have.

Discretionary power within police organizations has been discussed in the literature, with scholars showing that police discretion increases as one goes down the hierarchy (Bradford, 2014; Davis, 1975; Gundhus, 2018). At the same time, chasing migrants remains the undesirable work of police officers who often recount their aspirations to find and condemn criminals rather than undocumented migrants. It is even more difficult for French police officers to chase EU citizens and bring them to court. EU citizens can hardly be identified as migrants (Directive 2004/38), and thus enjoy the freedom of movement that EU membership promises however limited and conditioned is this (Atger, 2008; Bauböck, 2009; Junevičius and Daugélienė, 2016). The state rationale to bring in Romanian police officers ‘to do the job’ becomes desirable and acceptable given that French police find the work demoralizing. Nevertheless, this is not to say that arresting and pursuing Romanians does not produce ‘moral conflict’ for French police officers. First, the securitization of Roma migrants has been an official policy for years, and has encouraged and normalized the racist profiling of people of Roma ethnicity (van Baar et al., 2019; Vrăbiescu, 2019c;
Yıldız and De Genova, 2018). Second, the collaboration of Romanian police officers reinforces racist attitudes, endorsing the practice of profiling without attempting to justify it. With the assistance of Romanian police officers, Romanian citizens of Roma origin are identified in France, and thus no French police officer is placed in the spotlight for racist profiling or singling out Roma people.

Indeed, by enacting the police agreement in order to control and identify Romanian citizens who have committed petty crimes on French territory, the Romanian police help the French state to categorise Romanians as ‘criminals.’ The more that alleged criminals are stopped, searched and identified by the police in France, the more consistent becomes the stereotypical portrait of Roma/Romanians (Kaneva and Popescu, 2014). Often this label affects and influences the self-image and cultural identity of both Romanian and French police officers and agents. As such, police work in bilateral collaborations reveals the mechanisms of reproducing ethno-racial and gender stereotypes, but also the state-to-state power relations. Performativity of policing mobility helps demonstrate the production, reiteration and enforcement of social norms, whereas within two-state agreements performativity reinforces domestic ideas in the transnational arena.

**Conclusion**

Phenomena such as marginality, violence, law and order have prompted scholars to analyse the state-idea in relation to the ‘idea of police’ (Bierschenk, 2016; Walker, 1977), debating the common root of nation-state building and the police (Williams, 2016) and questioning the ‘imagined’ and ‘fictional’ in nation, state and police work (Bradford and Loader, 2016). Theories of police activities suggest that their focus is on maintaining a vision of social order and existing social hierarchies so that ‘people from marginalized and excluded groups will by dint of their low social status be the special objects of police attention’ (Bradford and Loader, 2016: 6). It is no secret that ethnic and racialised minority groups are disproportionately targeted by police actions, which take into account individual stereotyping and institutional racism. As this article has shown, a two-state police collaboration takes no account of whether undesirable and racialized migrants are EU citizens or not. Racialized Roma, living in segregated and marginalized camps or ‘visible’ in the center of Paris, continue to be the preferred target of Franco-Romanian police activities.

The Romanian state practice of policing its own nationals on French territory highlights the need for debate on transnational policing and one-to-one state agreements within the EU legal framework but also more broadly in the international arena. Through qualitative data, the article has exposed the frictions raised and negotiated during the daily work of mixed teams of Franco-Romanian police officers in France. Empirical data on different police activities revealed frictions, such as that Romanian police officers exhibit admiration for French culture, while at the same time confessing that some of their French colleagues display a problematic attitude towards them and Romanians in general. At the same time, this article has exposed the tension in the historiography of policing and police institutions in two states, now both members of the EU. Despite their similarities in implementing nation-building and police reforms during the 19th century, France and Romania followed quite different political trajectories, with the former binding its police institution to the reality faced in the colonies, and the latter undergoing deep reforms under the state secret police of the ex-socialist regime. However, the present harmonization of legal frameworks and institutional backgrounds enables the collaboration between the two European states beyond EU constraints or assistance. Beyond organizational culture and the negotiated professionalism related to it, this article has pointed to the mechanism of reproducing
national and state loyalties, ethnic and gender categories, and European ‘values’ through the performativity of police work.

This article has engaged in debate on the representation and embodiment of state and nation, thus demonstrating the performativity of police work in transnational missions. Being a police liaison officer comes with obligations to conduct oneself professionally and to display expertise, but at the same time it is a position of recurrent negotiation of identity, reiteration of social norms and cultural expectations. When borders are crossed, police officers have to adapt and translate boundaries in order to embody and reproduce the ideals of their nation, facing cultural biases on a daily basis. Police officers actively try to embody a model of Romanian national identity that will distinguish them, and ultimately ‘all’ Romanian citizens, from the category of criminals and undesired/unworthy migrants. The police institution is and represents the state, whereas its agents and officers are required to embody the state, to make it real and present even on non-national territories. Some examples showed how institutions shaped the roles of Romanian liaison officers, allowing and encouraging them to do so. Representing the state through the work and bodies of police officers and agents (wearing uniforms or not) becomes a currency in negotiating the ethics and legitimacy of the police institution and the state itself.

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Notes
1. The bilateral agreement was renewed in 2017 for 5 more years. The Romanian Police official website has a short description of the program and the task liaison officers have on the French territory: https://politiaromana.ro/ro/structura-politiei-romane/unitati-centrale/directia-afaceri-europene-misiumi-si-relatii-internationale/biroul-afaceri-europene-si-relatii-internationale/compartimentul-relatii-internationale/franta.

2. This initiative is by now one among many other bilateral police cooperation agreements between Romania and European states. At the same time, France deploys police officers from other countries under international cooperation agreements.
3. EC/115/2008 shapes a common approach of the member states ‘for returning illegally staying third-country nationals’ and does specify that it cannot apply to EU citizens: ‘This Directive shall not apply to persons enjoying the Community right of free movement as defined in Article 2(5) of the Schengen Borders Code’ (art.2–3). See also Mantu (2017) explaining other cases of EU citizens’ expulsion in Belgium, Italy, and the UK and the European Court of Justice approach.

4. On France-Morocco collaboration see El Qadim, Nora. (2014) ‘Postcolonial challenges to migration control: French–Moroccan cooperation practices on forced returns.’ Security dialogue 45(3): 242–261.

5. The Grenoble discourse was officially reiterated by the French Ministry of the Interior (Ministère de l’intérieur 2010) and implemented through the governmental decision (circulaire) from 12 August 2012.

6. Roma is an endonym that appears in Romani language and reflects a name chosen by those who self-identify as pertaining to the Romani ethnicity. Gypsy is an exonym, a denomination that is imposed, and there is no equivalent in Romani language.

7. According to a commissioned researched conducted in 2016 ‘Barometru INSCOP. See also the official website of Romanian Police https://www.politiaromana.ro/files/pages_files/Activitatea_Politiei_Romane_in_2014. pdf and several censuses on data about public trust in police institution in Romania conducted by sociological institutes IMAS, INSCOP and ICCV.

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